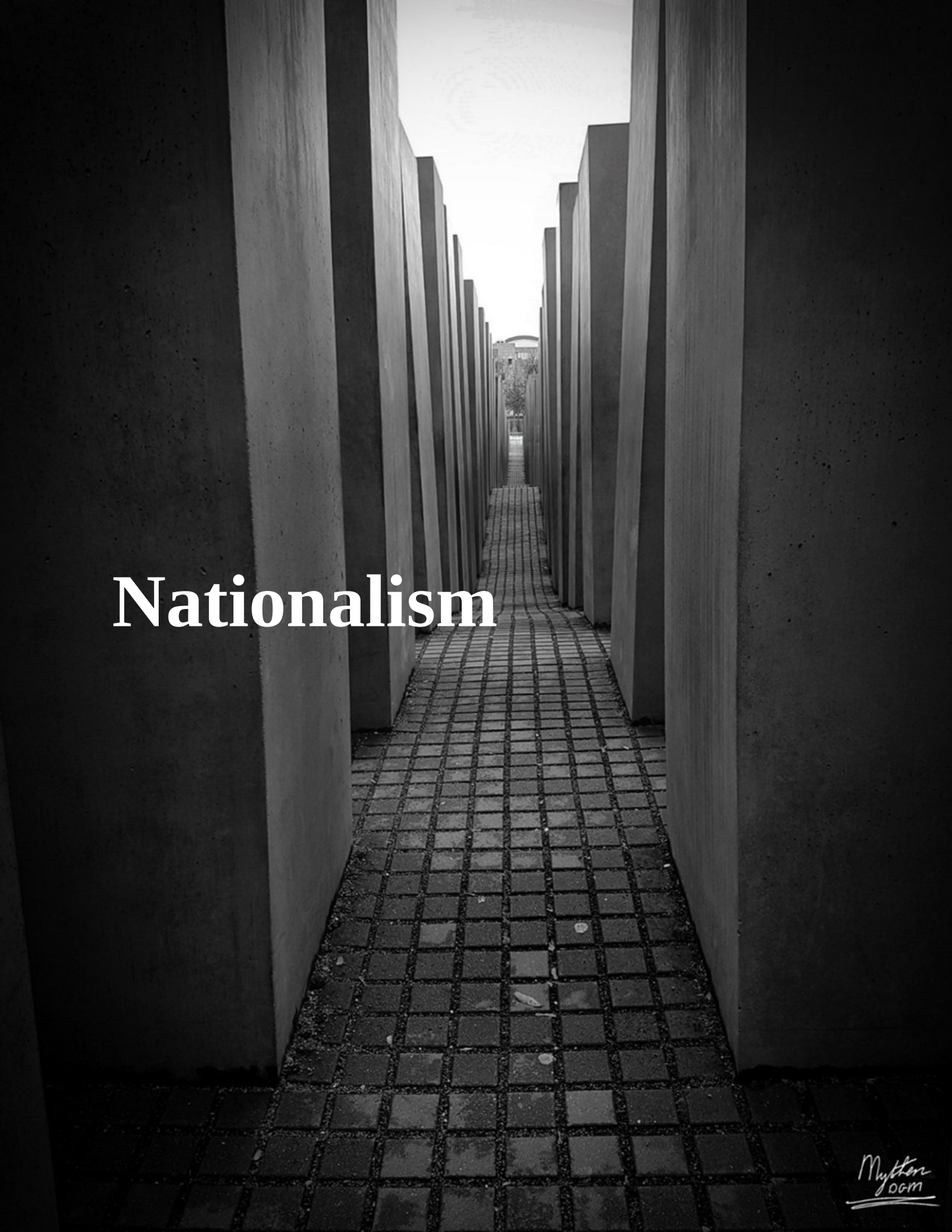




Nationalism

From mainstream news to social media, we are seeing this word, this aged notion spread again. A word that was emblematic of populism in revolutionary times but instead served as the major source of conflict in the first four decades of the twentieth century. So why has nationalism returned to mainstream politics throughout the first three decades of the twenty first century? Why has nationalistic sentiment crept into the collective western political apparatus? It is time in all seriousness, to ask ourselves these questions from an individual and collective standpoint.

Some consider the beginnings of modern nationalism to be traced from the days of the late eighteenth century, flourishing in France whilst it was in the throes of revolution. We must remember, however, that the roots of nationalism were foundational in their approach, thus making it ever easier to mould into what has been seen in the early twentieth and twenty first centuries. From the desire to drive civic nationalism via the vehicle of shared values to the more conservative ethnic nationalism focusing on a shared heritage, the reality and breadth of its foundational state allowed nationalism to be easily shaped by the desire of those who strive for control, to thrive in power and to in turn, foment division.

Over time, tacit adjustments were made to what was perceived as nationalism into its various, more extreme forms by the early twentieth century. The gradual regressive adjustment of nationalism within some nations during the early twentieth century can be accounted for by the timely arrival of the “strong” leader, the voice that grows and speaks in ever stronger tones when a nation is in the midst of a perceived existential crisis.

Exploiting the needs of a nation, finding and moulding the national collective need into an emotionally negative rebuke of the status quo, this voice does little to bring unity via collective intellectual collaboration. In order to bring people closer, this voice, this “leader”

would focus on division. Divisive points that can become fault lines gain a pervasive amplifying resonance when combined with fear. And now the echoes of the voice have come forth yet again. We are seeing the slow degradation of democracy, one election at a time. The erosion of the rule of law in tandem with the emboldened strategy of the modern-day “strong man” challenging the extent of their respective constitutional power. But we have to ask ourselves here why we have handed power to those who echo sentiments best left to the last century of war and strife. It is due to our inability to continually provide real world improvement to the daily lives of the people. The western world was elated with the fall of communism. The supposed virtuous victory of capitalism over its great rival was pyrrhic in reality, for we as a collective western civilisation have since then done little to protect what was hard won. Democracy has since become little more than a required function of capitalistic expansion at the ever-increasing cost to the individual. We have done little to restructure, redefine and evolve our collective proportional systems of representation into a model for real positive change in line with regulated technological advancement.

Instead, continual financial lobbying along with increasing unregulated corporate greed has weakened society and its perceptions of the political class. Now enter the voice again – the words of the past reframed, shaped to bring recognition of fear and reinforcement of anger to fuel the increasing ire of the masses. Thus, the door has been reopened and slowly we have seen such sentiment return with common discourse changing from constructive to destructive vernacular.

The voice of nationalism has revealed itself once more. We have seen increasing use of degrading language in major political speeches from key leaders decrying the enemy within and without in order to fuel division at home. All the while lambasting the core of centrist global

programs and political institutions, which has kept the peace for eighty years. All in the name of desired growth of a nationalistic centred ideology designed to fracture all those from the majority who are not ideologically submissive or aligned. Enemies they shall become to suit the need of the voice in the form of political weapons or targets of increased discrimination, thus fuelling increased division.

All this leaves me with the words: “Hate begets hate; violence begets violence; toughness begets a greater toughness”, ringing loud within my mind as a lasting challenge to the political discourse we face today. Our political vocabulary may have regressed but we must also recall the days of elevating oratory that fired up our hearts and inspired our desire towards civic duty. From Dr Martin Luther King Jr as quoted above to John F. Kennedy, whose words of collective strength and unity inspired nations to face their challenges with hope. Words have power and we must not forget the responsibility of all words we put forth into this collective existence that we share.

Considering this, we must begin to address how we use our words in this modern age. With the advent of social media, we have given over the ownership of our information flow from publicly owned, regulated sources of media and rigorously sourced, editorially reviewed journalism into the hands of private, data-driven platforms that have been designed to maximise viewing time for profit. The algorithmic design of such platforms feeds off reinforcement of preconceptions which in turn drives a user to consume more. It is a human fact that the algorithm of these technology platforms automatically adapts towards emotive media, much of which is fear-and-hate-filled. The current state of play is a perfect amplification chamber for hate as resonance through siloed engagement leeches from us the ability to form our own views through engagement with fact-based content across the political divide in traditional media form.

Addictive engagement is winning the battle versus the fading recognition to preserve our ability to think critically. This will give ever more power to the voice of nationalism. We need to move back towards a more holistic and in turn, realistic world view when it comes to how we consume our daily news.

So, I would ask you to consider this. Read news from all sides. Open your mind to current affairs and build your ability to critically dissect and assess the information that comes your way. Engage with people in your life on the issues of the day. Engage constructively and positively with all within your sphere of reality. Push beyond and become active with your representatives and with your political system. This is key to preventing us as a civilisation from sliding further down the road towards nationalism.

For humanity has achieved so much more when borders are crossed, cultural exchanges occur and free trade flows with a goal of building a world order that is fair, free and respectful of all cultures whilst building economic equality. Let us restore the peace dividend once again while we evolve our democracy.