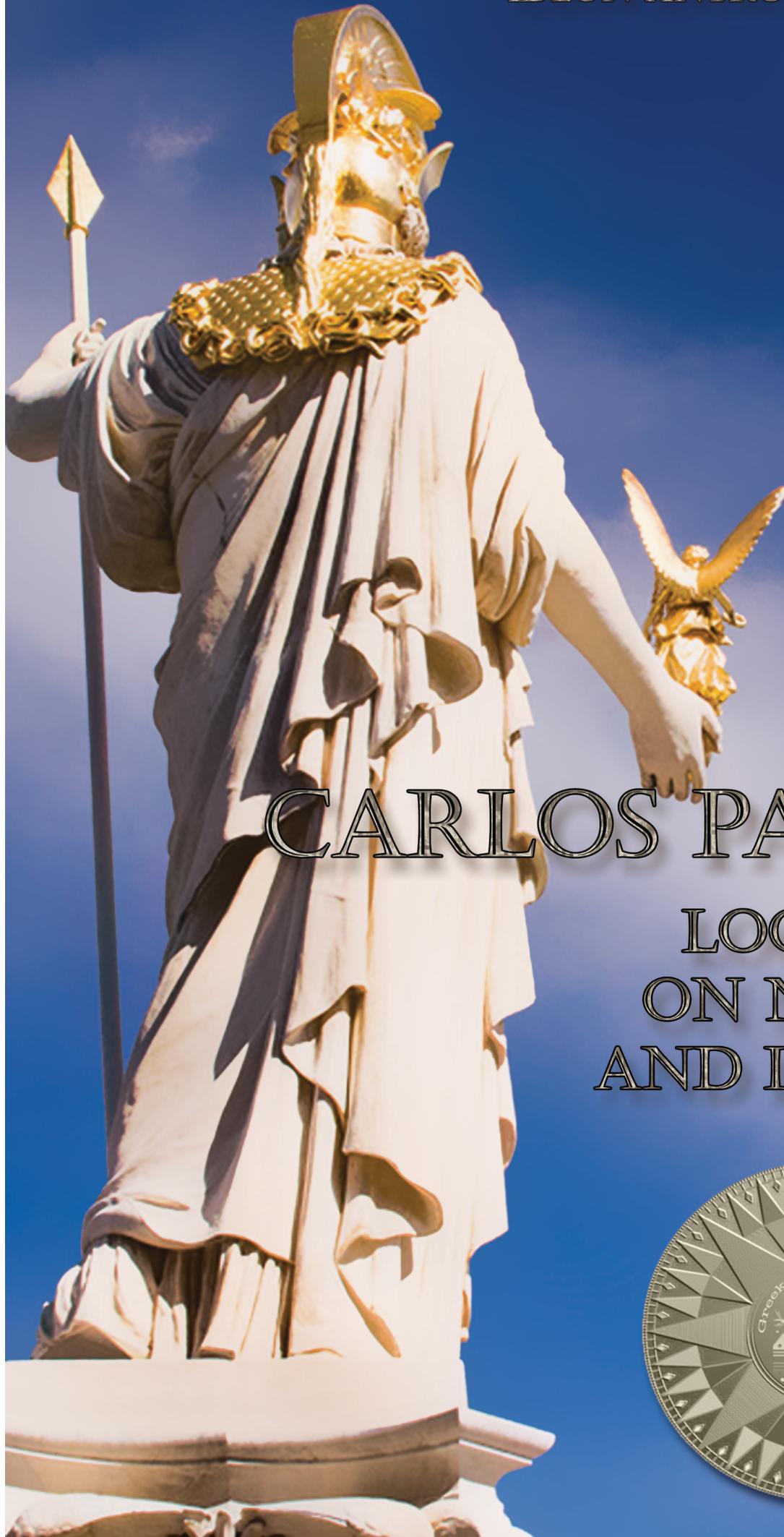


IDEON ANTRON PUBLICATIONS



CARLOS PARADA

LOOKING
ON NATION
AND IDENTITY



Articles/Studies #3 October 2788 since first recorded Olympiad (“2012”)

Looking on Nation and Identity

CARLOS PARADA

Άρθρα/Μελέτες/Εργασίες #3, Οκτώβριος 2788 από πρώτης Ολυμπιάδος (2012)

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Απαγορεύεται ρητώς η αντιγραφή και διάδοση για κερδοσκοπικούς σκοπούς ή με οποιοδήποτε χρηματικό αντίτιμο για οποιοδήποτε λόγο. Διανομή, αποκλειστικά χωρίς χρέωση.

Εκδότης: «Ιδεών Άντρον»

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Θύρσος Έλληνες Εθνικοί

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Athens, October 14 “2012”

We continue our journey, researching every aspect of society through glances and prisms that avoid fanaticism, while focusing deeply in the most difficult philosophical aspects.

Carlos Parada from Lund University in Sweden, author of *Genealogical Guide to Greek Mythology* and creator of the website on Hellenic Mythology (*Greek Mythology Link*, www.maicar.com), delivered this essay in answer to a question from Thyrsos, asked over a year ago, regarding the notions of nation and nationalism. Mr. Parada duly honored us, offering a short and spontaneous contemplation on the subject. We now pour it freely into the sea of information flooding the Internet, without further comments (these belong to the readers after all).

In this way, we expect to contribute to the efforts of those who stand still and calm, reasserting a civilized society, and striving to survive in stormy weather, while remaining firmly oriented towards the ideals of the Hellenic and Roman civilizations—the cradle of our own European civilization.

May you all enjoy a good reading!

Αθήνα 14 Οκτωβρίου «2012»

Συνεχίζοντας τη διαδρομή μας ερευνώντας κάθε δυνατή πτυχή των κοινωνικών δεδομένων μέσα από ματιές και πρίσματα που αποφεύγουν το φανατισμό αλλά καινοτομούν και εμβαθύνουν εκεί που οι περισσότεροι δυσκολεύονται να εστιάσουν, παρουσιάζουμε την αμέσως επόμενη εργασία που μας προσέφερε ο σεβαστός καθηγητής Carlos Parada από το πανεπιστήμιο του Lund στη Σουηδία.

Ένας πραγματικός Δάσκαλος, Φιλέλληνας και κυρίως Ευγενής, ο δημιουργός, μεταξύ πολλών άλλων, του Ομηρικού λεξικού που εκδόθηκε από το Πανεπιστήμιο που υπηρετεί και διδάσκει, και δημιουργός της ξεχωριστής ιστοσελίδας αναζήτησης της Ελληνικής Μυθολογίας <http://www.maicar.com/>

Η Εργασία αυτή που βλέπει πρώτη φορά το φως της δημοσιότητας, γραμμένη στην αγγλική γλώσσα, δημιουργήθηκε μετά από το ερώτημα μας προ ενός και πλέον έτους, για τις σκέψεις που του δημιουργούνται γύρω από τις έννοιες του Έθνους, του Εθνισμού και του Εθνικισμού.

Ο κύριος Parada μας Τίμησε Δέοντος, προσφέροντας μας σε ένα μικρό πόνημα με τις πιο αυθόρμητες διαδρομές που τον οδήγησε ο στοχασμός του, και εμείς το προσφέρουμε ελεύθερα στη θάλασσα των πληροφοριών που κατακλύζουν το διαδίκτυο, δίχως κανένα περαιτέρω σχολιασμό, μιας και αυτόν τον αφήνουμε στους αναγνώστες, ελπίζοντας να συμβάλλουμε στις προσπάθειες όσων Όρθιων και Ήρεμων ακόμη Ανθρώπων, για μία Πολιτισμένη κοινωνία που πασχίζει να επιβιώσει σε χρόνια τρικυμιών, και να παραμείνει σταθερά προσανατολισμένη προς τα ιδεώδη και τις κατευθύνσεις του αυθεντικού Ελληνικού και Ρωμαϊκού Πολιτισμού . Την Αφετηρία αλλά και το ειδικό Κέντρο Βάρους, τον Ομφαλό ας μας επιτραπεί να πούμε, δίχως να μειώνουμε ούτε στο ελάχιστο τις Παραδόσεις των υπόλοιπων Εθνών, του ίδιου του Ευρωπαϊκού Πολιτισμού.

Καλή ανάγνωση σε όλους!

Looking on Nation and Identity

Neither Laestrygones nor Cyclopes,
nor wild Poseidon will you ever meet,
unless you bear them in your soul,
unless your soul has raised them up in front of you.
—Constantine P. Cavafy, *Ithaca*.

You surely have noticed that unsavory terms such as deception, betrayal, theft, scandal, broken promises, lies, hypocrisy, or corruption show an inclination to flow to the realm of politics more than to any other province of human activity, except perhaps that of outright criminality.

This is so ordinary that you stop paying attention, just as you stop hearing the bells of the church of your neighborhood or the noise of the cars below your window. Only occasionally you ponder why, of all places, such terms heap up on precisely the realm representing the state or indeed the whole nation. However, you soon dismiss the thought again. After all, politics is the realm where desires and fears most easily reach exacerbation. So before we return to this, let me show you another peculiarity.

Since Homeric times, boasting has been regarded as a disgraceful behavior, condemned by both gods and men. To be sure, it is still deemed as quite improper in nearly every other sphere. Yet, in the realm of politics, blowing one's own horn has become a natural law. Self-praise and fanfaronades are the rule. "There is no program, no intention, no vision, no conduct, no merits greater than my own." That's what the politician is telling you in a nutshell, even while affecting humility.

Although the realm of politics is often condemned and ridiculed, politicization has increased under the rule of representative democracy. More and more people want to be part of that derided realm, apparently led by the conviction that everything is politics. Hence, government has come to appear in consciousness as the highest peak conceivable, or even as the very provider of all kinds of nourishment—whether material or spiritual. For increasing numbers, there is nothing in the universe more noteworthy than a government—whether they wish to serve it or overthrow it. If you look closer, however, you may perceive that the aggrandizement in consciousness of the significance of politics and government is the work of

idolatry. And you may perceive it even more clearly on the very day idolatry culminates in the deification of rulers—the ultimate boast of the politician.

Idolatry is an immoderate condition of the mind by which appearances acquire a peculiar solidity. You may speak of government just like, a moment ago, I was speaking about the realm of politics. But, when you examine my words, you immediately realize that there is no such realm, except as a figure of speech.

Examining appearances, Owen Barfield reminded us that the rainbow is as dependent on vision as it is on sunlight and raindrops. Is it *really* there? he asked. Or is it your eye bringing the arch of colors into existence? It is your eye, but it is not a dream or a hallucination. Others around you confirm that the rainbow is there. The appearance is collective, and so the rainbow looks like an independent object would.

You may have noticed that the very existence of an event could depend on the mass media reporting it, and on you watching the coverage in the news. At your end, however, watching the reportage is a second event in which a representation of the first one appears. Yet, for this representation to become a collective appearance, also others must see the news.

A closer examination of collective appearances will show that they are dependent on the mind, much like the rainbow depends on the eye. Their presence will increase or diminish in proportion to the qualified attention they receive—whether approval or rejection. If attention were withdrawn altogether, appearances would lose solidity, turn into something else, or even disappear.

I am not trying to demonstrate what might be real or unreal. However, a little thought will show that we are dealing with dreamlike states, and that even cherished notions such as “a people” or “a nation” are mere constructs or, you could say, artificial entities. A construct helps the mind to allocate its desires and fears—the very substance of life, you may call them. Idolatry may be said to channel the exacerbation of those fears and desires. It crystallizes appearances, causing the mind to lose itself in them. Idolatry entails the loss of identity and the renunciation of individuality.

This may happen in varying degrees, but received convictions are always involved when the mind fails to assert itself. So let us play with an example of a firmly held received conviction that has been following us since the times of our unknown beginnings.

Suppose you join an association of any kind. It could be a chess club, a political party, a cooperative, or a religious congregation. Normally, the association will introduce you to a set of views, objectives, rules of conduct, etc., and require that you express your allegiance to them. Such requisites are not offensive if you already share the values and objectives of the association you are joining. Even so, your identity will now manifest itself not just internally, as it used to do before you became a member, but also externally. This needs not be offensive either. Yet, that interaction creates a polarity, and you might eventually discover that its external and internal aspects no longer coincide. And so you simply disaffiliate yourself and end all your connections, maybe transferring your allegiance to some other organization. Except in some extreme cases, no one should be too mad at you for doing so.

This is a pattern of ordinary experience that could be applied to many other organizations, syndicates, institutions, clubs, etc. However, in associations such as “civilization”, completely different rules apply. To begin with, you do not seek membership in civilization. You are part of it from birth. And unless something exceptional happens, you will never be able to opt out. Civilization is everywhere.

For convenience, we may call that membership *citizenship*. This word comes with a host of connotations. The most important is that human societies, though ultimately being composed of individuals, only recognize citizens. Civilization requires visibility, and therefore prescribes the individual attributes, qualities, and qualifications. So first you start by becoming a citizen, and later on you may become a doctor or a teacher. Looking closer, you will notice that individuals and citizens are almost two different species. If you chose to call the former natural, then you would have to call the latter engineered, or if you wish, trained, like when you train your puppy. But, we usually prefer to call him educated, cultured, or

civilized.

Although it may be admitted that something is lost during that training process, domestication is generally understood as the necessary price—a sort of original taxation—that human beings must pay for the benefits derived from civilization. I am not discussing the truth of this description; for after all we are speaking of unknown beginnings. All I seek is to illustrate the solidity of some received convictions.

To make a long story short. There is no evidence supporting the assumption that humans would spontaneously fall into savagery in the absence of civilization. Moreover, you can confirm, any day you wish, that civilization itself is precisely a massive display of that same savagery that it claims to harness.

Yet, the assumption that man is a savage if left alone remains unquestioned. So deeply rooted is that conviction, that you cannot even begin to conceive how human relations had developed if man had been left alone. Naturally, you may dream for a minute or two, that you were a gentle being before civilization caught you. Innocent even... But you were only a child then. Civilization had not yet showed you the darker truths of your nature: that you are evil from birth, a violent savage, as also everyone else is. And when you look around, the evidence of it seems to be everywhere, just as your pedagogues told you, unless you noticed that everywhere is precisely where civilization is... But even if you noticed it, you wouldn't entertain that obscure thought for too long. Rather you would hold onto the received conviction that the human animal living within you needed to be tamed for good reasons and benefits, and that the amorphous mass of wild men and women needed to be turned into peoples and nations, again for good reasons. And yet, there is no *they* or *it* doing it. Civilization has no volition of its own. If anyone, you are doing it yourself.

Let us now take a look at the nation.

You may have read or heard that nations are formed by peoples sharing a common view derived from a common memory expressed in myths, traditions, and historiography. The accounts in these sources are often associated with an ethnic community and a homeland—usually described

as unique for its beauty, bounty, or sacredness—and with a name, a common economy, and a set of laws and institutions in charge of regulating life.

This is roughly the model presented by historians, sociologists, and others. It is generally admitted that this model allows many variations. For example, nations may be formed in the absence of an ethnic community, and the homeland doesn't need to be the same as the cradle of the people. There are other variations, and eventually you will notice that several features present in the model may be absent in many concrete nations. To avoid getting entangled in those variations, let us choose a central feature which can never be absent when we speak of a nation—namely the notion of people—and ask a few questions about it.

How do peoples emerge? Was the earth always populated by different peoples? If yes, what is the origin of each of them? If no, would you say that humanity was originally one unit and later separated into peoples? If yes, would you call that unified humanity a people? If no, why not? If yes, would you then admit they were sharing a common view in those remote times? If no, in what sense were they a people? If yes, when and why did they abandon their common view to embrace different myths, traditions, laws, etc.?

Here, I think, is where we start losing memory and cannot find any historical ground... To keep your investigation going, you could try to find clues in the mythical accounts. Schelling, for example, examined the successive generations of gods with that purpose in mind. But the myths, in the form we have received them, belong to a period of advanced differentiation. You can hardly expect unambiguous answers from them. You could think of turning to ethnology, which studies differences and similarities of peoples, but that would prove fruitless. In 1842, Schelling even suggested the necessity of an *ethnogeny*, to address these problems, but there is no such science so far.

The consequence is we must speak about nations and the identity of nations without having a clue about the origin and identity of the peoples forming them—the manner of their emergence, or whether they were one

or many in remote times. It could be like speaking about bread before the discovery of flour, or discussing twigs and leaves as things apart from stem and roots. But here's where we stand.

Let me resume. The model or core of the nation implies the emergence of what is called national identity. This sentiment is so vivid that even personifications that you know are fictitious, like John Bull, Marianne, Mother Svea, Mother Russia, and several other mothers, could appear to capture the very gist of the nation. Although you easily recognize John Bull as a fictitious personage, England still appears in consciousness as a real entity, different from simple perceptions such as hills, sheep, white cliffs or green fields. Unless you were permanently inflamed with patriotism, the view of the landscape should make England recede. However, looking at the caricature of John Bull should bring it again to the foreground. This is so because a caricature is supposed to represent a really existent original. But there is no original here. John Bull is the personification of a personification. The landscape cannot do that, unless you start experiencing it as *homeland*. Home is where you live, but homeland is your *patria*, *Vaterland*, or motherland, with borders and corners you probably have never visited. It is also a personification. As the words suggest, it is somehow your mother or your father. But we speak these words for our own satisfaction.

These are all constructs. You may hear that the public opinion is "outraged", or that the market is "worried". No doubt, language has a finger in it. Especially the historical narrative cannot avoid introducing ghosts, as also the article you are reading cannot avoid it. This is how we speak, and if you are aware of it, it shouldn't be a big problem. The confusion arises when you forget they are ghosts and start inflating them. Ghosts resemble the optical illusions you observe on the road when you go for a drive on a summer day. Like a mirage, the ghost vanishes when it comes under close examination. But unlike the mirage, the ghost returns to haunt you after your inspection is finished, compelling you to think, speak, and act as if it really existed.

It is like a trance. It is as if you, despite having identified the mirage and

showed it to your son, came back from your drive convinced that the road was wet, being supported by your son. It is like a trance, and in it the nation appears to answer several questions, as if you were visiting an oracle. In reality, it is you the one who asks and you the one who answers, but for convenience let us say that the nation is doing it.

The most important question that the nation has to answer is that of identity, and so the first question is “Who are we?”. The second is “Where do we come from?”. This one I will leave aside because it is related to the unsolved issue of the origin of peoples. It is usually taken care by descriptions of geographic redeployments (invasions and migrations, whether real or hypothetical) that often produce the answer, “Somewhere else.” So let us look at the first one.

The answers you receive are largely based on an external representation of memory, a faculty closely related to identity. You find memory incarnated in records, traditions, historiography, etc. Remember, this is not real memory. It is a representation at the service of another representation. But it makes no difference. Sooner or later, you discover that memory is flawed and cannot be trusted. Sometimes it’s better, sometimes worse. It’s not your fault. Naturally, you forget things: the sequence of events, their when and where, their who and how. You cannot recall what was said, nor the order in which it was said, nor why it was said. Perhaps it was not said at all. The meaning of written words you cannot fully ascertain either. They had other connotations once upon a time. Or else important sections of documents are missing because of time, bribes, wars, catastrophes. Or else someone was lying... You may find yourself imagining past events, adapting them to your present needs, or simply inventing them. You may pick your photographic album and throw away the pictures that no longer fit your present mood or your future job. You may even scissor out some unwanted acquaintances. Then, you may update your journal and appointment book—fragments of the history of your life—rewrite them altogether, or even destroy them. And if you work in certain places, you may be able to forge public documents (which historians of a later date will consult), doctor genealogies in obedience to some request, add or

remove zeros, change dates, alter curricula (including your own), or do many other things that might never be discovered.

All this is well known, and you may shrug your shoulders now. This is how history is made. However, if you give it a little thought, you will admit that any identity thus obtained is fundamentally false, whether it is the nation's or your own. You may shrug your shoulders again, unless you noticed that those layers of falsehood could be torturing you... But now let me complete the picture. After the saga of memory, comes that of imagination. It is a shorter, though equally dazzling story with fireworks, floods, earthquakes and storms. In it you may see the nation projecting on the screen of the future her glorious destinies and awful catastrophes, thus pretending to have the answer to yet a third question, "Where are we going?"

The works of memory and imagination are impressive. And you can see, for example, that literature and the other arts derive from them beauty and insights that may enrich you enormously... But you will also see that it is in the midst of a mishmash of distorted accounts, beliefs, fantasies, ambitions, forgeries, and dreams, that the "authentic Self" of the nation is expected to be found. How authentic can it be? For even if everything you learned about the nation were true, and even if you knew how its people emerged, you still wouldn't be able to find any "authentic Self" of the nation, simply because there are no such things as collective memory or collective identity. They are mere projections.

If you haven't yet despaired and continue your scrutiny, you won't fail to notice that also the basic question—Who are we?—is corrupted, and that the original, unspoiled question was "Who am I?" (in the singular). According to the traveler Pausanias, it was inscribed in the fore-temple of Apollo at Delphi, though as a maxim, *Know yourself*. You have read the story. And now you may realize that the Delphic advice addresses the individual because only an individual can be assumed to have a Self. The nation obviously lacks one. Suddenly, you remember there was no nation in Hellas then. Just a collection of city states. But it makes no difference. Still, the Delphic advice was not wasted in any imaginary, collective entity

that might have belonged to the *Kulturnation* that Hellas is assumed to have been in that period.

For all that, the nation still appears to think and feel, to have a Self—a true identity—and even a life, which necessarily oscillates between her desires of prosperity and future glory, and her fears of failure and utter extinction. And here again, in the distress that appears projected on the large screen of the nation, you recognize the replica of what may affect the psyche of a single person.

But leaving that replica aside, you may think that it is in the life of the national community that you share your feelings with your fellow citizens—the songs, the dance, the food—experiencing both fraternity and friendship. By all means, go ahead! But, what could have hindered you in the absence of the nation or any other collective entity? Isn't that same life also producing suspicion and anxiety? Where do all divisions come from? Who or what is reminding you of all conflicts and crises? Of class, gender, hierarchy, inequality, race? Who or what is putting the blame on you? Could it be the nation doing all those things? Of course not. The nation is an imaginary entity. You are doing it yourself. You do it each time you put yourself at the service of imaginary entities.

Then, you may hear that the nation “suffers”, just as you heard the day before that the market was “worried”, and you may wish to know the cause of that suffering. And looking for it you inevitably find it. Maybe it's your neighbor, or the government... You arbitrarily identify causes by isolating a segment. By picking a date, or a beginning, you build a “chain of events”. But unless you inflate it, a chain of events is comparable to Barfield's rainbow. Your vision is indispensable for its existence. In reality, a chain of events has neither beginning nor end, and causes and types of causes are uncountable and unaccountable. If you look closer, you'll see there is no particular cause for anything. Everything is the cause of everything. It's the whole world operating upon itself. And it's not upon your shoulders unless you put it there.

You probably feel only a low-key outrage for what Achilles did to the body of Hector. Why? Why have you cooled down? No parliament is

discussing today the rapes and atrocities of the sack of Troy. Why not? Why are new crimes more important than old ones? Why is it a profanation to desecrate the grave of someone recently deceased, but to plunder the tomb of an ancient man is not? Is the former more dead than the latter? Or is it because “Time purges all things,” as Aeschylus says? Well, if Aeschylus is right, then time will also purge your own day, sending all puzzles to the deepest oblivion where you no longer can see them. And once they have disappeared from your consciousness, do they still exist? But you don’t have to wait for Time to do that. You can do the purging yourself. There are no rainbows on a clear day...

Let us now juggle with some contemporary developments and see whether your ghosts look like mine.

You might recall that during the second half of the 20th Century, interventions in the internal affairs of sovereign nations were, with few exceptions, nearly unanimously rejected on the grounds that it was up to each people to shape their own destiny or choose their own system of government within the borders of their own state.

However, the narrative of the first decade of the 21st Century so greatly inflated notions such as universal values, democracy, or human rights that invasions, bombings, occupations, and the destruction of nations could appear as some sort of necessity. Simultaneously, the notion of globalization suggested that the economic and financial independence of nations had *de facto* ceased to exist, and that they should submit to international influence.

Here again you will see, if you give it a thought, that there are no universal values that could be conclusively defined. If they are defined, then they are not universal. Words are many. But, how do you translate them back into realities and avoid dealing with ghosts? Again, the Delphic advice intimates the answer: By determining how far or how close from true identity they might be.

True identity refers to the simple existence of your own being—the one thing you can be completely certain of. It is pure subjectivity. It is what makes a *subject* in the grammatical sense of the word: the center about

which everything else revolves. Yet Delphi was not promoting egocentrism. The advice was given because it is plain that humans are not what they think they are. You are that center, yes, but who are you? Is your identity defined by clothing and layers? By visible things such as ethnic origin, citizenship, profession, beauty, gender, class, age, ideology, received convictions, outfit, territory? When you leave aside everything visible, including your memory and imagination, do you completely cease to exist? Can that existence be delimited? Behind your appearance, is there an object or a subject? What are terms such as citizens, consumers, voters, ethnic communities, human resources, manpower, social capital, or collateral damage? Are they not superimposed layers attempting to define the individual from an objective point of view (as an object), and from a collective point of view (as a collection of objects)? At length, that cannot be done because layers are false. They produce suffering, and too many layers produce great suffering. Layers are known to be fallacies because the individual, being ultimately identity, can only be sensed subjectively, as the Delphic advice implies.

Let me resume. I was suggesting that universal values are ghosts. For the story is not new to us that whenever a strong state imagines inscribed in its own destiny the domination of every other nation on earth, it decides to become the champion of universality. The cloud of universal values arises to suggest that domination is not pursued to satisfy narrow interests, but to benefit the whole world. For example, in the narrative of Thucydides, Pericles imagined that Athens was the “school of Hellas” (2.41.1), not just the school of his own city...

And by the way, what was that school teaching? It taught, for example, that if you are not interested in public affairs, then you are “a useless character” (2.40.2), harmful even. It also taught (2.60.2) that “...it would be better for individuals themselves that the citizens should suffer and the state flourish than that the citizens should flourish and the state suffer.”

The discourse has not changed since. So ask yourself whether these are realities, or figures of speech at the service of constructs. No matter how absurd the question may sound, do the experiment and ask yourself: Can

states suffer?

Then see whether appearances resist scrutiny, or whether they vanish like mirages. Giorgos Seferis reminded us: “When Oedipus encountered the Sphinx, his answer to its riddle was: ‘Man’. That simple word destroyed the monster.”

The discourse of universalism, if carefully crafted, has a certain effect—as surely the Sphinx also had. However, a simple word could be enough to expose its emptiness. There are no riddles to solve. Nobody doubts that the universe is one. Simply, everyone senses that no special efforts are needed to be universal. Nothing can ever bring anyone closer to the universe than anyone already is.

In the emptiness of that discourse, universalism produces standardization—a caricature of itself. But then again, human identity manifests itself through differentiation. And it is on differentiation that the true sense of *we* rests.

So the conquering nation is internally opposed by the same force that inspires its endeavor. Like the Sphinx, it becomes the victim of its own riddle. Universalism corrodes her identity, leaving her with the impossible task of creating a new ego out of multiplicity and extension. It can no longer hold to its own being. And in this splitting of the ego, disorder prevails and disintegration follows. This is the well-known fate of empires and quasi-empires. They inevitably fail to conjure up the spiritual sentiment and cohesion that the nation, after all, could call forth.

Let me recapitulate. The nation kept three questions alive (*Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going?*). We have seen that these questions were defective from the start, for being in the plural form. Nevertheless, they formed a stable tripod, mirroring the three perceived dimensions of time, balancing desires and fears, and thereby providing a credible illusion of identity. Despite difficulties, the nation could even absorb the identities imagined by the city, the village, and the local community. But unions and empires, while in permanent extroversion and outward action, must stand on one foot (the third one), disregarding the equilibrium between desires and fears. And as they fail to meet the

requirement of identity, they lose their balance and fall, their demise often generating an unpredictable wave of destruction.

Such a wave may no doubt destroy states, nations, cities, villages, and what these ultimately are: humans. Yet, the capacity to destroy is one thing, and the ability to establish a durable universal order is quite another. Strength, international mobility, good planning, or a rich supply of resources is not enough for introducing a lasting world order. All the same, it could be attempted by a nation or a group of nations. International powers other than nations cannot by themselves attempt it because they cannot even begin to sketch an embryo of a common identity. Ultimately, they must act through the agency of a nation or group of nations. So I leave those powers aside without negating their influence.

What in all circumstances is needed is the ability to establish a credible identity. That is the key, far more important than the accidents of politics, or the state of the economy. Destructions and threats of destructions are always possible, but they merely arise fears and anxiety while suffocating desires and hope—except perhaps the desire for alleviation. There is no equality in that equation, no balance, and therefore it should be short-lived.

One thing is certain, though: the future is unpredictable. Despite prognoses, analyses, or “Babylonian fortune-telling”, it cannot be known. And it cannot be known because it is no more than a place in your mind where worries and hope travel to. A similar unreality affects the past. It cannot be retrieved because it is no more than the shelter your mind is offering to sweet-bitter nostalgia. You know well what remains. Just this moment and the persistent presence of your own Self in it. And there’s where the Delphic advice pops up again with timeless insistence. For before any other knowledge, before the beauty and riches of the earth, and before the marvels of the starry sky, the sages of Hellas chose “the Self that is yours” as the one thing worth to be known first. Why?

Carlos Parada

Lund, August 2011