

Shifting Rivers: On the Decay of the Art of Nationalism

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*“To hear the phrase “our only hope” always makes one anxious,
because it means that if the only hope doesn't work, there is
nothing left.”*

-Daniel Handler

Let us swear to die gloriously, and thus reinforce the notion that some shall *need* to live gloriously; and others perish in the heartlessness of treason. The concept of nationalism has long been part of humankind's integrity, so much so that dissecting the idea of homeland requires a certain degree of mental abstraction natural selection seems to have discarded during the past decades. We are born to the welcoming embrace of a pair of motherly hands which clasp a metallic badge onto the lap of our hearts and seal the initiation rite for us. Fathers of freedom, forever glorious! Shall ye leave for once those agile white steeds you ride so comfortably and tell us about the battles you won with your hand on your heart, our flag on your chest and your own interests in mind?

Our flag conveys a comforting sensation of familiarity. It unconditionally embraces us and fellow comrades that were born under the same blue cloth, and therefore gathers and unifies a massive amount of people with tight and strong, abstract ties. This love for the homeland is a social construct that lives within and without each of us, turning others into mere extensions of ourselves; and society, a vital part of the nation's persona. We feel real pride when a team representing our country wins a medal at the Olympics –even if the sport is fancy table tennis instead of gymnastics. We become experts on the art of ping pong. We celebrate. We cry. *We, us, never them.* Nationalism is practical and cozy, and it suits us well. It is the unexplainable feeling of excitement when the flag raises, our skin tingling while the anthem is sung in perfect unison, the golden eyes of the golden sun scrutinizing the audience. The golden eyes of the golden sun shining upon an overcast sky which prevents both blue ends from meeting.

Nationalism is no natural primordial need for us human beings, but we have been instructed to think otherwise. When detaching ourselves from the situation, we become aware that illogically idolizing a transcendent entity that is able to unite large communities at a psychological level is in fact uncannily similar to life in 1984's Oceania. We have been instructed to worship historical figures that stand up for values that have been forgotten, cherishing and encouraging borders that separate us from those who are different, building shrines for our homeland heroes, and being taught to kneel before them so that we remain static and stagnant for centuries. Yet nationalism's bulletproof façade has acquired some cracks during the last few decades. The slaughter of innocents and frequent wars have led people to question the nature of this “entity” which, like many controversial figures such as God and Richard III, needs their fellow men to sacrifice for its

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greater wellbeing. Upon a closer look, the face of someone else can be distinguished when staring fixedly onto our flag's sun. The face of a larger organization. The face of a poorly concealed *primus inter impares*.

We no longer live in a time where the memories about our country's inception are easy to relate to, and nationalism is gradually showing its real aim: being a tool designed to prevent people from opposing the government, and government's only claim to exert power among us. We are daily witnesses of the 21st century version of the divine right of kings. This decay in the support of nationalism stands out when confronting any patriot on the flaws and deceits of their homeland's bosses. Upon discussing the disciplining aspect of nationalism, a supporter of the flag regime is mostly incapable of accounting for his or her position. Up to now, governments had not need to answer such claims as these had arisen only in isolated cases.

Therefore, the speech necessary to reply back still seems to be under construction. Due to the lack of logical rhetoric, people in power has chosen an alternative response to opposition, keeping to their Orwellian style: motivating nationalism supporters to act moved by fear. Fear of those who are not patriots. Fear of that which is different. Fear of *them*. Mental boundaries are no longer enough for the cheap nationalist. During the last decades walls have been built and destroyed, built and forgotten and, most worryingly, built and cherished as monuments. And new promises of future walls arise every day. We either live in a world of demigods or in a huge game of Age of Empires in which the scenery is constantly modified according to The Party's interests. Canals are dug open and shut down. Bridges are built and tumbled down. Maps are here to help us forget borders used to be different.

We live in a controversial age where people claim to seek gender, ethnic and religious equality by creating yet more flags to designate restricted and restrictive groups. Borders have been planted and taken root upon our minds up to a level where egalitarianism is seen as noticing and accepting other's differences instead of taking them for granted. However, these times are changing. Every day more and more people dare to question nationalism and risk being called a traitor, thus reinforcing the notion that they are nothing but witnesses of cheap and easy crowd manipulation. Soil and foliage are constructed and deconstructed before our eyes, more often than girls in magic shows are cut in half. This is just a different kind of circus, where we must resist the blinding lights. Stopping borders from segmenting our minds is tougher than shifting rivers and destroying walls because whereas ruins remain forever, our memory perishes. After all, do you remember when this city used to be run by rivers?

Neither do I.