

On Patriotism

The amount of times I have of late heard 'My country is the best' or less direct statements to the same effect is surprising. I thought we at UWCs were about something else.

By accident of birth we 'belong'. We belong mostly to the country where we were born, unless, un-normally, our parents were abroad then or had the bad luck of being stateless - bad luck indeed in today's world where you can function only if you are registered and integrated somewhere.

Belonging to a particular nation, with other words: the holding of a particular passport, may be comparatively advantageous (you may have relatively free access to large parts of the world) or disadvantageous (you may have to wait long for visas). But the basic principle of nationality is that of exclusion: access is denied or made difficult (tied to conditions) somewhere. And of course membership in a nation, read state, is not for free. Beyond all rights we are - and mainly - to fulfil our duties vis à vis that state. Do we have to feel proud of accidentally belonging to some state instead of to all others ?

National pride far exceeds my expectations, but I remember a very similar, almost all-pervasive 'communalism' from my student times at Atlantic College back in the seventies. Is it a UWC plague ?

Of course there is some bridging done, everyone has friends from the near or far abroad. Some international love affairs are going on, even some intercontinental ones. Even the worst fascists (I know of some in Austria) usually knew some Jews who, and this they underline, they liked - and this then is to prove that they were no racists.

What is international understanding ? Does it not mean a coming out of one's own little shell and an expanding into foreign realms ?

Or maybe we should not call it inter-national understanding, because that by definition starts from the separate, from the national - with the 'inter', though a pre-position, coming into it only afterwards.

Maybe we should strive to become cosmopolitans. And being a cosmopolitan most certainly means more than being able to plug in everywhere in the world via a hotmail account. And it means more than paying everywhere with a Master or Visa or an even posher credit card (if you happen to belong to the lucky few that are granted access).

Why is this campus so self-centred ? Why don't more care about what's happening in and to the world ?

A good way to start may be to look beyond your threshold. Maybe - beyond all due respect to roots and what we are used to - the country we come from is not the best, most beautiful, most worthy (to win at rugby or cricket or Nobel prizes). Maybe the world is not too dangerous a place to concede that other places outside 'home' are more impressive, have better climates, more poisonous snakes, and higher mountains, in short: are in some or many ways 'better' than home. Then we could start learning - from others but for ourselves.

Becoming a cosmopolitan does not automatically result from being a UWC student or teacher. Maybe it starts when you unlock your doors of perception.

Günther Lanier