

Nationalism and Self-Determination: Is There an Alternative to Violence?

Neelan Tiruchelvam Millennium Lecture 2
March 19, 2000

by

Michael Ignatieff
Writer, Historian and Broadcaster



ICES

International Centre for Ethnic Studies

1.27

Nationalism and Self-Determination: Is There an Alternative to Violence?

I want to say that it is an enormous pleasure for me and my wife Susanna to be in Sri Lanka, to be in South Asia for the first time. Now, when I tell you that I've never been in South Asia before, I can feel a tremor of apprehension going through each and every one of you. Who is this European coming all this way to talk about problems, dramas, tragedies that in some ways we know better than he does? Who, you may be thinking, does he think he is? Well, let me tell you who I am.

I am a Canadian scholar and writer, as introduced to you, who for the last decade has written a great deal and thought a great deal about ethnic war and ethnic conflict. chiefly in the Balkans: that is to say, I do know something about ethnic war in Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Kosovo. I have also travelled in Central Africa and watched the process of ethnic war in Burundi and Rwanda, I've watched civil war in Angola, I've been in the mountains of Northern Iraq to watch the Kurdish struggle at close hand, and I've been to Afghanistan; but you will notice that I've not been to South Asia. My claim to be knowledgeable about ethnic nationalism is derived from a place other than this. So

I am in the odd position of speaking about a subject that each of you knows more intimately than I do. But that, I presume, is the slightly sadistic intention behind Radhika: that is, to put me in a room where I know something but not very much; you know a great deal more.

My old master Isaiah Berlin used to say: 'Everything is what it is and not another thing.' And this should be the methodology, the guiding principle, for all discussion of ethnic nationalism. Sri Lanka is Sri Lanka, it is not Bosnia, Bosnia is not Angola, South Africa is not Rwanda. These are obvious points to make. but many theoreticians of ethnic nationalism talk as if we could speak of a genus of which Sri Lanka is merely some poor little sub-case. I am here to say I don't believe that. Every particular country, every particular drama, every particular national tragedy, must be understood in its particularity.

There is another preliminary thing to say, which is that I am a European; and in this part of the world, Europeans have been telling people what to do for centuries without much success, without much credit. What right does a European like me, even if I am speaking with a Canadian accent, have to speak to you about your problems? The only thing I would say about the European tradition is that we have discussed in the '90s, particularly in our part of Eastern Europe, in our home, in the home of our civilization, ethnic nationalism as a deep and enduring problem for us. So we are not in a position to tell you anything, We have learnt painfully from our experience that nations can be destroyed and people can be killed by these conflicts. We have not bypassed them, in fact this crisis, this drama, is something that we share not from a position of superiority but from the position of desperate equality.

Another point — a slightly theoretical point. One of the reasons that I am attached to the liberal political tradition that descends from Thomas Hobbes and John Locke is that it is a tradition formed out of the experience of civil war and religious violence and communal conflict. The reason that tradition is alive for me, this European tradition, is not that it has some mysterious imperial superiority but that this tradition was forged in trying to understand the very problems which you in your civilization and me in mine are desperately trying to understand. If I use European language here, if I refer to those traditions, if it is not, as I say, because I think it was superior but because it was

forged in the experience of dealing with these issues. So, those are some preliminaries .

My subject, my lecture topic, is called 'Ethnic Nationalism: Is there an Alternative to Violence?' If you ask a question in a lecture, you must always give an answer. I want you to know that the answer to this question is 'yes'. And yes, the answer, if it is 'yes', will require turning that 'yes', that affirmation, into a reality, and turning that 'yes' into reality will require a great deal of civic courage from everybody in this room. Turning it into a 'yes' will require us to think very hard about the work and the inspiration of Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam. When I say that I think there is an alternative to violence here, it is because I believe in his example and in his work. And as an European not from your part of the world I want to tell you what I learnt from him, because I learnt an enormous amount. Here was a man who was a South Asian to the tips of his fingers, to the depths of his culture, who also had a deep respect and willingness to learn from European culture. The thing that is very remarkable about him and very unusual, and one of the reasons why he was a genuinely global figure is that he effortlessly was able to think about the Canadian experience with bi-national communities and linguistic communities and aboriginal communities, he was able to refer to a host of different national contexts and bring them to bear on Sri Lankan problems. That's the best kind of internationalist you can be. — someone who is from somewhere, who is not a cosmopolitan snob, disdaining little places, but is rooted in a place and is able to learn and reach out to other places and draw on their national experiences. And I hope there are plenty of people, and I believe there are plenty of people in this room, with that balance of passionate patriotic attachment to your country and a fascination and interest in what other places can teach you about your sorrows and your difficulties. And you mourn and I mourn him, and you know that you do not mourn him alone. I was at the old theatre of the LSE, a place that many of you may know, last November, and listened to the High Commissioner for National Minorities of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Max van der Stoep, begin his annual lecture in the High Commission with an invocation of the memory of what was for him the great South Asian human rights activist Dr Neelan.

One of the things that struck me when I was sent the tributes that came from this society about him was the strength of the civil society that mourned his passing — the number of institutions, newspapers, groups of social scientists, scholars, trade union activists, people from the tissue of your society, from both, from all your communities who joined in mourning him. In the very moment in which you felt most desperate and most depressed about what had happened, the death of this man, the very nature of your mourning taught me something, which is that there is a very strong civil society here, men and women of passion and goodwill who know an evil deed when they see it. And know what to feel when they see an evil deed. And that is a source of strength in your community, at least as I look at it from a distance away. But you also know, because I was made aware of this very quickly, that not everyone in the Sri Lankan community mourns his death. Not everyone did. I received material in the mail in the course of my preparation for this lecture which described him as a traitor to his people.

The word 'traitor' is a very interesting one. It is one that should be mentioned and talked about frankly because it makes very important assumptions. The word 'traitor' assumes that someone has the right to speak for a community and someone else doesn't have the right to speak for a community. Someone was saying that this man did not have the right to speak for his community and they wanted to stop him speaking for that community. So certain claims have been made here. One of them is that he who is not with us is against us, and we have the right to define what a community must stand for, and once we have defined what it is, those who don't stand with us stand against us. All Neelan's life, and, I suspect, the life of many in this room, stand against these principles, against the idea that anyone can say who is and who is not a traitor to their people and their community. And that idea, the very idea that there can be traitors among us, is one of the most divisive principles, it's one of the bases, in fact, of nationalist ideology and identity, and it was a principle that Neelan fought against all his life. He believed in politics, and because he believed in politics, he believed in compromise.

There are people in your community who believe that any form of compromise is a form of betrayal, a form of treachery. These are very fundamental things, and they are the things he stood against. He died

because he wasn't simply an impartial distant humanist. He was a practical politician speaking for a community and insisting that he could speak for that community as well as anybody else, and it was up to the community to decide who would speak for them. And that is what democratic pluralism is all about, and, as you know, it cost him his life. But he also spoke very courageously and very directly against what he saw as a crisis in the legitimacy of your state. Because he was a constitutional lawyer, because he valued the rule of law, he was extremely concerned about the weakening legitimacy of your state, of national government. So he spoke against those who tried to coerce his community, but he also spoke against aspects of the national state here and of the ways in which that state was practising extra-judicial executions, detention without trial, the ways in which disappearances were occurring, the ways in which the minorities in this country were inequitably represented in state employment, the continuing failure of the state to deliver services to the Tamil community in their own language, and the increasing communalisation of the state itself.

In what name was he speaking when he made these criticisms? Not in my view, not as merely the spokesman of a particular ethnic minority, but on the basis of a passionate idea about the state itself. The state that Neelan believed in was a state which was a neutral arbiter between communities. A state that obeyed the rule of law. A state that enforced the rule of law for all citizens, regardless of race, language, religion, ethnicity. A state which was prepared to devolve power to regions and communities and grant those collective rights essential to the preservation of the identity of those communities. So that when he criticised the Sri Lankan state, what I see him doing is not speaking on behalf of a particular part of the society but calling on the society to reflect about what kind of state it wants, and making a very strong claim that the only state that could survive here, the only state that could preserve order here, was a state that had the allegiance of all its citizens. I suggest to you that his ultimate allegiance as a thinker, as a writer, was not to any particular community, but to an idea of the rule of law, the idea of the validity of the state as an arbiter, as a source of fairness, as a source of justice in this and in everything in society. Now in Neelan's tragedy I see a man fighting on two fronts at once, and eventually being destroyed because it is impossible to fight on two

fronts. A man contesting the ways in which the Sri Lankan state is losing its legitimacy, a man fighting within his own community against those who were using violence and terror to define what it stands for. But this was a heroic and noble struggle, one that I commend to you as a fine example, but pursued at a terrible cost.

Now let me move away from Neelan's example and how I interpret it and let me say something else. My sense of what I do when I come to a place like this — and I give lectures all over the world — is, I don't just talk, I also listen. Tomorrow morning there will be a seminar. I hope anyone who has very strong feelings about what I'm saying or what I'm going to say will come and talk to each other, and I will give you my pledge that I will listen in silence. My wife says I never listen to anybody or anything. But she is wrong. I do listen. I do.

So, let me leave the direct Sri Lankan situation for a second, and talk more generally about nationalism and self-determination. And try and explain the simple question which I have been trying to think about for a decade, which is why violence occurs in some ethnic conflicts and not in others. We have to think hard about the violence, it is the key question. Some people say violence occurs simply because in certain societies there are ancient, ancient enmities based on colour, language, religion, race, ethnicity, which are so deep, so intractable, so eroding, they go down so far into the social tissue, that violence is simply inevitable. This I would call, if you allow me to be fancy, an essentialist definition of why ethnic conflict occurs; and it simply says that ethnic conflict is simply inevitable in certain societies when they have these kinds of religious and ethnic polarities.

I am against that kind of explanation because I think it is in fact no explanation at all. My premise is that in fact all human differences — male, female; black, white; Protestant, Catholic; Muslim, Jew; Hindu, Buddhist — all of the human differences are minor. That is to say, all of them are private, and in the normal course of events people enjoy each other's differences; difference is an attractor. The question then becomes how certain differences are polarised and politicised, become major. It's not the differences themselves, I am saying to you, it's the ways in which differences become a source of, a lever of political power and injustice.

The nub of the problem in Sri Lanka — but frankly it is the nub of the problem everywhere: in this you are not alone, this is the problem everywhere — the problem is not the existence of religious or ethnic differences as such but that these differences confer an unjust political and social advantage or disadvantage. It's the way the minor difference is politicised and turned into major difference in order to maintain and reproduce forms of power. It's when power comes into these differences — the fact that you have a certain religion, a certain language, gives power. The minute it does so, it violates a basic institution of democratic society, which is that power should be allocated by democratic suffrage, and those we promote should be promoted on individual merit, not on the basis of their religion or their ethnicity, race or whatever.

Therefore if any state that has ethnic and religious differences is to create — and my liberal individualism may appal you — a society of individuals, do not allow political power to create a society in which power and influence are not accorded to individuals on the basis of merit and their capacity to persuade their fellow citizens rather than on inheritance, ethnicity or religion and so on. Now violence occurs because when power is distributed by ethnicity, race or language, and the state, the chief arbiter of legitimacy of society, distributes power and advantage according to language, ethnicity, religion, it creates a very powerful sense of injustice in those who do not receive the benefits of that distribution. The violence that occurs in this sense is deeply connected to a sense of injustice.

This is perfectly obvious to you, but, believe me, many liberal cosmopolitan intellectuals like myself are always puzzled by violence. They ask themselves why are these irrational people killing each other. They are killing each other or engaging in violence out of a deep sense of injustice. Something very unfair, some enormous violation of their expectations, is occurring, and violent protest becomes an inevitable response when the state does not respond adequately. Perfectly simple, perfectly obvious and perfectly fundamental, because the state is not simply the moral entity, the state is the source of the legitimacy of a society. When it distributes power and advantage unfairly, everybody suffers from that, not merely because they have been done hard by but the moral order in which they live has been violated. You can't take the

ethical dimension out of this . If you take the ethical dimension out of this, you don't understand why people fight and die on those issues. Because it is not just a matter of injustice. It's also a matter that when power is distributed according to ethnicity, religion or race by unfair methods, human beings do not get the recognition that all human beings deserve.

So the issue here is not just a matter of justice and injustice. It's about recognition. When a minority does not, for example, receive recognition from the state — and that means very practical things, the right to use their language, the right to celebrate their festivals, the right to educate their children in their customs and traditions — the feeling they have is an elementary violation of their identity as human beings. A sense that they are not being recognised as existing, belonging to the political community. The ethical dimension, in other words, in these struggles is fundamental. Recognition is about moral recognition. You see me, I see you. You accept me as equal, I accept you as equal . These again are obvious points, but they must never be forgotten, because otherwise you can't understand the violence that occurs when these extremely powerful intuitions are denied.

All forms of recognition ultimately require that the state grants the minorities a certain degree of self-determination: the capacity to rule themselves, to be recognised as equals, to be recognised as a political actor. To be recognised as a political actor is to be recognised as having a right to rule yourself in that which matters most to you, self-determination. This is an elementary point, but it needs to be said again and again: self determination for minorities does not have to mean separation or separatism. It means recognition of that community as a political actor. It does not mean giving them some enormous portion of your real estate, cutting your heart out; it means recognising them as political and moral equals in a community, in giving them the power to educate their children and teach their languages and reproduce what is fundamental to their collective existence. That's what it means. It doesn't mean separation or separatism.

Now when a society is unable, when a state is unable, to engage in this basic act of recognition towards the minority, it does so because it believes in a particular vision of the state. It doesn't do so because the people involved are wicked or blind or stupid, but because the state

believes that the state belongs to the majority of the community. That the state is the creation, the expression of the national tradition, language of that majority. The consequence of that, however, is that the minority does not feel that the state does belong to them.

In fact, the point here is that both are wrong. The state properly should not belong to anyone. The state should not belong to any community as a community, it should belong to all citizens equally. When the processes of recognition between the majority and minority do not occur, when a sense of injustice accumulates, violence is the inevitable result. First, demonstrations, then it escalates and you have gone through the whole terrible cycle.

The thing that is again so obvious about violence, although it is unfashionable to say so, is that violence draws on the very best in people. This is what is so terrible about it. Violence draws on people's capacity to serve a cause greater than themselves, to sacrifice for the common good, to put their individual welfare at the service of the nation and the people. And these are the noblest parts of the human soul. When exploited by these terrible people, when exploited by demagogues, they turn into a nightmare that can destroy society. But unless you understand that the appeal of violence is to that something deep and noble in the human heart that desires something bigger than yourself, you cannot understand violence at all. The problem, needless to say, is that all this fine moral capital in society is exploited by thugs and crooks and demagogues. Now the other problem with violence is that it is deeply attractive, it draws a certain kind of person.

I am trying to describe to you the ways in which violence begins as a response to injustice, begins as a response to a lack of recognition, and then becomes a completely autonomous actor, separates from the justice of an original cause and becomes a way of life, becomes a business and becomes a system in which the best qualities of human beings are exploited for the lowest, most criminal ends, and this is the tragedy which you have experienced in your community and which I have seen everywhere I go. And I don't want to moralise about it, but I simply want to observe one thing that is apparent to you in Sri Lanka, as it is to me in Bosnia or Kosovo or Angola. The numbers of people engaged in acts of violence, the numbers of people who pull the trigger, throw the bomb, strap the bomb to their bodies, the number of people involved in

the total community is always tiny. And the horror of the situation is that this tiny number of people by the use of violence can destroy the political future of entire communities. In Northern Ireland, 30 years of the history of a part of Great Britain which I love and respect has been made a misery by how many? 2000, possibly 1500, nobody knows for sure, but a tiny number of individuals. And this is the pathology of violence that I insist upon, because there is a very strong sense in which violence expropriates democracy, in which tiny minorities of people are prepared to do ultimate havoc to human beings and by that very fact acquire a power disproportionate to their numbers and hold the communities in which they live in thrall, in subjection. And in this sense violence is not merely terrifying, frightening, depressing, it's also a form of tyranny, it's also a form of political tyranny in which your voice, your ability to express your freely chosen views about the future of your country, are expropriated from you by a tiny minority of people who have exploited the consciousness of the young and vulnerable people for their own ends. And in which the nationalism, the cause, the heroic cause, of the people, ends up justifying everything: the indoctrination of child soldiers, the sale of drugs to finance arms, the extortion of money in the diaspora community.

One more thing — just as a little sideline if you allow me, because it deserves a study on its own — is the role of expatriate communities in making the problems of their home societies worse. The most rabid Croatian nationalists are not in Croatia, they are in Sydney and Toronto. I expect you can find certain obvious parallels in your own community. Why is that so? Because absence removes responsibility. You can have any opinion you want in Toronto and Sydney because you won't pay the consequences of it. Somebody else will die for your beliefs, but not you. Your views are also frozen at the moment that you left. You never learn anything. Your politics is stuck. The Croatians who left in 1946 believe it's 1946, it's in fact 1999, 2000. Expatriation stupefies, freezes political opinion at the moment that you leave. Expatriation is irresponsible in the sense that you are no longer facing the consequences of your action. And most of all, expatriation involves guilt: you've left. You have abandoned your political community, and that means that your political views, your extremism is powered by

guilt. I must do something for my nation because I've left it, and therefore the more extreme I can be the better. These are the sources, the psychological dynamics, by which violence becomes a way of life, because we know it's expatriate communities in the modern world of jet travel who fund nationalist and extremist violence and terrorist violence in every community I have ever been in. There is no national struggle that is a purely local struggle. They are all fuelled and driven from the suburbs of Sydney, Toronto, wherever. And this is a place *inter alia*, where the international community can do a lot to help you. Because never think that the Sri Lankan problem is a drama in one little island. It is an international poison to the degree that it draws on sources of support and finance from communities right near where I was born.

The second source of violence evidently is that when the state is presented with a challenge to its very legitimacy, its very survival and its very identity, the dilemma it has is to preserve its own legitimacy. To respond to terror with terror is to lose legitimacy — to lose the very thing which makes it a state, which makes it a moral entity. And bit by bit, as it engages in the violence it is trying to repress, it fritters away its own most precious asset, which is that it is regarded as an entity that observes and respects the law.

There is no one in the international human rights community who wrote so perceptively, so accurately and persistently about this problem than the man in whose honour I am lecturing tonight. And it's one of the most important things that he said to his community: If you fight fire with fire you burn your house down. If you burn your house down you have nothing left. It is obvious to you as it is to me. I repeat things we know, I repeat things that he unfortunately died saying.

So, to recapitulate, you then have a society in which you have a tiny guerilla movement in which violence has become a way of life. You have a desperate state responding, occasionally or frequently, being unable to live within the rule of law. Between these two millstones a society can be absolutely torn apart and see no way out. And the thing that is happening here is that violence is expropriating democracy, violence is silencing civil society, violence is making all of you mute, because in the face of violence what can you say? The terror of these situations which I have seen in a number of communities is the ways in

which it deprives decent, honest citizens in whatever community they come from, of a sense of agency — of a sense that this is their political community, this is their country, this their life, and that if citizenship means anything they must stand up and fight for it in their community, peacefully. When violence becomes a way of life that sense of agency just is sapped and drained out. It's drained out by many things and not just by violence. It's drained out by the kinds of condemnation to which Neelan was subject. You are a traitor if you engage in compromise, you are a traitor if you talk across the communal divide, you are a traitor if you talk outside the confines of your group; and because this is a society with a mature democracy, with experience of what a democracy is, many of you must feel this sense of tyranny, of being silenced, of being diminished by violence, by a nationalist language which says he who is not with us is against us.

In this sense I want to put particular stress on the notion of agency because the thing I want to do is to kindle in you... probably I do not have to kindle it in you at all because you feel it probably much more strongly than I do. .. that sense that I have felt when violence is committed in my name. I speak personally now: when violence is committed in my name, the feeling I feel as an agent is: 'Who gave you the right to speak for me? Who gave you the right to speak for me with these actions?'. I am trying to see the ways in which violence expropriates your voice and your agency, expropriates your citizenship, expropriates your capacity to be a moral actor in the world. And I think that the recovery of this society depends on the capacity of individuals, one by one, in discussion with each other, to recover that sense of angry agency. That sense that 'Excuse me, I will speak for myself, I will not be spoken for, I will not let bombs speak in my name, I will not let tanks speak in my name, I will speak in my own name'; and the responsibility of political leadership is to allow that agency, that civic courage, to recover.

Now, self-evidently, you must be thinking it's dammed easy for me to say this. Right? I will leave your society, I am not implicated in that sense, I am deeply conscious of that. I am deeply conscious that if I were here, if this beautiful country was my fate and my destiny, I would feel the temptation of despair and disillusion. What in the West is called being 'burned out'. I would feel the strong temptation to

escape abroad if I could, just go anywhere. Scarborough, perhaps. To get away. But there is a more subtle temptation, which is to endure, to go on, to keep your head down, to make do, hoping it will go away, resigning yourself to an indefinite future of eternal war. One of the reasons I call it a temptation is that it capitalises on one of the most noble emotions there is, which is human endurance. This is a society of an extraordinary human endurance and courage. You arrive in Colombo and what you hear is about people enduring, surviving. These are noble emotions, but they are a pitfall because at a certain point they may catapult very slowly into a kind of cynicism, a kind of demobilisation, a kind of loss of activism, and in that sense one should not be seduced by the moral charm of endurance .

Now, what is the way out ? I have nothing of any originality to say about the way out. Much of what I say is about what I learnt in talking to Sri Lankan friends and reading and thinking very carefully about what Neelan left behind . Neelan refused the temptations that I have described, and that's why he is an example . He refused to go. He stayed. He refused to shut up and endure, he spoke out. Nobody says he did not make mistakes, but he was there, he was here right to the bitter end, and that's something that certainly inspires me. It seemed to me that Neelan 's way is the right way, but it's a double way, sustaining a non-violent alternative within his own community on the one hand, and on the other sustaining a critical dialogue with the Sri Lankan state so that it remembers it is not, it should not be, a state that is owned by a particular community, it should be a state that is owned by all communities. He refused the equation that to compromise is to betray, he refused the equation that to discuss with someone else is to be a traitor to your own community. He refused: that, it seems to me, is the right way.

He did his best to find the courage to mobilise those who are sick and exhausted by war. And, as I said to you, the extraordinary factor about war as a way of life in these societies — not just here but everywhere I have been — is that millions of people are held captive by thousands of people, and that is the hideous dynamic that needs to be broken. It seems to me that to Neelan, as I understand him, there was no military solution to this problem. Neither side can prevail militarily, neither side can definitely be defeated militarily, a military reunification of the island is not possible, and also quite possibly not desirable in

the sense that pacification of an ethnic conflict, a nationalist conflict, is not desirable. You just can't solve it with troops even if you win a military victory. The military victory will turn to ashes because you have not secured consent and political agreement. What is conquered by force can only be kept and maintained by force. That is the dilemma you have. I say that not as a moral point but just as a fact that seems to follow, as I understand, from ethnic conflict around the world.

It seems to me, also sticking my neck on the block as I say, awaiting your correction and disagreement tomorrow, that partition is not a solution. Because built into partition is the implication of what in Europe we know as ethnic cleansing. One community cleared from the south, other communities cleared from the north. The result: two ethnically cleansed homogenous communities across a partition line which seems to me (I don't know your history well) to be a violation of everything that has been true in your island for centuries. It is also clear to me that Tamil Eelam is not a solution either, because it seems to me to be a recipe for a single-party dictatorship. The means they employ have betrayed their ends. The state they would create, while promising self-determination to the Tamil people, will actually betray and frustrate the self-determination of individual Tamils. And give me a choice between individual and collective self-determination, it's individual self-determination every time. The liberty that matters to me is liberty of individuals. The freedom of individuals to speak and act, not the collective freedom of some community, manipulated and directed by a single tyrannous leader.

So, where do I come? You'll expect me as a liberal to come to this point. You have to share the place, you have to share the island, as the only solution. I haven't got anything further to say about constitutional innovation here. I understand you are in the middle of a fairly complicated constitutional process. I come from a country where constitution making and constitution revising is a way of life. The one good thing to know from Canada is precisely that there is no definite, final, irrevocable, confrontational solution to this problem. If you have two national communities that are accorded rights within a constitution, what that constitution creates is a dynamic of conflict, frankly endless conflicts, battles about language, about this, about that, and

the whole purpose of a political community is to keep this from degenerating into war. So constitutional settlements are very important, but my experience in Canada is that constitutional settlements are the beginning of a new page and not the end of conflict. Their purpose is to keep us from killing each other.

Finally I return, and I 'm really coming to my conclusion, I am speaking for a vision of a state which is not owned by any community; a state which belongs to each of you as citizens; which takes among its fundamental principle the idea that all of you have equal rights, all of you must be served and protected in your dignity, in your ways of life, in your ways of living, in your ways of believing. And that if you can work very hard for that idea of a state, you'll have a civic Sri Lanka as opposed to an ethnically divided Sri Lanka.

Clearly, clearly, this kind of exhortation seems pie in the sky. I am actually very pragmatic about these things; having seen a great deal of ethnic war, I think almost anything is better than war. And what I plead is that you have a constitutional process that is simply not fitting constitutional pipes together but a process that involves some basic recognition — I come back to that point again and again — a moment of recognition between the communities. And what do I mean by recognition? There are many kinds of recognition. I don't mean the recognition of love, I don't mean the recognition of deep knowledge, I don't even mean the recognition of forgiveness — that will take a very long time —. I don't even mean necessarily the recognition that is implied in the idea of respect. I mean a much more brutal, simple understandable basic recognition, that together you might just avoid Armageddon. In other words the recognition, as the great Abraham Lincoln once said: 'If you do not hang together, you will certainly hang separately.'

