

## Identity - Humanity – Country

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The following personal essay was written for an online discussion on the psychological causes of warfare. That scholastic group's perspective was mainly psychoanalytical. The general theme was *"What are Countries anyhow? Why do people are willing to kill and be killed for their "Country?"*.

...Normally such questions are, in my view, ill suited for triggering meaningful exchange of views and findings among scientifically-minded professionals, present company included. But later in the evening I remembered, that an hour earlier I had said to my daughter, who is a clinical psychologist, "I spent most of the day fighting the wars of Israel, and today they managed to knock me off my balance, I became enraged"... I used "fighting the wars of Israel" ironically, to dampen the confession of weakness and vulnerability revealed in my rage. I wanted my daughter to visit the battlefield on which her daddy gave his fight, i.e. read the talkback lines including mine that followed an article in a leading Israeli newspaper. It had been an exhausting fight, I was psychologically bleeding and I hoped to get some support (call it "glory"). Still later I made this connection which had not occurred to me before: I have always acted as if it were my duty to care and "fight" for my country. A quick checking revealed that this self-imposed duty was and still is real on all levels: emotional, intellectual, moral. So if the feeling of duty is real - who does it concern? What is this country for me? – The *"What are Countries anyhow?"* line suddenly acquired meaning.

### **"Country" as an arena on which we fight for our humanity vs. "Country" as a container of our identity**

My duty is actually to my life, making sense of it, investing it with meaning. Love, accompanied with an urge to create and do things for the loved objects, is one avenue, perhaps the widest, toward making this sense and coping with the dread of death. Thinking about applying this strategy in real life, I realize that in my mind there exists a physically and mentally felt difference (though that difference never includes a frontline between different entities in war between them), between my intensive love-and-care zone which is my country, and the rest of the world. I love/care equally for people I know outside of my country, but in regard to other nations or people in abstract, the intensity is not equal and the result is a very different level of practice.

As far as I know myself, my "Country" is made of FAMILY, MEMORY, LANGUAGE (writing in English, even here and now, is for me an experience like making love wearing a woolen condom). My love of my country (my country, *not* my country's government and its wars) must include more conscious and subconscious feelings, experiences, shared memories of loved persons and landscapes, shared experiences, tastes, and habits -- but I feel sure it includes the first three, FAMILY, MEMORY, LANGUAGE. As a man of action, I do not feel that free to act anywhere else, and I love/need my freedom. I am telling you this, because I sense that this could be the meaning of "my country" for many good people, including you who seek to prevent persons being sacrificed "for a country",

do not believe that repressed and projected hate of your father is good enough reason for killing other people; do not share in the shared psychoses of your country, etc. I guess our countries could be something like the Deep South was for William Faulkner or the Yiddish-speaking Deep Brooklyn for Itzaak Bashevis Zinger (a small country, but he not a small literary fish - a Nobel Prize laureate).

Having confessed my feeling of duty and my kind of love for my country, I believe that the negative effects of being of a "Country" are the important ones for preventing wars and hatred of other people identified as not of "my country". The root of it, as Erik Erikson expressed so beautifully (the quotation follows this essay), is IDENTITY. I therefore would suggest that we reject, and advise others to reject, our country, or ethnicity, or race, or religion, or any partial identification label as a determinant of our personal identity. In physical reality or Nature we ARE individuals, humans, flesh and blood. This IS our True Identity. All national and other identification versions of "I AM..." are implanted artifacts of language, concepts we learn and internalize in the process of our socialization into one group or another. They are like clothes we as adults may shed if we wish. Personally, I AM not "a Jew" and AM not "an Israeli", although for the greater part of my life I believed I was. I AM NOT, because at some point in life I decided not to identify myself as such. I realized that I never really "was"; I discovered and embraced my true identity as myself and as a human (I am making my best not to include my and others' gender-identity in contexts such as this one, in which gender makes no difference any more than "race" or "nation"); I realized even earlier, that the tribal-national identity and identification of other persons is the root of that evil called war as well as of its national, ethnocentric, religious, racial, gender, class, "cultural", etc. etc., ideologies. In affinity, Olek Netzer. –

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"The child develops indoctrinated with the conviction that his "species" alone was planned by an all-wise deity, created in a special cosmic event, and appointed by history to guard the only genuine version of humanity." ...'thus "pseudo-species" are created who bind their members into a pattern of individual and collective identity, but alas, reinforce that pattern by a mental fear of and a murderous hatred for other pseudo-species."..."Man possessed by this combination of lethal weaponry, moral hypocrisy and identity panic is not only apt to lose all sense of species but also to turn on another subgroup with a ferocity generally alien to the "social" animal world."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Erik Erikson, *Psychoanalysis and ongoing history: problems of identity hatred and nonviolence*, American Journal of Psychiatry, 122 (1965), pp. 241-250.)