

Sri Lanka: Why the Search for Reconciliation Remains a Must

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Sri Lankan Army Victory Parade, May 2009

Here's the first edition of my new monthly column for [The Indian Economist](#)

In a brief glance away from the political obsession with Brexit, *The Guardian* ran an interesting report on the 20th of June. It detailed fresh allegations, photographic evidence included, of the Sri Lankan military's [use of cluster bombs](#) during the final stages of the country's 26 year long civil war.

Unsurprisingly, the allegations were rapidly picked up by the Sri Lankan media, although, not as widely as might have been expected. The online *Colombo Telegraph* immediately picked up and published the *Guardian* report too. What I want to focus on here, however, is the response that this report elicited in the paper's discussion forum.

This was the zone where the civil war reached its bloody apogee in May 2009

The headlining picture was of a demining operative defusing, what looked to be a cluster bomb at Chalai. This was the zone where the civil war reached its bloody apogee in May 2009. The first comment simply states, "It is from another country. Perhaps, Myanmar". Reacting, the next one fires back, "No thief or murderer will readily admit his guilt. Let an independent and credible investigation determine that". He continues to add, "No matter how hard SL tries to sweep these things under the carpet, the world seems to continue to haunt it for its lies". "Hilarious", retorts a third, "Either this is another joke by the terrorist to gain international support or some country is looking for an excuse to invade".

Now all this could simply be dismissed as standard online posturing – the hectoring megaphone that regularly blights such exchanges. In this case, however, I think it also points to something deeper: Sri Lanka's crying need, over seven years after the civil war's end, for redoubled efforts to promote genuine reconciliation.

I say 'process' advisedly, because if there's one thing that experiences around the world of efforts to reconcile people in the aftermath of violent conflict indicates, it's that this takes time.

That said, the fact that reconciliation isn't easy and doesn't happen through a one-off event, is no reason to not attempt it. On paper at least, the current Sri Lankan Government (GoSL) has committed itself to doing exactly that. One of the transitional justice mechanisms, proposed at the UNHCR in Geneva last September by Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera, was to set up a 'Commission for Truth, Justice, Reconciliation and Non-recurrence' (TRC).

Plus, there are no magic, one-size-fits-all solutions to save a country from the painful process of working out its own ways to heal its people and move on.

Eighteen months on, however, movement on making this Commission a reality is proving to be painfully slow. While an official 11-member Reconciliation Consultation Task Force was set up in January, progress with getting things moving on the ground has been minimal. Both, The TRC and other mechanisms, including an Office of Missing Person envisaged by Samaraweera, have been stagnant. The upcoming Geneva session of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) will undoubtedly have the effect of focusing minds on these issues in Colombo. But even if the imperative of moving forward decisively with reconciliation does receive increased official attention, the next question will be the shape and form that this attention assumes.

At the very least, we must hope that it learns from the mistakes made in the recent roll out of the Office of Missing Persons. Virtually none of the public consultation with families of the disappeared and other concerned civil society organisations (which was earlier promised by the government) was carried out. Instead, without further comment, a new bill was sent straight to the parliament. These mistakes need to be kept in mind as they are critical.

Acknowledgement and Accountability

A Sri Lankan TRC-type body must ensure that a wide range of people – Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims – have access to the mirror of the Commission.

From South Africa to Peru to Colombia and Mindanao today, the experience of Truth Commissions (TRCs) points out the importance of wide-ranging public consultation over both- the design and implementation- of a Commission's mandate. As a Peruvian Commissioner once said to me, "we are holding up a mirror to our society". If a Sri Lankan TRC-type body has any ambition to do something similar, it needs to do all it can to ensure that a wide range of people – Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims – have access to the mirror of the Commission. They

should be able to see their own faces and those of family members and friends they lost during the conflict.

Let's come back to the online disputants. If their responses indicate anything in this context, it is that for all the progress achieved on many fronts since the war's end, Sri Lanka remains a divided society, with many deep scars yet to be healed. Setting up a well-thought-out, properly functioning TRC would be a good place to begin the process of addressing this pain. There could not be a better time for the government to begin doing so than now.

Mark Salter is a writer and researcher focusing on issues of democracy, conflict, reconciliation and diversity management.

Churchill puts the case for a United Europe

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Listen to the voice of Winston Churchill, one of the European Union's spiritual founding fathers speaking in support of a 'United States of Europe' at the May 1948 Hague Congress that established the European Movement.

Also in attendance at the Congress was a young British student called Noel Salter, who happens to have been my father.

**The Brexit fantasy is about
to come crashing down**

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Boris Johnson: outwards and upwards. Photo: Peter Nicholls/Reuters

Here from Fintan O'Toole of [The Irish Times](#) comes perhaps the best dissection I've seen so far of what's been smashed up – and what's potentially been unleashed – by the result of the UK's EU membership referendum vote. The fact that the analysis comes from beyond the UK's borders – Dublin to be precise – somehow feels both appropriate and not entirely

coincidental.

Brexit vote reveals rancour and distrust at the heart of the English body politic

[Fintan O'Toole](#), *The Irish Times*, 25 June 2016

Did you ever see a slightly drunk man trying that trick with the tablecloth? He thinks he can whip the cloth off the table with a fast, clean snap, but leave all the crockery perfectly intact. He gives a sharp tug and stands back with a triumphant flourish as the plates and glasses come flying to the ground and shatter all around him.

That's what [Brexit](#) is like. Those who have driven it have successfully pulled the cloth off the table – the underlying fabric of modern Britain has been whipped away with a shocking suddenness.

They stand in triumph, sure that they have pulled off the trick of removing a whole layer of political reality without disturbing all the family tableware. They have yet to notice that so much that was on the table is now at their feet, broken, perhaps irreparably. Brexit has achieved the breathtaking feat of causing deep cracks in four different polities at a single stroke.

One of them, most obviously, is the [European Union](#). For the first time in its history, the EU's engine has gone decisively into reverse. At the simplest level, it has been a process of relentless expansion – no large entity in modern history has grown so rapidly since the United States in the 19th century.

And now the steady advance has become a full-blown retreat.

The whole psychology of the European project has been turned on its head – instead of ever-widening frontiers, the EU now has to think about how to prevent a retreat from becoming a rout.

The rout that must be feared is a disorderly overthrow of liberal European values. When Nigel Farage speaks, as he did in his moment of triumph early yesterday, of victory for “the real people, the decent people”, the undertone is that nearly half of the UK’s voters are neither real nor decent.

[England](#) has not had the time, nor made the effort, to develop an inclusive, civic, progressive nationalism. It is left with a nationalism that is scarcely articulated in positive terms at all and that thus plugs into the darker energies of resentment and xenophobia.

But this is not just an English disease. Brexit is a huge boost to the European far right.

Racism and chauvinism

The questions that flow from it are not just about whether the Netherlands or France or Denmark might follow where England has led. It is about whether the blowback from failed austerity, the hubris of the euro project and the relentless rise of inequality will provide a fair wind for racism and chauvinism.

The EU already has two member states – Poland and Hungary – that have moved towards authoritarian nationalism and away from liberal democracy. The success of the English nationalist revolution (and that is what Brexit is) will further energise those forces throughout the union

This will please some of the Brexiters, of course – at least until the more moderate of them realise that they are, after all, Europeans and that the fate of [Europe](#) is their fate, too. But they surely cannot be so complacent about the other three

polities they have managed to crack.

One of them is the UK. A second Scottish independence referendum is inevitable – and this time the pro-independence side will have the enormous advantage of putting forward a conservative proposition that has overwhelming popular support: keep Scotland in the EU.

The utter refusal of the pro-Brexit campaigners, almost of all of whom would claim to venerate the union, to take the break-up of the UK seriously suggests that deep down, they really don't care that much about it.

English self-assertion has trumped UK preservation. The consequences will play out over the next decade: the chances are that by the 10th anniversary of what the victors are hailing as Independence Day, it will be English independence that is explicitly celebrated.

And this has deeply unsettling implications for the third cracked polity, Northern Ireland. A few pro-Remain voices, such as Trades Union Congress general secretary Frances O'Grady, tried in the referendum debates to make a gentle plea to voters to think about Ireland and the Belfast Agreement. They went unheard.

English nationalists, it turns out, wouldn't give the froth off a pint of real ale for the Irish peace process. They have recklessly imposed an EU land border between Newry and Dundalk, between Letterkenny and Derry.

What grounds are there to believe that when they come to power in their own little England, they will care about (or pay for) a province they clearly regard as a closer, wetter Gibraltar, an irrelevant appendage of the motherland. It beggars belief that the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) made common cause with a movement whose logical outcome is the end of the union.

The last piece of the tableware that must now be badly

fissured is the least expected: England itself. The English seem to have been utterly unprepared for how deeply divided they are, how bitter and angry the Brexit debate would be, how political assassination would return to the streets of England.

David Cameron, in one of British history's greatest miscalculations, thought of the referendum as the lancing of a boil. The bubble of nastiness that had built up in the Tory party over decades would be burst once and for all by the cold prick of economic realities. Instead though, the referendum merely revealed how deeply the English body politic is infected with rancour and distrust.

Distrust

That distrust extends far beyond the dominant political class – to church and trade union and business leaders and to the whole idea of objective expertise. Every time a Remain campaigner said the word “experts”, another Leave voter was born.

And this raises a huge question: where is the source of authority in the brave new England? Many of the most prominent Leave campaigners are naked chancers. They made stuff up with gay abandon, but when they come to power in the autumn, they will be the establishment they have told everybody not to believe.

Prime minister-in-waiting Boris Johnson is merely the winner of a Winston Churchill impersonation contest. He has a streak of Churchill's brilliant opportunism and reckless charm, but he does not have behind him the national consensus that an existential struggle created behind Churchill and he is, in everything but girth, a lightweight.

It is not even clear that the Brexit coalition can itself hold together in any meaningful way. It is, after all, a weird

conjunction. Brexit is not so much a peasants' revolt as a deeply strange peasants' – and – landlords' revolt.

It is a *Downton Abbey* fantasy of toffs and servants all mucking in together. But when the toffs, as the slogan goes, "take back control", the underlings will quickly discover that a fantasy is exactly what it is.

The disaffected working- class voter in Sunderland, rightly angry about being economically marginalised and politically disenfranchised, will wait in vain for the magical billions that are supposedly going to be repatriated from Brussels to drop from the clear blue skies of a free England.

There is, of course, a tried and trusted way to hold this kind of rickety social coalition together. It is to turn up the volume on nationalism and xenophobia, to deflect the inevitable disappointment anger onto Them. The English nationalists have just lost their favourite scapegoat, the EU. When their dream turns sour, where will they find another?

**Brexit or Bremain? Keep
connected and inclusive, not
angry and isolated**

Brexit or Bremain? Keep

connected and inclusive, not angry and isolated



There's a rousing editorial arguing passionately in favour of the UK remaining in the EU in this week's critical referendum on the issue.

'We need', it argues, 'to remember our history. Britain was formed and shaped by Europe. And we are – in historical as well as cultural, geographical and trading terms – a European nation. In almost every generation of European history until the past 70 years, people from these islands have fought and died in European wars. But within the borders of the European Union, there has been no war at all. This has not been an accident. To turn our back on that is unworthy of our traditions.

A better world', it continues. 'means working across borders, not sheltering behind them. Cutting yourself off solves nothing. That, fundamentally, is why Britain should vote to

remain in the club that represents the most advanced form of cross-border cooperation that the world has ever seen.'

Amen to that. Keeping fingers crossed tight for the actual vote. Which, all the indications are, is likely to prove very tight indeed.

The Guardian view on the EU referendum: keep connected and inclusive, not angry and isolated

Economics, foreign policy and Britain's idea of itself are all on the ballot. But after a divisive campaign so, too, is our ability to get along. Another powerful reason why the wise vote is for remain.

Who do we think we are, and who do we want to be? Are we so different from others that we cannot play by shared rules? Are we one member in a family of nations, or a country that prefers to keep itself to itself and bolt the door?

All of these questions were always on the ballot in this week's fateful referendum. But after a campaign that has been nasty, brutish and seemingly endless, the UK will be voting on another question too. With all the differences and the diversity among all of us who already live on these islands, how are we all going to get along? In the run-up to polling day this contest has risked descending into a plebiscite on whether immigrants are a good or a bad thing. To see what is at stake, just consider the dark forces that could so easily become emboldened by a narrow insistence on putting the indigenous first.

Head and heart

The backdrop has been the most unrelenting, unbalanced and sometimes xenophobic press assault in history. The leading

political lights of leave have claimed to be pro-immigrant and yet have, at the same time, been ruthlessly fearmongering about Britain being overrun by Turks, after [a Turkish accession](#) which they understand perfectly well is not on the cards. The mood is frenzied, the air thick with indignation, and clouded with untruths. The best starting point for Britain to reach a sound decision on Thursday is to cool the passions of the heart, and listen to the head.

All reason tells us that the great issues of our time have little respect for national borders. The leave side has attempted to turn [“expert” into a term of abuse](#), but one does not need the IMF, the Bank of England or any special knowledge to grasp that these border-busting issues range from corporate power, migration and tax evasion to weapons proliferation, epidemics and climate change. Not one of them can be properly tackled at the level of the nation state. Impose controls on a multinational corporation and it will move to a softer jurisdiction. Crack down on tax evasion and the evaders will vanish offshore. Cap your own carbon emissions in isolation and some other country will burn with abandon.

In so far as any of these problems can be effectively addressed, it is through cooperation. A better world means working across borders, not sheltering behind them. Cutting yourself off solves nothing. That, fundamentally, is why Britain should vote to remain in the club that represents the most advanced form of cross-border cooperation that the world has ever seen.

We need, too, to remember our history. Britain was formed and shaped by Europe. And we are – in historical as well as cultural, geographical and trading terms – a European nation. In almost every generation of European history until the past 70 years, people from these islands have fought and died in European wars. But within the borders of the [European Union](#), there has been no war at all. This has not been an accident. To turn our back on that is unworthy of our traditions.

This is not to dispute that there are flaws in the way that Europe is constituted and led. The EU is a union of nations working together, it is not and never will be a United States of Europe, and so its leadership is bound to depend on the imperfect leadership of all these countries. The single currency has been a flawed project and has set one nation against another, forcing the poor to pay the price for propping up a shonky structure. But Britain is not part of the eurozone, and the EU is not a plot against the nation state. Britain is still robustly herself too, warts and all.

If the EU has become a whipping boy, that is in large part because of the frustration that many inevitably have with day-to-day life in Britain. There are millions of citizens whose wages have been stuck for many years, whose job security has been hollowed out, and whose hopes of a fair deal are being undermined, all at a time when immigration has increased. People are bruised and angry, and many are ready to take it out on those they feel have let them down. Even if the UK government itself actually bears far more of the responsibility, it must be admitted that the EU is part of an international economic order that has been unkind to many. The wish to kick against it can thus be understood, even though it is mistaken.

For the core issues here are labour standards, and they are more effectively governed collaboratively, or else the great danger is of a competitive pressure to strip away protections covering hours, discrimination or agency and temporary working. More broadly, there is no crisis in Europe which is so serious that it would be better for the British prime minister to be outside the EU knocking on the door pleading to be heard rather than inside the room sorting things out. A leave victory would not solve the problems that cause such anger. On the contrary, it would make most of them worse.

The only argument about the [immediate economic effects of Brexit](#) is the depth of the hit that the economy would take,

not whether it would take a hit at all. The political victors would not be those who wish to rebuild politics. They would be rightwing Tories, and ruthless plutocrats who want freedom to reorder Britain and make money as they choose. They have no interest in fairer taxes on the rich, or higher spending on the NHS. They have spent their so-called Brexit dividend – which in reality is almost certainly a negative number, not the mendacious £350m a week which has earned them an official reprimand – many times over.

A significant group of them are flat-taxers who are whispering about deep cuts to corporation taxes. Facile Brexiter talk of a more buccaneering Britain – presumably a country fit for Sir Philip Green or Fred Goodwin to capture other galleons – offers precisely nothing to assuage the fears of elderly voters who simply want nothing more to change.

It is a fantasy to suppose that, if Britain votes to leave, these victors would want to maintain or extend protections for pensioners or workers. On the contrary. Human rights, equality, health and safety, and aid to refugees would be out of the window. Those who vote to leave as a protest against the elite will, in truth, be handing the keys to [the very worst of that very elite](#). There would be no “taking back control” for most working-class leave voters, just less control over their diminishing share than ever. Those who have not yet made up their mind in this campaign should ask themselves this: do you want to live in a Britain in the image of Nigel Farage? Yes or no? For that’s the choice on offer. If the answer is no, then vote remain.

Fantasy island

Thursday’s vote is in some ways a choice between an imaginary past of which too many in this country cannot let go and a future about which all of us are inescapably uncertain. If it goes in favour of leave it will hand Britain’s young people a country that most of them do not intend to vote for. Is that

fair? It may push Scottish nationalists to proceed with a break-up of Britain that was rejected less than two years ago. Is that responsible? It will put the settlement in Northern Ireland – the fragile prize won so recently from decades of hatred – at risk. Is that worth it? Not at all. Instead we should be putting our shoulders to the task of building a democratic, devolved, multicultural Britain with a fair deal for all, connected to the world and working with our European neighbours.

The campaign has further alienated voters who were already disaffected. To an extraordinary degree, it has inflicted the Tory party's pathological obsession with the EU on a country that does not ordinarily share it. No one bears more responsibility for this whole unedifying event than David Cameron, it is true. In the end, though, Thursday's vote is not about him.

It has become a turn-in-the-road issue for Britain and Europe alike. Imagine a world without the EU – without the clout to face down Russia over Ukraine, without the ability to put together coherent answers to carbon emissions, to protect standards at work from a race to the bottom. Like democracy, the EU is an imperfect way of answering the modern world's unrelenting challenges. But the answer to its imperfections is to reform them, not to walk away – still less to give in to this country's occasional hooligan instinct in Europe.

Like democracy, whose virtues are in our minds afresh after the violent death of [the committed and principled MP Jo Cox](#), the EU is not just the least bad of the available options. It is also the one that embodies the best of us as a free people in a peaceful Europe. Vote this week. Vote for a united country that reaches out to the world, and vote against a divided nation that turns inwards. Vote to remain.

EU referendum: the paradox of true sovereignty points to Remain

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My brother Tom's feisty UK EU referendum thinkpiece just published by [openDemocracy](#): Retaining European economic sovereignty, he argues, demands continuing to pool it – within the European Union.

The paradox of true sovereignty points to Remain

Tom Salter

The EU provides a means to exercise more control of international capitalism no individual European nation has the power to exercise. It's paradoxical but critical: sovereignty is dependent on an economy and order over which no nation is sovereign

There is a fundamental mis-match between the increasingly globalised nature of the economy and the national basis of politics. Nationalist ideology, like most ideology, blinds us to those aspects of reality that do not fit with the ideology. Core to nationalist ideology is the idea of sovereignty. The legal and military foundation of sovereignty gives the nation the appearance of solidity. However meaningful political sovereignty depends on the resources any government can devote to that sovereignty.

What does the 'sovereignty' of a person with no money mean in practice if they have to sell their bodies to eat? Similarly the sovereignty of a nation with no means exists more in theory and law than in practice. Though the presence or absence of sovereignty may be clear legally, think of any very poor country and any very rich country to observe how in practice sovereignty is a matter of degree, conditioned by whether a country has the finance to exercise that sovereignty. Think of Greek sovereignty in hock to the EU, or bankrupt post war UK in hock to the USA. Compare that to the capacity of the USA to exercise its sovereignty in practice.

Legal national sovereignty runs into the limits reality imposes. The 'national' economy any government has to tax is only national as far as tax is concerned. Bar North Korea 'national' economies are integrated parts of a global economy.

Money moves fluidly around the globe only residing temporarily in any particular nation. Nation states own significant portions of global capital concentrations, especially in land, property and mineral resources. But the majority of global capital is not owned by states. Individuals, private pension funds, the private sector, multi-national corporations and international banks own most of the global wealth. Even labour is increasingly trans-national. The nationalist desire for sovereignty obscures this simple reality. Sovereignty is dependent on an economy over which the nation is not sovereign.

This creates a paradox. To develop more real world sovereignty, in the form of higher tax revenues to spend on democratic national priorities, the nation-state is dependent on its tax take of a global economy over which it is not sovereign. If people want the benefits of the higher tax revenues and personal incomes that come from free trade, the nations in which they live cannot be economically sovereign. The historical track record of isolationism has proven the two to be incompatible. This can be seen in the contrast in the quality of public services and personal incomes between isolationist North and trading South Korea, or between isolationist Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge and Thailand.

Nationalisation does not in itself create economic sovereignty either. A nationalised industry does not have sovereignty over the private sector industries with which they compete globally. Nationalised industries have also struggled to compete with the innovation and productivity of the private sector. Think of the contrast in the fortunes of nationalised British Leyland and German private sector VW, Audi, Mercedes and BMW for instance. Taxing the private sector has proved a more successful strategy in Germany for generating tax revenues for public services than nationalisation of British Leyland has for the UK exchequer.

So ironically the economic sovereignty associated with

nationalisation can have the inverse effect when the state ends up with less money to spend on public services as a consequence. The nationalised UK car industry, British Leyland, proved a drain to the public exchequer. The private sector West German car industries have contributed huge amounts of tax revenues to fund the real expression of democratic West German sovereignty in universal public services. Part worker owned businesses, like John Lewis, have also proved more successful in generating innovation and productivity than state owned ones.

There is a strong correlation between the size of all countries' GDP/capita and the percentage of the national economy that is taken in tax. Poor countries, defined by a \$5,000 GDP/capita, generally have a tax take of below 20% of GDP. Rich countries with \$20,000 GDP/capita generally have tax takes of over 30% of GDP. This high tax take allows governments in rich countries to pay for more universal and higher quality public services. In Europe the figure for the average tax take is closer to 40% of GDP, and interestingly this varies little according to left or right governments.

Poor countries cannot afford to pay for infrastructure and universal health and education provision because their tax-take per capita is below \$1000 per year. Generally this is not enough to pay for universal and free public services. The quality of the performance of their statehood in these respects is compromised by how small their tax revenues are to pay for them. By contrast rich countries average \$8000 per capita tax take, is enough to pay for the expression of sovereignty in public services that are demanded in national democratic processes, as well as pay for the military defence of that sovereignty.

Paradoxically the higher tax revenues, that come in part from the absence of economic sovereignty free trade implies, gives us meaningful sovereignty – the tax revenues to spend on publically funded services and security. When the EU, or the

WTO, debates international trade rules, when NATO debates defence policy, when the UN debates the Charter on Human Rights, when the African Union debates continental responses to regional security issues, no single country is sovereign and all compromise their sovereignty in abiding by collective decisions.

But all stand to gain in the meaningful expression of national sovereignty if their tax revenues to spend on protecting human rights, security and trade are increased as a consequence of pooling sovereignty. The EU is the strongest embodiment of that mature understanding of the limits of national sovereignty in the world. The emotions that drive the desire to leave the EU remind me of a child or adolescent demanding total control. 'The UK it's mine, mine'. It is not the mature expression of the realisation of an independent adult that we are interdependent.

Understanding the limits of nationalism, of how any individual nation-state is not only part of the family of nations but is dependent for its sovereignty on a global economy over which it cannot be sovereign, is an expression of political maturity and honesty about the limits of the nation. Emotional nationalist appeals to 'stand on your own two feet' are no substitute for the intellectual maturity to accept the economic limits of sovereignty, and how accepting those limits openly actually increases the space for the most useful sovereignty as far as citizens are concerned – an economy large enough to produce taxes that can fund good quality infrastructure and universal services and alleviate poverty. It is the countries with the largest GDP/capita to tax that are best able to express their sovereignty – at a national level through public services and internationally in trade deals.

We need institutions if we are to manage our shared economic and political interests and redistributive responsibilities. Just because it is hard to continually hash out the balance of

bureaucratic and democratic control in the EU, or because we are not happy with the present balance, is no reason to dismiss the need for these institutions in order in part paradoxically to exercise more sovereignty. The EU provides a means to exercise more control of international capitalism no individual European nation has the power to exercise – especially in preventing the continued erosion of the tax base on which meaningful sovereignty depends – through company tax avoidance, transfer pricing and company registration in secrecy jurisdictions that the Panama papers have revealed in the gory detail we have long needed.

Although there is a distinction between power and sovereignty, meaningful sovereignty is dependent on the money and power with which to express it. It is the size of their GDP that gives the USA and China the wealth with which to express their sovereignty. But it is the size of their GDP/capita that give Denmark and Norway the tax revenues per head of population the money to fund the best universal public services and welfare systems in the world. All four countries have the money to fund the performance of their nation in different ways – and it's a very expensive piece of theatre. The EU is the second largest economy in the world. It provides the citizens of Europe an economy that is large and free enough to fund national public services through taxation. But it can also finance something else based in a more exciting ethical and political ambition. That is the expression of Europeans mutual obligation through redistribution – to iron out the worst disparities of national wealth.

How far to go towards the political integration of European nations to best govern the European economy in the interests of its citizens, like those of the world, is an open question – best answered so far by the principle of subsidiarity. The principle is that a central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed at a national level. For instance the so called

'democratic deficit' is produced in part by the present mismatch between monetary union overseen by the council of ministers without the fiscal union that is really necessary to make it properly functional in the longer term.

That process is deeply fraught as the UK referendum debates now constantly remind us. The appropriate response is not to walk away but to engage in the creative politics necessary to imagine the form a more meaningful pooling of democracy, as well as sovereignty, to govern the reality of our shared economic space requires.

The development of a shared identity necessary to make democratic governance meaningful to Europeans will only develop through shared political and democratic practice over time, just as they have for democracy within its constituent nations. Foreign policy, and South North migration in particular, may present the thorniest issue for the EU as regards the pooling of sovereignty. But even this demands the political imagination to create new life outside the mental carapace of the nation-state if the issue is to produce policy responses beyond increasing the voltage running through the razor wire and providing live ammunition to the soldiers and sailors at the re-erected national borders of Europe's nations.

If we move the argument away from the economic facts that condition the limits of national sovereignty to the limits of nationalism for the expression of our ethics there appears to be a happy coincidence. I believe ethics worth believing in are universal. A globalised capitalist economy without democratic political control produces huge disparities of wealth and power between classes, regions and nations with all the suffering and risks of conflict that entails. Petty parochial debates about whether the UK contributes as much as it gets back to the EU miss this basic point.

A meaningful EU authority, like a meaningful UK authority

within the UK, redistributes from rich to poor Europeans through welfare and public services. The EU also helps promote the creation of the wealth to be taxed for that redistribution and the defence of the rights of the workers who produce that wealth. We should use the EU to act as an inspiration for bringing together all nations of the world in a global union, for a more meaningful United Nations.

Only when the global economy is taxed, universal services are provided for all people and the global threat to humanity, and other species, of habitat destruction, pollution and global warming are controlled will any claims to beliefs in universal ethics have a practical institutional expression. It is a parochial ethics hardly worth the name in which only your family, your village, your fellow Londoners, or fellow Scots, or fellow Englishmen or Brits or Europeans lie within the circle of ethical responsibility.

But we lack the practical institutional means, in particular redistributive taxation and universal services, to extend our ethical responsibility towards each other to all humanity. Until we do the exercise of that responsibility will be severely constrained by the boundaries of the nation. In the meantime Europe provides Europeans with an institutional starting point for the journey towards that ultimate goal.'

<https://opendemocracy.net/uk/tom-salter/paradox-of-true-sovereignty-points-to-remain>

When Nelson Met Ali

When Nelson Met Ali



A great image from when Muhammed Ali and Nelson Mandela met in 2005, included in a recent BBC feature titled 'Ali's love affair with Africa'. Nelson, of course, had been something of a boxer in his day. And as he had said on a previous occasion, "Ali was not just my hero, but the hero of millions of young, black South Africans because he brought dignity to boxing."

And to a whole lot of other people too, he might have added.



Ali in Nigeria on his first African tour in 1964, where crowds welcomed him with chants of “king of the world” – Photo: AP

BBC feature at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36469288>

One-on-one with Donald Trump

One-on-one with Donald Trump



Ready to be terrified? Then watch this segment from a recent CNN interview with US Presidential hopeful, Mr Donald Trump.

Deeply, truly, scary.

http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_slatest/2016/06/03/donald_trump_s_cnn_interview_is_incoherent_racist_and_terrifying.html

Basic Income: landmark vote

Looms in Switzerland

The 'basic income' proposal Switzerland is voting on this weekend will probably fall at the polls this time. But it's an approach to regulating the work – life balance that we're definitely going to be hearing more about in future – and not just in Switzerland either!



Supporters of a basic income last month crowdfunded a giant poster asking: "What would you do if your income were taken care of?"

Switzerland basic income: Landmark vote looms

Imogen Foulkes BBC News, Geneva, 4 June 2016

Switzerland will become the first country in the world to hold a nationwide referendum on the introduction of a basic income

on Sunday. The proposal, if passed, would give every adult legally resident in Switzerland an unconditional income of 2,500 Swiss francs (£1,755; \$2,554) a month, whether they work or not.

Supporters point to the fact that 21st-Century work is increasingly automated, with more and more traditional jobs, in factories, retail and even in finance and accounting, being done by machines. And they do not need salaries.

The campaign has staged some eye-catching demonstrations, including one in which hundreds of “robots” danced through the streets of Zurich, promising to “free” humans from the daily grind of Monday to Friday work, just to pay the bills. “The robots are saying ‘we don’t want to grab your work and make you suffer’,” said campaigner Che Wagner. “We want to make you free, that’s why they want a basic income for us humans.”

Mr Wagner claims an unconditional income would be a fairer solution. “In Switzerland for example, over half of all work that is done is unpaid – in the home, care, in the communities – so, that work would be more valued with a basic income.”

In fact the idea of a basic income is not new. In the 16th Century Thomas More suggested it in his famous work Utopia. In the 20th Century economists from both the left and right argued that it could be a good idea. American economist Milton Friedman, who was a staunch proponent of free market capitalism, supported basic income because, he argued, it would allow what he called “a rag-bag of specific welfare programmes” to be abolished.

But despite all the debate, the idea of a basic income has never really caught on – until now, perhaps. [In Finland, the government is considering a trial to give basic income](#) to about 8,000 people from low-income groups. Different groups would be given different amounts, to try to find out whether more generous payments would deter people from seeking paid

work. Meanwhile the Dutch city of Utrecht is also developing a pilot project for basic income.

Around the world, many governments, from Australia to Canada, are taking a closer look at the administrative costs of running complex welfare systems and asking themselves whether a basic income would simply be cheaper.

Freedom to choose

Campaigners like Che Wagner are ideologically committed to the concept regardless of the cost, because they believe the current situation forces people into work they often do not enjoy, and which does not allow them to choose other activities they might enjoy more, and which could be equally useful to society.

But Professor of Labour Relations Andy Stern believes increased automation, as illustrated by those dancing robots, is the most important reason for governments to think very seriously about basic income. "Any good country needs to think about what's next," he told Swiss television.

"With a wave of technological change on its way, driverless cars, robotic surgery, the elimination of finance and accounting jobs, clearly there is going to be a huge disappearance of jobs. No one can really explain where the new jobs are coming from, so it would be foolish for a country not to prepare for what may be the greatest technological revolution in the history of the world."

Big questions

But there are many big questions over the Swiss proposal on basic income. For a start, although supporters have suggested a figure of 2,500 Swiss francs a month, they have offered no ideas on how that could be financed.

Instead, they say, if Swiss voters back the idea, Switzerland's parliament will have to work out how to implement it. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, there is little support among politicians for basic income: not a single parliamentary party has come out in favour.

But what is a surprise is that none of the political parties have cited cost as their main objection. Instead, there are concerns about encouraging a "lack of initiative and personal responsibility", and of not providing young people with a real incentive to find work. Business leaders, already facing a skills shortage in many areas, are also alarmed.

But a key argument against basic income, and the one likely to sway many Swiss voters, comes from the right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP). Switzerland could easily afford to introduce a basic income, argues SVP representative Luzi Stamm, but not when Switzerland has a free movement of people agreement with all 28 EU member states, many of whom have a far lower standard of living.

"Theoretically if Switzerland were an island [basic income] would be possible," he said. "You could cut down on existing social payments and instead pay a certain amount of money to every individual. But with open borders it's a total impossibility. If you would offer every individual a Swiss amount of money you would have billions of people who would try to move into Switzerland."

Like all European countries, immigration is a hot political topic in Switzerland. And the Swiss may be nervous about measures which could make their country more attractive than its neighbours.

Latest opinion polls suggest voters will reject basic income. But the campaign has created a lively debate about how people will live, and work, in the future, and for Che Wagner that is already a victory.

“If you look back 20 years we will [ask] ourselves: why didn’t we come up with this concept of a basic income earlier?” he said. “It detaches work and income on an existential basis. It’s great that we have fewer jobs, so that people can actually do what they want. We just want to make capitalism better and work in a more human way.”

**The Muslim nation that saved
Jews**

**The Muslim nation that saved
Jews**



*Lime Basha's family hid three Jewish brothers in their home
during WWII
(Norman Gershman)*

This is an account of an extraordinary and – to me at least – unknown corner of modern history. It concerns the determined efforts of Albania's most Muslim population to protect both the country's own Jewish communities and that of neighbouring countries during the Holocaust.

'To look after your guests, your neighbours, is a matter of national honour', says Dashmir Balla, whose family hid three Jewish brothers in their home during World War II, explaining the background to this story. Inspiring.

ABC RN – The Drawing Room, 14 April

2016

During the Holocaust, many individuals and small groups risked their lives to save Jewish people. However, it's only in recent years that the world has begun to hear the story of the Muslim nation that opened its borders and welcomed Jews. Barbara Heggen reports.

Despite being occupied by Italy and then Germany during WWII, Albania not only protected its Jewish population but offered refuge to Jews from elsewhere in the region—and this is a country with a Muslim majority.

It's such an important part of history that the world needs to know. Dashmir Balla

The reason for this heroism lies in a concept known as *Besa*. It's an Albanian word meaning 'to keep a promise'. Dashmir Balla, former president of the Albanian Australian Islamic Society, says it's a code of respect deeply embedded in Albanian culture. 'To look after your guests, your neighbours, is a matter of national honour.'

As a result, Albania has no concept of 'foreigners' and visitors are regarded as guests. This honour system has remained constant throughout the country's long history of being invaded. Mr Balla says that the *Besa* ethos goes hand in hand with the teachings of the Koran. 'It dictates a moral behaviour so absolute that non-adherence brings shame and dishonour to one's self and one's family.'

During communist rule, Albania remained an isolated state and most Albanians were unaware of world events, including the fall of the Berlin Wall. The country's leaders forbade religion, so no one spoke much of the efforts to save Jews.

After communist rule finally ended in 1992, Jewish survivors

began returning to Albania to find, and thank, the Muslims who had saved them. 'Because of the communist regime, the shutters had come down and this information was suppressed. Unfortunately, many Albanians didn't know about it, but when I did find out I was very, very proud,' says Mr Balla. 'It's such an important part of history that the world needs to know.'

Many extraordinary accounts of wartime courage and heroism in Albania have come to international attention thanks to American photographer Norman Gershman. He spent six years travelling throughout Albania interviewing and photographing the people who risked their lives to save others.

Jayne Josem, the curator and head of collections at the Melbourne Jewish Holocaust centre, says she too was surprised when she first learned of the story. 'The fact that a whole country banded together to save Jews and the fact that they were Muslims, it totally fascinated me. I had to figure out how to bring the exhibition to Melbourne.'

The centre, in partnership with the Albanian Australian Islamic Society, is presenting an exhibition of Gershman's photographs and screening his award-winning documentary *Besa: The Promise*.

Ms Josem says it is a beautiful story, which is once again bringing together people of different faiths. 'We've come in closer contact with the Albanian community, we had an opening event and many local Albanians turned up, and they really are just wonderful people. It was one of the warmest events we've ever had at the centre.'

Editor's note: this article has been changed to reflect the fact that Albania was not the only European nation which had a larger Jewish population in 1945 than 1939.

Besa: Code of Honour is on at Melbourne's Jewish Holocaust Centre, until the 26th April