

Charles University in Prague

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BACHELOR THESIS

The notion of American patriotism as deployed in the US political arena

Patriotismus coby frekventovaný pojem v americké politické aréně

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Studijní program: Specializace v pedagogice

Studijní obor: Anglický jazyk se zaměřením na vzdělávání — Německý jazyk se zaměřením na vzdělávání

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis, titled ‘The notion of American patriotism as deployed in the US political arena’, is fully my individual work and that I used only the sources listed in the References section. I also declare that this thesis has not been used to gain any other degree.

Kolín, 18th April 2019

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Signature:

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mgr. Jakub Ženíšek, Ph.D. for his willingness to supervise this thesis and for his valuable advice. I must express gratitude to my family as well, for without their encouragement I may never have brought this thesis to completion.

Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the rich meaning of patriotism in the US politics. The theoretical part focuses on the facets of patriotism specific to the USA—American exceptionalism and the Pledge of Allegiance—and on types of patriotism in general. The practical part is devoted to delineating the notions of patriotism of three prominent American politicians among whom there are significant ideological differences: President Donald Trump, late Senator John McCain, and former President Barack Obama. Their opinions on patriotism are uncovered mostly by analyzing their speeches, but in some cases also by reading their tweets, listening to interviews with them, and reading articles about them. My hypothesis was that when we compare their views of patriotism, we will find that not all three men advance a similar kind of patriotism. I believe this hypothesis to be definitively confirmed in the conclusion where the final comparison highlights many differences, including essential ones, between the patriotism of Trump and that of the other two politicians.

Keywords: American patriotism, American exceptionalism, Donald Trump, John McCain, Barack Obama

Abstrakt

Tato práce je zaměřena na zkoumání různorodosti významu patriotismu v americké politické sféře. Teoretická část se soustřeďuje na aspekty patriotismu specifické pro Spojené státy—americká výjimečnost a Slib věrnosti—a na typy patriotismu obecně. Praktická část je věnována vykreslení představ tří předních amerických politiků o patriotismu. Jsou to muži, mezi kterými je mnoho ideologických rozdílů: prezident Donald Trump, zesnulý senátor John McCain a bývalý prezident Barack Obama. Jejich názory na patriotismus jsem zjišťoval především rozborem jejich proslovů, ale v některých případech také čtením jejich tweetů, poslechem rozhovorů s nimi a čtením článků. Má hypotéza byla, že při porovnání jejich představ o patriotismu zjistíme, že všichni tři muži neprosazují podobný druh patriotismu. Tato hypotéza je dle mého jasně potvrzena v závěru, kde v rámci konečného srovnání upozorňuji na mnoho rozdílů, některé z nichž jsou zásadní, mezi patriotismem Trumpa a zbylých dvou politiků.

Klíčová slova: americký patriotismus, americká výjimečnost, Donald Trump, John McCain, Barack Obama

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1. Introduction

Patriotism is an important aspect of American culture. In proof of this claim one may cite the daily recitations of the Pledge of Allegiance in US schools (Jones and Meyer 2) and the ubiquitous displays of the American flag (Marshall 13). Furthermore, patriotism was invoked by the infamous USA PATRIOT Act (Soutphommasane 2). Since patriotism plays such a prominent role in the American society, one may wonder what exactly Americans think it is. Let us start by looking at how Merriam-Webster, the best-known American dictionary, defines it: ‘love for or devotion to one’s country’ (‘patriotism’). Though it would be foolish to expect details from a definition, I hoped for more. Considering the significance of patriotism in the US, I find it odd that at least the national flag and the readiness to defend one’s country are not mentioned too. As for the words used in that definition—‘love’, ‘devotion’, and ‘one’s country’—they appear to be themselves very hard to define.

Love can be expressed in many different ways, or alternatively, there are many different attitudes and forms of attachment denoted by the expression ‘love’. Devotion is not a straightforward concept either. One possible way of differentiating types of devotion is to say that devotion may either be blind, or it may predicated on the perceived virtues of its object. The meaning of ‘one’s country’ is unclear as well since citizens can experience their country in diverse ways. Moreover, Americans tend to label the opinions of other Americans with whom they disagree as ‘un-American’, which Merriam-Webster defines as ‘not American : not characteristic of or consistent with American customs, principles, or traditions’ (‘un-American’). Here we uncover but more layers of ambiguity since who can authoritatively delineate what American customs, principles, or traditions are? In conjunction with ‘un-American’ is used the word ‘unpatriotic’ (Soutphommasane 3), which implies that *real* Americans are patriots. Thus, when Americans talk about what Americans do or do not do, they might be describing what they believe to be the makings of a genuine patriot. Ultimately, the pertinent lesson that can be learnt from the definition of patriotism as ‘love for or devotion to one’s country’ is that if we wish to find out what Americans mean by ‘patriotism’ we should not only study their usage of the word ‘patriot’ and its derivatives, but also how they say that love for and devotion to America should be expressed and how they imagine America and Americans. In this connection it is appropriate to mention the ideology of American exceptionalism which may be argued to constitute American identity (Restad 3) and be stronger than the nationalism prevalent in other nations (Caldwell 2).

Seeing that patriotism is vaguely defined and at the same time so potent a concept in the US, I infer that there are many Americans who ask themselves the question ‘What is patriotism?’ and come up with answers that are often different and sometimes even wholly irreconcilable. I would not be surprised to find out there are several competing ‘patriotisms’ in the US, each person subscribing to whichever best fits their worldview. In this thesis, I shall focus on the Americans whose words carry a lot of sway and who speak of patriotism quite often—American politicians. My hypothesis is that when we compare the expositions of patriotism given by three political figures of greatly differing political persuasions, we will find that either each of these politicians propagates a very different sort of patriotism, or that at least one of them promotes a type of patriotism unharmonizable with the notion advocated by the other two.

In the theoretical part, I will first briefly discuss American exceptionalism and the Pledge of Allegiance, both of which are USA-specific phenomena that rubbed off on the country’s patriotism. Then, I will succinctly characterize the types of patriotism gleaned from academic literature. Falling back on the data presented in the theoretical part, the practical part will be devoted to the analysis of the rhetoric of three successful US politicians who flourished in the 21st century: Donald Trump, John McCain, and Barack Obama. I shall unfold each one’s idea of patriotism and look for disagreements among them on this topic. In the conclusion, I will attempt to outline the common core of American patriotism based on the points they agreed on. I will also sum up what was disagreed about and make a final evaluation of how extensive those disagreements were to see whether my hypothesis was correct.

2. Theoretical part

2.1. American exceptionalism

What will be discussed in this section is the belief that the USA is more exceptional or better than other nations. I am interested in the common tropes used to communicate this belief and in the alleged sources of America's excellence. The connection between exceptionalism and patriotism is the fact that those who believe in exceptionalism think that those who do not are unpatriotic. The heated debate over whether Obama believes America is exceptional illustrated this (Restad 1-2).

2.1.1. What makes the USA exceptional

The origin of America's uniqueness is often seen in the revolutionary ideas contained in the Declaration of Independence that are thought to be the foundation of American national identity. According to Charles Dunn, there are ten generally agreed on values which collectively make the USA exceptional:

1. Equality. The Declaration of Independence proclaims that 'all men are created equal' which translates to all citizens being equal before the law and having the same rights when competing for education, jobs, and status.
2. Liberty existing within limited restraints. Restraints are needed to prevent anarchy, but they must be limited. Liberty cannot be sacrificed in favour of equality and vice versa.
3. Protection of one's property 'against unreasonable searches and seizures' per the constitutional amendments.
4. Opportunity—what is rewarded is personal achievement, not arbitrary, unearned privilege.
5. Democracy. Governments derive 'their just powers from the consent of the governed' and therefore cannot overstep the constitutional boundaries set by the people.
6. Participation in politics and community affairs.
7. The belief that this participation can make a difference like the civil rights movement was able to.
8. The importance of community illustrated by neighbourhood organizations, churches etc.
9. Invoking God (after the example of the Founding Fathers) and freedom of religion.
10. Meritocracy—one gains a position of power through merit and ability (3-6).

Since the country's inception US presidents have been arguing that its mission was to spread its exceptional values (Restad 5).

2.1.2. Exceptionalist tropes

We may begin with the phrase ‘a city upon a hill’ which comes from the New Testament, specifically Matthew 5:14: ‘You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden’ (*New King James Version*). The phrase became part of American exceptionalist rhetoric owing to Puritan Minister John Winthrop who believed that Puritan colonists ‘shall be as a city upon a hill’. This influenced President John F. Kennedy who declared, ‘I have been guided by the standard John Winthrop set’, namely, the idea that the rest of the world is watching what Americans are doing. Later, President Reagan would repeatedly speak of the USA as a ‘shining city on a hill’. He explained that for him the USA was ‘a magnet for all who must have freedom, for all the pilgrims from all the lost places who are hurtling through the darkness, toward home’ (Restad 15).

The notion that America attracts people from other parts of the world who seek freedom is also expressed by the Statue of Liberty. This monument, more so than any other, is thought to stand for the USA and its values (Lemke 193). At the statue’s feet there are broken chains which can symbolically refer to the Declaration of Independence (‘July 4, 1776’ is inscribed on the tablets the statue holds) and to the end of slavery. The statue’s most prominent features, however, are the torch and the seven-rayed crown which give it a radiant aura. The number seven symbolizes the seven continents, viz. the whole world which is to be irradiated with liberty. This reflects the idea of the Founding Fathers that America will enlighten the rest of the world (Lemke 199-200). Nevertheless, this interpretation of the statue’s symbolism took a back seat at the beginning of the 20th century when one million migrants would yearly enter the US. The statue then came to be perceived as ‘Mother of Exiles’ (Lemke 205). This understanding can be traced back to Emma Lazarus’ sonnet ‘The New Colossus’ which even became a part of the statue’s pedestal. The poem depicts the statue as a compassionate, yet strong mother figure inviting the oppressed from abroad to America. She is

Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.

“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,

The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!” (Lemke 202)

We may notice that Lazarus’ description of the statue as a beacon for immigrants is similar to the way Reagan would later describe the shining city on a hill. As for the statue, according to John Higham it also became ‘the supreme symbol of a multiethnic nationality’. In the closing scene of the play *The Melting Pot* lovers gaze towards the statue, and thus it was associated with the notion that America is a crucible where immigrants by overcoming their cultural differences fuse into one people (Lemke 205). Eventually, the statue became an ostentatious reminder that America is a ‘nation of immigrants’ (Lemke 194). Moreover, many textbooks teach about US immigration in conjunction with the American Dream—the belief that people of all backgrounds can move upward in America—and put a picture of the Statue of Liberty alongside these lessons (Lemke 206). As we can see, this famous statue has served to prop up various tropes regarding America’s uniqueness.

One very important exceptionalist concept yet to be mentioned is that the USA should act as the world’s policeman. America had the greatest part in creating and maintaining the post-WWII order. It has been telling certain nations what they cannot do (e.g. Syria cannot use chemical weapons), threatening them with an intervention should they defy. Weary of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, however, many Americans began questioning whether playing the global policeman is best for their country (Rachman). Critics of interventionism may argue that policing the world amounts to leading ‘perpetual war for perpetual peace’ (qtd. in McElroy). Yet others insist that ‘[o]nly America has the material greatness to be able to stop the slide into chaos; only America has the moral greatness to do it, not for the sake of power but for the sake of peace’ (Rasmussen).

2.2. The Pledge of Allegiance

Reciting the Pledge has become a ubiquitous ritual in the USA. It opens not only every school day, but also every session of legislatures, including the US Congress, and meetings of many clubs and associations. It is heard at graduations, monument dedications, football games, and car races (Jones and Meyer 2). One recites it while ‘standing at attention facing the flag with the right hand over the heart.’ Its text goes as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

The centrality of the flag is notable, but not surprising since the full name of the Pledge is ‘The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag’ (‘4 U.S.C. §4’). We should also note which qualities the Pledge attributes to the American nation. Let us start with the phrase ‘under God’ which was inserted in the Pledge in 1954 so as to highlight the difference between the American system and the ‘Godless communism’ of the Soviet Union and Red China (Jones and Meyer 11). In 2000 ‘under God’ became a subject of serious controversy when an atheist filed suit that recitation of the Pledge in his daughter’s public school violated the separation of church and state (Jones and Meyer 13). As for ‘indivisible’, the author of the Pledge chose this word to affirm national unity in face of mass immigration and the Civil War being recent history at the time (Jones and Meyer 3). Lastly, ‘liberty and justice for all’ can have various interpretations. It may denote the ideals that Americans should strive to attain, or it may purport to describe the reality of the USA, but if understood as such, the Pledge can be brushed off as untrue (Jones and Meyer 14-15).

2.3. Types of patriotism

Broadly speaking, we can identify three schools of patriotism. We may begin with zealous patriotism which makes its adherents either disregard morality, or ground morality in patriotism which they claim to be a paramount moral virtue. A second type of patriotism is moderate patriotism which is constrained by universal morality. Finally, the third kind is political patriotism which goes further by excluding, or deemphasizing cultural and ethnical ties and postulating as the object of patriotic loyalty one's country's laws and institutions (Primoratz and Pavković 1-3).

If the three politicians to be discussed in the practical part do not belong to the same school of patriotism, that will at once reveal that their views on patriotism considerably diverge. On the other hand, if they all can be located within a single school, that will strongly suggest that their notions of patriotism are all in all compatible. Let us now look more closely at the types of patriotism as they are presented by philosophers and political theorists.

2.3.1. Immoral Patriotism and Patriotism as a Central Moral Virtue

Some patriots believe that the interests of their country can trump morality. This attitude can be called Machiavellian (Primoratz 19). Indeed, Machiavelli himself wrote, 'When the safety of one's country wholly depends on the decision to be taken, no attention should be paid either to justice or injustice, to kindness or cruelty, or to its being praiseworthy or ignominious.' Such patriotism is epitomized by the tenet 'my country, right or wrong' (Primoratz 20). We may call it 'blind patriotism' because it can lead one to assent to one's government's policies though they may greatly curtail liberty. The fervour for the national symbols and the connection to racial nationalism are also typical of this patriotism (Soutphommasane 2-3).

Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre is thought to advocate extreme patriotism (Primoratz 20), although the position he defended seems more nuanced than the one sketched above. Far from arguing that patriots should simply ignore morality, he put forth the proposition that patriotism is indispensable because it is essential to sustaining morality. However, the momentous commonality of the fanatical unsophisticated patriotism with MacIntyre's version of patriotism is that they both are in their own way above morality—the former can easily brush it aside and the latter makes it dependent on itself and therefore subservient.

Furthermore, it is crucial to stress that MacIntyre presents two types of morality: one which is patriotism-based and particularist and the other which is impartial and universal (7-8). As for the impartial, universal morality, he insists that patriotism is incompatible with it. He argues that identifying the cause of America with the cause of universal morality has led to ‘confusion and incoherence’ (MacIntyre 19). In his view, to support one’s country only because one believes it promotes great moral ideals is no patriotism since such an attitude places those moral ideals above one’s country. Moreover, one can support a country just for the cause which it champions even if that country is not one’s own. For MacIntyre, patriotism is ‘a kind of loyalty to a particular nation which only those possessing that particular nationality can exhibit’ (3-4). It is to be pointed out that this loyalty does not entail being uncritical to one’s country’s government. To be a patriot, one only need exempt from criticism ‘the nation conceived *as a project*’. Still, this might impel patriots to work against ‘the best interests of mankind’—German patriots during WWII are a case in point (MacIntyre 13-14). Patriots value their nation’s merits, although not simply as merits, but as the merits of *their* nation. Nevertheless, these merits can only be ‘*partially* supporting reasons’ for patriots to love their country. Patriotism also does not mean to merely want to repay one’s country for the benefits received from it. True patriotism is an essentially particular relationship (MacIntyre 4-5). This brings it into conflict with the impersonal universal morality demanding that one abstract oneself from social particularity. If we wish to impose the restrictions of universal morality on patriotism, we get an ‘emasculated’ patriotism which ‘amounts to no more than a set of practically empty slogans’ when there is a conflict with other communities over scarce resources or the right way to live. In such situations genuine patriots cannot assign the same value to the desires of every human involved but must be partial to their compatriots (MacIntyre 6-7).

If we have to choose between patriotism and liberal universal morality, on what rational grounds should we choose patriotism? The truth is that MacIntyre does not openly endorse patriotism. He concludes that patriots and liberal moralists can justly charge each other with endangering morality (MacIntyre 18). The case which he makes for the patriotic morality can be summed up by saying that universal morality tends to dissolution whereas patriotism provides a firm foundation for an alternative morality.

At first MacIntyre draws attention to the fact that morality is learnt from the way of life of a specific community (8). Then he argues that moral rules are justifiable only by the goods that can be enjoyed in that community and that to abide by those rules one usually needs its support (MacIntyre 9-10). If one’s community is of the essence for one’s moral life,

loyalty to that community—patriotism—is ‘a prerequisite for morality’, a paramount virtue (MacIntyre 11). Furthermore, without patriotism I am deprived of a significant aspect of my moral life: I cannot understand the story of my life as part of the story of my community, which means that I do not know ‘for what crimes of my nation I am bound to make reparation, for what benefits to my nation I am bound to feel gratitude’ (MacIntyre 16). What is more, every political community’s survival is dependent on patriotic soldiers willing to lay down their lives for their country despite disapproving of some of its policies. If in place of patriotism we embrace the rationalistic ideology of liberal universal morality, we will expose all social bonds to potential dissolution by rational scrutiny (MacIntyre 17-18).

2.3.2. Moderate Patriotism

Unlike Alasdair MacIntyre, proponents of moderate patriotism believe there is enough room within the framework of universal morality for a meaningful patriotism to exist. A notable advocate of this kind of patriotism is Stephen Nathanson.

Nathanson wishes to propose a concept of patriotism which would appeal to those who ‘are uncomfortable with the rituals and symbols of national loyalty’ and despise chauvinism, militarism, and blind allegiance, but who also care for their country (535). He reminds us that ‘even politically alienated people’ can love their country in the sense that they love its language, culture, history, and natural beauties. However, he agrees with MacIntyre that patriotism requires ‘loyalty and a preference for the well-being of one’s own country over others’ (Nathanson 536). On the other hand, Nathanson thinks it stupid to consider one’s nation superior to all others (537) and stresses that patriotism is a virtue only as long as it is moderate, viz. it encourages one to do good to one’s country, but not to be hostile or indifferent to those outside it. Patriotism is much like loyalty to one’s family which is virtuous unless it moves one to violate the rights of strangers in order to further one’s family’s well-being (Nathanson 538).

Nathanson tackles at length MacIntyre’s argument that moderate patriotism proves to be hollow in conflict situations. Nathanson argues that moderate patriots—differently from extreme patriots—will try hard to avoid violent escalation. They will endeavour to reach ‘a just accommodation.’ If the opposing side is in the right, ‘they might well urge a sacrifice by their own community’ (Nathanson 541). When the cause of the conflict is an immoral traditional practice of their community, they will favour ending that practice, but they will also look for alternative, moral ways to foster the traditional values embodied in it (Nathanson 543-544). Nevertheless, if no fair compromise can be made with the other community and the

survival of their own community is at stake, universal morality does not compel moderate patriots to ‘group suicide’ just as it does not compel them to care the same when a stranger dies as when a member of their family does, and thus, they will enter the field of battle, albeit ‘with deep regret’ (541).

As regards MacIntyre’s claim that good soldiers must embrace unconstrained patriotism, Nathanson highlights that national leaders seem to think morality is a powerful motivator since they always try to morally justify going to war. Actually, moderate patriots want their government to be obligated to provide even better justification in the future than it is now before declaring war. When we remember the bloodbaths of the last century, we will realize that too little morality coupled with excessive patriotism is more likely to ruin humankind than too little patriotism possibly dissolving social ties. Nathanson even says that the nations which ‘lack the qualities that make them merit loyalty’ should not be beneficiaries of patriotic devotion (550-551).

2.3.3. Political patriotism

Some political theorists propose that national and cultural elements of patriotism be done away with, or de-emphasized and that patriotic loyalty be focused on one’s country’s laws and political structure which secure the rights and liberties of the citizens. This political patriotism has been recommended especially to the USA and Switzerland whose populace is ethnically and culturally diverse (Primoratz and Pavković 2) and to Germany which is haunted by its hypernationalist past and used to be divided.

Grappling with the division of Germany into East and West, Dolf Sternberger coined the term ‘constitutional patriotism’. What he meant by it was that among the citizens of West Germany emerged ‘a second patriotism that is based on the constitution.’ Although he did not want to dispense with the attachment to the nation, its land, and its culture, he averred that the people of West Germany must direct their loyalty primarily to the state and the rule of law because Germany was not whole (Primoratz and Pavković 6). Characteristic for Sternberger’s patriotism was fierce, even illiberal opposition to the enemies of democracy, be they Nazis or communists (Müller 100).

Jürgen Habermas, who believes that German national identity is irreversibly scarred by Nazism, borrowed the term ‘constitutional patriotism’ to argue that in the political realm German national and cultural identity must be wholly replaced by identification with West Germany’s democratic laws and institutions. Arguably, this kind of patriotism is highly

advisable for the European countries with heterogenous population and can facilitate European integration (Primoratz and Pavković 6-7).

Maurizio Viroli propounded a version of patriotism which also focuses on one's country's laws and the liberty they enable, but even so includes a greater degree of particularism than constitutional patriotism. According to Viroli, patriots embrace their republic's way of political life, seeing their common liberty as predicated on their history and political culture. Nationalism, however, is rejected since it is concerned with purity and uniformity, not liberty (Eckersley 190).

3. Practical part

3.1. Donald Trump

3.1.1. 2017 Inaugural Address

In the Inaugural Address of the current US President Donald Trump the word ‘patriotism’ appears only once, but when we peruse the speech we can see that the idea of patriotism permeates it. Trump seems to be saying that patriotism is the key to achieving unity and prosperity, indeed, the ultimate answer to all challenges that the US faces. Let us begin with this short, but telling extract:

At the bedrock of our politics will be a total allegiance to the United States of America, and through our loyalty to our country, we will rediscover our loyalty to each other. When you open your heart to patriotism, there is no room for prejudice. (‘The Inaugural Address’)

In these two sentences, the President mentions patriotism thrice: once explicitly and twice implicitly. The implicit mentions are ‘a total allegiance to the United States’ and ‘our loyalty to our country’. With this understanding, we can see that Trump describes patriotism as the foundational principle of his politics. His speaking of ‘a total allegiance’ may hint that he is wary of ‘a partial allegiance’ and wants Americans to pay allegiance exclusively to their country. Interestingly, he also argues that patriotism is the cure for prejudice. The rationale behind this belief seems to be that when you love your country, you will also love your fellow citizens: ‘[T]hrough our loyalty to our country, we will rediscover our loyalty to each other.’ This shows that Trump’s assertion that patriotism will put an end to prejudice referred only to the prejudice of Americans against fellow Americans. Before the inauguration, at a victory rally in Cincinnati, Trump hammered home that love of country has the power to unite Americans because their country is what they all share: ‘We spend too much time focusing on what divides us. Now is the time to embrace the one thing that truly unites us. You know what that is? America’ (Althouse 00:34-00:46). That Trump chooses to point to patriotism as the means to mend divisions is noteworthy since the charge of being a divisive bigot is perhaps the one levelled against him most frequently (Rubin). This corroborates that patriotism as he defines it plays a central role in his politics.

Returning to the inauguration speech, we see Trump introduce diverse topics immediately after his remark about patriotism and prejudice:

The Bible tells us, “how good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity.”¹ We must speak our minds openly, debate our disagreements honestly, but always pursue solidarity. When America is united, America is totally unstoppable. There should be no fear – we are protected, and we will always be protected. We will be protected by the great men and women of our military and law enforcement and, most importantly, we are protected by God. (‘The Inaugural Address’)

At first, let me note the appeal to religion. By quoting the Bible, and immediately after mentioning patriotism at that, Trump reinforces the idea of ‘one Nation under God’, implying that the belief in the God of the Bible forms an essential part of American patriotism. As for the specific quote, it is of note that it comes from the book of Psalms which is part of both the Christian and the Jewish Bible. By speaking of ‘God’s people’ it provides a spiritual sense of belonging that can complement the natural bond of Americans to their country. The phrase ‘God’s people’ can also be understood to imply that Americans are nearer and dearer to God than anyone else—a sort of American exceptionalism. Another implication of equating Americans with God’s people can be that those Americans who do not worship God are unpatriotic and do not belong to the nation the President is envisioning. Though he does encourage God’s people to live in unity, by saying ‘God’s people’ he also accentuates the division between believers and unbelievers. A few moments after quoting the Bible, he doubles down on the view that the belief in God is indispensable for Americans by invoking God as their supreme protector.

Between the two remarks about God, Trump managed to sandwich two notable ideas: the need for Americans to be frank with each other and the assurance that the American army and police can be relied on. When he says, ‘We must speak our minds openly, debate our disagreements honestly’, he may have political correctness in mind which many Americans see as preventing their free expression.² Upfront about one’s opinions and willing to have a candid discussion with their opponents is what good patriotic Americans should be, according to Trump. Still, he leaves this theme rather quickly and at once returns to the theme of unity: ‘[A]lways pursue solidarity. When America is united, America is totally unstoppable.’ Unity figures very prominently in Trump’s inaugural speech, which makes it sound more conciliatory than his other speeches, but we should not forget that this unity is qualified—inseparable from patriotism and the belief in God. After speaking of the united America’s

1 *New International Version*, Psalm 133:1

2 According to a survey conducted by the libertarian Cato Institute, the majority of Americans think that political correctness stifles speech in an unhealthy way (Ekins).

unstoppability, Trump goes on to indirectly praise the military and law enforcement. The implication is that patriots should look up to them with gratitude. By saying ‘great men and women’ he acknowledges that both sexes are due recognition from Americans for their work.³

The address continues in this way: ‘Finally, we must think big and dream even bigger. In America, we understand that a nation is only living as long as it is striving. ... No challenge can match the heart and fight and spirit of America.’ This means that an enterprising spirit and persistence are the marks of a true patriot. US citizens are encouraged to believe there is nothing they as a collective cannot do. The exhortation to ‘think big and dream even bigger’ can remind us of the American Dream. A few moments later, Trump powerfully reiterates several of his points:

A new national pride will stir our souls, lift our sights, and heal our divisions. It’s time to remember that old wisdom our soldiers will never forget: that whether we are black or brown or white, we all bleed the same red blood of patriots, we all enjoy the same glorious freedoms, and we all salute the same great American flag. And whether a child is born in the urban sprawl of Detroit or the windswept plains of Nebraska, they look up at the same night sky, they fill their heart with the same dreams, and they are infused with the breath of life by the same Almighty Creator. (‘The Inaugural Address’)

Once more, patriotism is established as the best way of making Americans see past their differences: ‘[W]hether we are black or brown or white, we all bleed the same red blood of patriots’. Fighting and dying for the country makes one a patriot no matter one’s race. There are three new things in this section of speech: ‘a new national pride’, the ‘glorious freedoms’, and the ‘great American flag’. National pride—which is clearly a synonym of patriotism for Trump—is said to be a source of inspiration and healing. The flag is something patriots revere. As for the ‘glorious freedoms’, the epithet ‘glorious’ implies that they are special and rare, that America is the land of the free to a greater degree than any other country.

However, one remarkable characteristic of Trump’s type of patriotism is that he wants Americans to be patriotic mainly in order to make America great, not so much because America already is great. Emblematic of this idea is his campaign slogan ‘Make America Great Again’ (Seipel) which, unsurprisingly, made an appearance in his inaugural speech too:

³ Trump might have been trying to clear himself of the frequent charges of sexism. His alleged sexism is documented for example by Newsweek in a video called ‘Trump’s Sexist Remarks About Women’.

Together, We Will Make America Strong Again.

We Will Make America Wealthy Again.

We Will Make America Proud Again.

We Will Make America Safe Again.

And, Yes, Together, We Will Make America Great Again. ('The Inaugural Address')

The absence of references to liberty, democracy, or any other political, moral, or even religious value in this crowning moment of Trump's speech reveals the down-to-earth nature of his patriotism. He exerted himself to draw his listeners' attention to their country and nation so as to restore the strength, wealth, pride, and safety it supposedly lost. Throughout the address, Trump asseverates that for the US to return to its erstwhile glory, its interests always have to take precedence over the interests of other nations. His stated goal is the improvement of lives of all current American citizens and he heavily implies that America is in crisis because its politics have been viciously unpatriotic. Thanks to patriotic policies, on the other hand, America will allegedly become more prosperous than ever. To bring out all this, I compiled the following portions of the speech:

We, the citizens of America, are now joined in a great national effort to rebuild our country and to restore its promise for all of our people. ... At the center of this movement is a crucial conviction: that a nation exists to serve its citizens. ... We've made other countries rich while the wealth, strength, and confidence of our country has disappeared over the horizon. ... The wealth of the middle class has been ripped from their homes and then redistributed across the entire world. ... From this day forward, a new vision will govern our land. From this moment on, it's going to be America First. Every decision on trade, on taxes, on immigration, on foreign affairs, will be made to benefit American workers and American families. We must protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies, and destroying our jobs. Protection will lead to great prosperity and strength. ... America will start winning again, winning like never before. ('The Inaugural Address')

It is clear from this paragraph that according to Trump some countries are aggressively enriching themselves at the USA's expense. He is even ready to strike back by starting trade wars (@realDonaldTrump). The following excerpt shows Trump continuing to set forth his America First philosophy in a way that tempers his previous antagonistic remarks:

We will follow two simple rules: Buy American and Hire American. We will seek friendship and good will with the nations of the world – but we do so with the understanding that it is the right of all nations to put their own interests first. We do not seek to impose our way of life on anyone, but rather to let it shine as an example for everyone to follow. ('The Inaugural Address')

It seems then that Trump does not think that all countries of the earth are doomed to a constant zero-sum struggle and that he believes cooperation among countries is possible. However, what he said at the cabinet meeting on January 2, 2019 evinces his conviction that putting America first inevitably strains America's relationship with some countries: 'I shouldn't be popular in Europe. If I was popular in Europe, I wouldn't be doing my job' (ODN). At this point, I believe we are warranted to say that Trump is in line with MacIntyre's understanding of patriotism which stresses that the interests of nations often conflict.⁴ As to the block quotation above, it also deals with American exceptionalism. By saying that every nation has the right to put its interests first Trump implied that the USA should stop making sacrifices other countries do not make. On the other hand, he affirmed that America should play an exceptional role in the world when he spoke of the American way as a shining example for everyone else, which is reminiscent of the exceptionalist trope of the 'shining city on a hill'.⁵ Trump then does not seem to reject exceptionalism, but rather redefine it so that it would require less altruism toward and intervention in other countries.

3.1.2. Proclamation of National Day of Patriotic Devotion

Just by studying Trump's inaugural speech much insight into his patriotism has been acquired. This cannot be deemed a coincidence in the light of the fact that the President published a proclamation marking his inauguration day, January 20, 2017, as National Day of Patriotic Devotion:

A new national pride stirs the American soul and inspires the American heart. We are one people, united by a common destiny and a shared purpose. (Trump)

In the initial paragraph, commonality of Americans is dwelt on as it was at the inauguration. The same applies also to the next paragraph:

4 see p. 8
5 see p. 4

Freedom is the birthright of all Americans, and to preserve that freedom we must maintain faith in our sacred values and heritage. (Trump)

Apparently, patriotism resides in the faith in the sacred American values which produces freedom. The word ‘sacred’ gives it something of a religious quality. The following subsection seems to identify the American heritage with the Constitution:

Our Constitution is written on parchment, but it lives in the hearts of the American people. There is no freedom where the people do not believe in it; no law where the people do not follow it; and no peace where the people do not pray for it. (Trump)

What appears to constitute patriotic devotion according to Trump is love of the Constitution, belief in freedom, obedience to law, and praying for peace—this one implies that a dynamic prayer life is obligatory for patriots. Trump continues the proclamation by enunciating a kind of American exceptionalism:

There are no greater people than the American citizenry, and as long as we believe in ourselves, and our country, there is nothing we cannot accomplish. (Trump)

The beginning of the sentence is susceptible to the interpretation that Americans are innately superior to everyone else. Patriotism is described as the faith in oneself which is the key to unlocking Americans’ latent omnipotence. It is of interest that this proclamation utilizes religious vocabulary to such an extent—faith, sacred, pray. It almost seems as if the President desires to merge patriotism with Christianity, or at least capitalize on the religiosity of the American population by conceptualizing patriotism as a religion.

NOW, THEREFORE, I ... do hereby proclaim January 20, 2017, as National Day of Patriotic Devotion, in order to strengthen our bonds to each other and to our country—and to renew the duties of Government to the people. (Trump)

Three elements of patriotism are set forth nicely and succinctly here—cohesion among citizens, the feeling of connection to one’s country, and also working for the good of those one governs if one is an elected official.

3.1.2. Passion for the flag and anthem

Though they are not out of line with his inauguration speech or the subsequent proclamation, expressions touching on patriotism in Trump’s other speeches or in his tweets

often appear to be more intense. For one, Trump has been quite harsh in his opposition to those who disrespect the American flag. The most radical tweet of his on this topic is probably this one:

Nobody should be allowed to burn the American flag - if they do, there must be consequences - perhaps loss of citizenship or year in jail! (@realDonaldTrump)

It must be pointed out that to punish someone for burning the flag as Trump demanded would according to the Supreme Court's ruling be against the US Constitution (Jackson). This suggests that the flavour of patriotism to which Trump subscribes is more about the love of national symbols than about the love of the Constitution.

Taking a knee protests are in Trump's opinion another unacceptable offense against the country. These protests consisted in rugby players kneeling instead of standing during the national anthem. What led players to demonstrate in this way is the alleged oppression of black people in America, especially in the form of police brutality (Mindock). Here we can see the clash with the views of Trump who perceives the police uniformly as 'great men and women'.⁶ It is no wonder then that he fiercely criticized these protests, although the vulgarity with which he did so was somewhat shocking:

Wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL [National Football League] owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, to say, 'Get that son of a bitch off the field right now. Out. He's fired. He's fired!'

Trump went on to explain his patriotic outrage by saying that kneeling during the anthem is 'a total disrespect of our heritage' and 'a total disrespect of everything that we stand for' (The Straits Times). It seems that in his view there can be no reasons that could make a patriot participate in these protests. Strikingly absent from Trump's comments on the protests is any mention of the killing of unarmed black men by police officers which was the most obvious grievance of the protesters. This observation may induce us to question whether the President really reveres the flag and anthem so much, or whether he is using patriotism more like a smoke screen to hamper discussions about the police and race. Nonetheless, if we assume that Trump believes what he says, we must conclude that the flag and anthem are very dear to him. Supportive of this conclusion is the fact that he publicly hugged the US flag on at least five separate occasions in the past (CNN, 'Trump's flag hug').

⁶ see p. 13

As regards the taking a knee protests, they have since been prohibited by the National Football League which, however, gives the players who refuse to stand for the anthem the option to remain in the locker rooms while the anthem is playing. In the aftermath of this decision, Trump expressed his approval, but also indirectly proposed that it may be best if the players who wish to stay in the locker rooms left the USA: ‘You have to stand proudly for the national anthem, or you shouldn’t be playing, you shouldn’t be there. Maybe you shouldn’t be in the country’ (THE LIBERTY DAILY).

3.1.3. 2017 Values Voter Summit

The analysis of Trump’s view of patriotism would be incomplete if we did not take into account what he said at the 2017 Values Voter Summit. The focus of his speech was religion and its significance for American culture:

America is a nation of believers, and together we are strengthened and sustained by the power of prayer. ... [W]e all pledge allegiance to — very, very beautifully — “one Nation under God.” This is America’s heritage, a country that never forgets that we are all — all, every one of us — made by the same God in Heaven. (‘Remarks by President Trump’)

While in his proclamation of the National Day of Patriotic Devotion, Trump indicated that the nation’s heritage is the Constitution, now he declares that the heritage is the Pledge of Allegiance, notably its reference to the Heavenly Creator of all Americans. Trump makes it clear that this deity is none other than the God of the Bible when he says in another part of the speech: ‘We are stopping cold the attacks on Judeo-Christian values’ (‘Remarks by President Trump’). With that said, not all values Trump discusses are directly connected to religion: ‘We treasure our freedom. We are proud of our history. ... And we stand united behind the customs, beliefs and traditions that define who we are as a nation and as a people.’ It is plain to see that Trump believes that patriots must not be ashamed of America’s past and the American way of life, but on the contrary, have to embrace them. According to him, true Americans also ‘never lose faith, never give in, and always hope for a better tomorrow.’ They are hopeful of America’s bright future. In the following quote Trump appears to closely associate two things with patriotism: ‘As long as we have pride in our country, confidence in our future, and faith in our God, then America will prevail.’ Apart from the pride, which is essential to Trump’s patriotism, two other aspects of patriotism seem to be the trust that days of prosperity are ahead and the faith in God who watches over the Nation.

3.1.4. 2018 State of the Union and Trump on patriotism of his opponents

Another speech of Trump's which should not be overlooked is the 2018 State of the Union Address. In it, we hear him name very similar components of patriotism as in his other speeches. At times he repeats what he himself said at other occasions almost word for word, but he does give us a fuller picture of his ideas in some respects:

There has never been a better time to start living the American Dream. ... If you work hard, if you believe in yourself, if you believe in America, then you can dream anything, you can be anything, and together, we can achieve absolutely anything. ('President Donald J. Trump's State of the Union')

Through the belief in America—through patriotism—one will achieve the American Dream. Once again, he connects patriotism with the topic of unity which he introduces when he says 'together' and continues to develop in the succeeding part of the speech:

Tonight, I want to talk about what kind of future we are going to have, and what kind of a nation we are going to be. All of us, together, as one team, one people, and one American family can do anything. We all share the same home, the same heart, the same destiny, and the same great American flag. Together, we are rediscovering the American way. ('President Donald J. Trump's State of the Union')

Unity will make the US unstoppable. America will return to its former state of grandeur as a result of all Americans again pursuing the American way. In Trump's rhetoric, we detect an inescapable tension between his universal appeals embracing all Americans without any exception as a part of one big family and his insistence that Americans must worship God and unconditionally support the police, which all Americans are never going to do:

In America, we know that faith and family, not government and bureaucracy, are the center of American life. The motto is "in God we trust." And we celebrate our police, our military, and our amazing veterans as heroes who deserve our total and unwavering support. ('President Donald J. Trump's State of the Union')

Trump is not yet done with the exuberant praise of police and military. In a later section of the speech, he tells the story of police officer Ryan Holets who with his wife decided to adopt the

child of a drug addict. Moreover, he also tells an anecdote about exemplary patriotism related to the veterans and the flag:

Here tonight is Preston Sharp, a 12-year-old boy from Redding, California, who noticed that veterans' graves were not marked with flags on Veterans Day. He decided all by himself to change that, and started a movement that has now placed 40,000 flags at the graves of our great heroes. Preston: a job well done. Young patriots like Preston teach all of us about our civic duty as Americans. Preston's reverence for those who have served our Nation reminds us why we salute our flag, why we put our hands on our hearts for the pledge of allegiance, and why we proudly stand for the national anthem. Americans love their country. ('President Donald J. Trump's State of the Union')

Trump's talk of proudly standing for the national anthem is undoubtedly aimed against the kneeling protesters.⁷ The implication is that they are no part of the 'we' Trump is talking about, that they are not true Americans. To be fully American, one has to love America and display this love in the way which Trump requires. In other words, Trump considers his brand of patriotism as the standard of Americanness.

A few days after the State of the Union speech, Trump complained about the the lack of applause and response in general from the Democratic lawmakers during that speech. He concluded that 'they would rather see Trump do badly, ... than our country do well.' Then he proceeded to highlight how enthusiastically the Republicans in the Congress reacted: 'You've got half the room going totally crazy, wild. They loved everything. They wanna do something great for our country' (Toronto Star 1:11-1:43). Trump seems to be saying that unresponsiveness to his speeches betrays a deficiency in patriotism, whereas excitement over his words is evidence of patriotism. In all fairness, though, he makes one more argument in support of his conclusion—Democrats proved that they do not really love America by not clapping when he announced phenomenal improvements which had taken place in the USA on his watch. Apparently, he considered neither the possibility that the Democrats may have been sceptical whether those improvements actually happened, nor the possibility that they did not believe that his administration was to be credited for them. The President was unsparing in his opprobrium: 'They were like death and un-American, un-American.' He added an even harsher term, though he did so somewhat facetiously: 'Somebody said

⁷ see section 3.1.3., pp.18-19

“treasonous”. I mean, yeah, I guess. Why not? You know? Can we call that treason? Why not? I mean, they certainly didn’t seem to love our country very much’ (Toronto Star 1:49-2:10). Trump appears to suspect all dissenters of lukewarm love for America.

3.1.5. Denial of American exceptionalism?

One last issue to tackle so as to form a precise view of Trump’s brand of patriotism is the fact that shortly before announcing his candidacy for the President he rejected American exceptionalism at an event hosted by the right-wing Texas Patriots PAC:

I don’t like the term. I’ll be honest with you. People say, “Oh he’s not patriotic.” Look, if I’m a Russian, or I’m a German, or I’m a person we do business with, why, you know, I don’t think it’s a very nice term. “We’re exceptional; you’re not.” ... I want to take everything back from the world that we’ve given them. ... On top of taking it back, I don’t want to say, “We’re exceptional. ... By the way, you’ve been eating our lunch for the last 20 years, but we’re more exceptional than you.” ... [W]e’re dying. We owe 18 trillion in debt. (qtd. in Corn)

Trump is against saying that America is exceptional because he thinks it is mean to foreigners and also not true in terms of economy, though he would be happy to make it true:

I’d like to make us exceptional. And I’d like to talk later instead of now. ... I think you’re insulting the world. ... I see a lot of good patriots get up and talk about Amer—you can think it, but I don’t think we should say it. We may have a chance to say it in the not-too-distant future. But even then, I wouldn’t say it ... (qtd. in Corn)

It is not advisable for patriots to publicly say that the USA is exceptional, but it is pardonable. If Trump gets elected, he will make America exceptional indeed, but even once it is great again, patriots would do well not to brag about it. Trump’s attitude here was in harmony with his ‘Make America Great Again’ slogan. Nevertheless, a question may arise whether and how his seemingly low opinion of the USA can be harmonized with some other remarks of his. If other countries are eating America’s lunch and Americans are dying as Trump put it, whence does the national pride of which he spoke at the inauguration come, or what grounds does he have to insist that all Americans proudly hail the flag? Based on what we have covered, a threefold answer can be made: Firstly, he is proud of American history, believing that there was a time when the USA was great (hence the ‘Again’ in ‘Make America

Great Again’). Secondly, Trump thinks that the US Constitution is magnificent. Thirdly, he declares that the American people are potentially able to do anything and often names individual Americans of whom one should be proud, which suggests that the nation is in trouble just because incompetent leaders happened to be in charge.

It should be noted too that on May 28, 2018, when Trump had been leading America for over a year, he opined that it was in a wonderful state: ‘Those who died for our great country would be very happy and proud at how well our country is doing today’ (@realDonaldTrump). This change of opinion makes the possible contradiction between national pride and the country’s pathetic condition disappear completely. We can surmise that if Trump was asked to share his view of American exceptionalism in 2019, he would expatiate on it very differently than he did in 2015. Besides, even if he still opposes the term ‘American exceptionalism’, he sometimes unmistakably exhibits his indulgence in American exceptionalist thought—he believes in the American Dream, says that together Americans can accomplish absolutely anything, and that they ‘will shine for everyone to follow.’ In addition, exceptionalism was hinted at when he called Americans ‘God’s people’ (implicitly, the chosen nation beloved of God) and when he spoke of their ‘glorious freedoms’. While American exceptionalism is not the most important element of Trump’s patriotism, it would definitely be a mistake to say that no strains of exceptionalism are present in his thinking.

3.1.6. Summary

Let us now synthesize all the information we have gathered from the President’s spoken and written comments into a comprehensive, but also apt definition of American patriotism as conceived of by him:

American patriotism is the love for the USA and its patriotic citizens. This love entails always putting the interests of Americans before those of other nationals and being proud of the country, including its past. Patriotism is what makes one truly American. It means paying most diligent dues to the national flag and standing with the right hand on heart for the national anthem whenever it is on. To be a patriot, one must unquestioningly admire the military and the police, pray to the Judeo-Christian God who is the patron of the USA, and entreat Him that He may grant the country peace. Furthermore, patriots support President Trump’s policies and obey American laws. Patriots also hold firmly to the family values, American traditions, the idea of small government, and the literal interpretation of the US Constitution of which they stand in awe. Patriotism comprises the understanding that to be an inspiring example is the USA’s role in the world. It also includes the belief on one hand that

Americans have unlimited potential, and on the other that their country gives them the opportunity to realize that potential. Patriotism means working to uplift America, not just boasting about its greatness. It is also characterized by optimism about the country's prospects. Another part of patriotism is the readiness to discuss differences of opinion in an irenic manner with one's fellow citizens. Moreover, patriotism is the key to the total elimination of racial and gender prejudice in America because patriots will respect one another regardless of superficial differences. It is the ideology which when fully embraced unites the populace as if it had a single heart and leads to both collective and individual success. Through patriotism, the USA will not only regain its losses, but also be elevated to a formerly unattained level of prosperity.

The length of the definition is not to be wondered at since as we have seen that patriotism is a vital ingredient in Trump's successful rhetoric. He tries to gain the upper hand on those who disagree with him by painting them as deficient in their love of country, while he wraps himself in the American flag so to speak and makes his policy ideas seem like the natural outworkings of patriotic thought.

3.2. John McCain

Senator John McCain who was the Republican nominee for president in 2008 and passed away in 2018 was probably the best-known Republican critical of Donald Trump. McCain voted against a bill proposed by Trump's administration to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act (better known as Obamacare), which left Trump flabbergasted although they had been feuding for some time at that point (Abramson). Moreover, McCain strongly disapproved of Trump's attitude toward the allies of the United States and also toward Putin whom McCain perceived as an enemy (Moore). Let us see whether he disagreed with Trump about patriotism as well.

3.2.1. The essence of his patriotism

That there would be disagreements between McCain and Trump as to the concept of patriotism is indeed probable since McCain was invoking patriotism when criticizing Trump. One such instance of criticism was McCain's tweet in response to a prejudiced comment which the President reportedly made. During an unrecorded meeting in the Oval Office in January 2018, when immigration from Haiti and African countries was discussed, Trump is said to have asked, 'Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?' Once this made the news, McCain tweeted, 'Respect for the God-given dignity of every human being, no matter their race, ethnicity or other circumstances of their birth, is the essence of American patriotism. To believe otherwise is to oppose the very idea of America' (Berenson). A conflict between McCain's and Trump's idea of patriotism is already laid bare—while Trump believes that it is patriotic to put America first even if people from abroad are disrespected in the process, McCain thought that respect toward all people is required of American patriots.

3.2.2. 2017 speech at the National Constitution Center—contrast with Trump

John McCain provided the fullest exposition of what patriotism meant to him in the speech which he gave at the National Constitution Center after receiving the 2017 Liberty Medal. In this case, the Senator was not directly responding to any specific statement from the President, but it is apparent nonetheless that some of McCain's remarks were countering the notions which Trump, or at least his more extreme supporters had been spreading. The first comment pertaining to patriotism in McCain's speech was made when he spoke of his relationship to his 'old, dear friend' Joe Biden who is a politician of the competing

Democratic Party: ‘We often argued – sometimes passionately. But we believed in each other’s patriotism and the sincerity of each other’s convictions’ (‘Remarks: John McCain’).

In a later part of the speech, McCain expressed his love of the USA: ‘What a privilege it is to serve this big, boisterous, brawling, intemperate, striving, daring, beautiful, bountiful, brave, magnificent country.’ The words ‘boisterous, brawling, intemperate’ seem out of place here. They are normally used to describe negative qualities, but in this case they are cited in the middle of a compliment. Perhaps the Senator was trying to make the point that the reason to love one’s country should not be that one thinks it is perfect, and that part of patriotism is to acknowledge the country’s imperfections and to love it in spite of them. However, by following the three negative descriptors with six positive adjectives McCain might have also been trying to articulate his belief that although America has its faults they are more than offset by its excellencies. Be that as it may, the kind of patriotism to which he subscribed is clearly one which allows a degree of criticism of the country. In the next sentence, he was emphasizing the negatives even more than before, but paradoxically asserted as well that to live in America is a blessing: ‘With all our flaws, all our mistakes, with all the frailties of human nature as much on display as our virtues, with all the rancor and anger of our politics, we are blessed.’ McCain explained what makes Americans blessed when he continued:

We are living in the land of the free, the land where anything is possible. The land of the immigrant’s dream, the land with the storied past forgotten in the rush to the imagined future. The land that repairs and reinvents itself, the land where a person can escape the consequences of a self-centered youth and know the satisfaction of sacrificing for an ideal. The land where you can go from aimless rebellion to a noble cause, and from the bottom of your class to your party’s nomination for president. (‘Remarks: John McCain’)

What is here praised is the immense social mobility which allegedly exists in America. McCain, who at this point sprinkled some information about his life, was evidently a believer in the American Dream which seemed to be another cornerstone of his patriotism.

He went on to sing America’s praises for the role it had played in the world:

The international order we helped build from the ashes of world war, and that we defend to this day, has liberated more people from tyranny and poverty than ever before in history. This wondrous land has shared its treasures and ideals and shed the blood of its finest patriots to help make another better world. And as we did so, we

made our own civilization more just, freer, more accomplished and prosperous ...
(‘Remarks: John McCain’)

McCain believed that America’s active involvement in the affairs of other countries had increased global prosperity and helped to spread freedom worldwide. Essential to this effort were the brave patriots in the military. It is not to be overlooked that McCain’s idea that America benefits from improving the lives of people in foreign countries is opposed to Trump’s notion that countries of the world have become affluent by siphoning wealth from the USA.

In the next, long sentence, McCain clearly launched an attack on the Trumpian worldview:

To fear the world we have organized and led the three-quarters of a century, to abandon the ideals we have advanced around the globe, to refuse the obligations of international leadership and our duty to remain “the last best hope of earth”⁸ for the sake of some half-baked, spurious nationalism cooked up by people who would rather find scapegoats than solve problems, is as unpatriotic as an attachment to any other tired dogma of the past that Americans consigned to the ash heap of history.
(‘Remarks: John McCain’)

Trump is accused of being unpatriotic here although his name is not used in the speech at all. McCain’s usage of the phrase ‘the last best hope of earth’ evinced his belief in American exceptionalism. Thus, it is unsurprising that pride was part of his patriotism. At the Republican National Convention in 2008 he called himself ‘a proud citizen of the greatest country on Earth’ (‘Transcript: John McCain's Speech’). As we see in his remarks at the National Constitution Center, his kind of exceptionalism requires that the USA conduct itself as the leader of the free world and not look out merely for its own immediate interests. Such a notion of course does not sit well with Trump who is of an isolationist bent. Besides Trump’s isolationism, McCain also criticized Trump’s treatment of minorities when he spoke of ‘abandon[ing] the ideals we have advanced around the globe’ and ‘find[ing] scapegoats’ (‘Remarks: John McCain’).

McCain continued his speech with a pithy declaration: ‘We live in a land made of ideals, not blood and soil.’ This confirms what his claim that the essence of American

8 words memorably uttered by Abraham Lincoln

patriotism is adherence to egalitarianism suggested—the most important aspect of American patriotism for him was the devotion to American ideals, not affection to the homeland. We can consider his patriotism a political one.⁹ It is certainly much more abstract than Trump’s patriotism centred on ‘America First’. That said, McCain’s concept of patriotism obviously includes caring about Americans too: ‘Love of country is another way of saying love of your fellow countrymen’ (‘McCain and Obama on Sacrifice and Service’).

Let us now set forth more precisely what the ideals are that McCain believed America is made of. One of them is indubitably the respect for all humans regardless of their race, ethnicity, and country of origin. It can be reasonably inferred that another key ideal is liberty. After all, McCain gave the speech after receiving the Liberty Medal. While the concept of liberty is vague, we can see in another of his critiques of Trump that it includes the freedom of press and democracy (Nelson). He connected the latter with patriotism in 1999 while announcing his candidacy for president. He talked about the ‘new patriotic challenge’ which was a call ‘to defend the proposition that democracy is not only the most effective form of government, but the only moral government’ and to fight ‘the pervasive cynicism that is debilitating our democracy’ (‘Excerpts From McCain's Speech’).

Let us go back to the speech at the National Constitution Center and consider McCain’s particular choice of words ‘blood and soil’. That he chose them to epitomize the vision of America which he rejects is hardly accidental as these are the words white nationalists were chanting in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017. The slogan comes from the German ‘Blut und Boden’ which was used by the Nazis (Wagner). Although McCain may have intended to ascribe the blood and soil ideology to Trump with this remark, to do so is unwarranted. To claim that the President predicates the American identity on a bloodline is very precarious in the view of the fact that he said in his inaugural address ‘that whether we are black or brown or white we all bleed the same red blood of patriots’. He also stated that ‘[r]acism is evil’ and condemned the racist groups who rallied in Charlottesville as ‘repugnant to everything we hold dear as Americans’ (PBS NewsHour 2:44-3:01). However, in the press conference on race and violence in Charlottesville he did insist that not all who gathered to protest the removal of Confederate General Robert E. Lee’s statue were white nationalists, but that there were in fact ‘very fine people’ among the protesters. Trump even agreed with the protesters that removing Lee’s statue is wrong when he argued that in doing so ‘you’re changing history, you’re changing culture’. Moreover, he suggested that if Lee’s statues were

⁹ see section 2.3.3., pp. 10-11

taken away, the next in line could be those of Washington and Jefferson because they too owned slaves (NBC News 10:51-12:03). Nevertheless, I would interpret such argumentation as evidence of the President's ignorance of history¹⁰ and naivety regarding the protesters' motivation rather than a proof of his racism since in the same press conference he repeatedly described white nationalists as bad people. While Trump and McCain differed in their understanding of America, they actually both accepted the notion that it is a country for all races.

Having rejected the blood and soil narrative, McCain went on to link the American ideals with America's active engagement abroad:

We are the custodians of those ideals at home, and their champion abroad. We've done great good in the world. That leadership has had its costs, but we have become incomparably powerful and wealthy as we did. ... We will not thrive in a world where our leadership and ideals are absent. ('Remarks: John McCain').

We see that McCain considered America's involvement in the world both a moral good and a matter of self-interest. Near the end of the speech, he spoke of patriots as fighting for both Americans and foreigners: 'I've been inspired by the service of better patriots than me. I've seen Americans make sacrifices for our country and her causes and for people who were strangers to them but for our common humanity'. The notion that fighting for Americans and non-Americans goes hand in hand is of course discordant with Trump's rhetoric.

3.2.3. McCain on patriotism of his opponents

One other point of departure from Trump regarding patriotism seems to be McCain's greater readiness to believe that Americans with different views are patriots. This applies not only to Joe Biden of whom he spoke upon receiving the Liberty Medal. In a 2006 interview, when answering the question whether there is a difference between him and the Democrats, McCain said: 'We're patriots. We love America. And we may have different views' ('Transcript: Sen. John McCain'). In the same interview, he also said: '[B]ecause we disagree does not mean our opponents are unpatriotic.' In his speech at the 2008 Republican National

10 George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were founders of the USA, whereas Lee commanded the army of the Confederacy that threatened to destroy the USA. Furthermore, though slave owners, Washington and Jefferson 'laid the first seeds for the abolition of slavery' ('George Washington, Thomas Jefferson & Slavery'). Although Lee too wrote that slavery is an evil, he asserted that blacks are better off enslaved in America than living free in Africa and that '[t]he painful discipline they are undergoing is necessary for their instruction as a race' (Lee 82).

Convention, McCain was even friendly toward Barack Obama, his rival in the race for presidency, and Obama's supporters:

Despite our differences, much more unites us than divides us. We are fellow Americans, an association that means more to me than any other. We're dedicated to the proposition that all people are created equal and endowed by our Creator with inalienable rights. No country ever had a greater cause than that. ('Transcript: John McCain's Speech')

Shortly after that, McCain also said that 'after we've won,' (which did not happen) 'we're going to reach out our hand to any willing patriot'. The context suggests that the patriots to be reached out to were Democrats. However, McCain's approach to Obama was fraught with contradiction. On one hand, he professed the conviction that Obama is 'a very patriotic American' (Veracifier 0:06-0:12), but on the other, he would repeatedly say that 'Obama would rather lose a war in order to win a campaign' (Veracifier 0:55-1:18). Betraying one's country for selfish ambition—which is what McCain accused Obama of doing—is certainly unpatriotic. Strangely enough, a few months later but still prior to Obama's election, McCain would risk the ire of his own base by telling them that Obama is 'a decent person and a person that you do not have to be scared as President of United States [*sic*]' (ThePatriotsMaxims 0:48-1:04). To harmonize all the things which he said about Obama in 2008 is impossible. We could speculate that McCain made outrageous accusations against Obama because he used to think it would help his own campaign, but later realized it was actually unhelpful and/or simply wrong.

In general, McCain did not question the patriotism of his opponents, but in the case of Obama and Trump he made an exception. Although he did not explicitly say that they are unpatriotic, he very plainly implied it. When it comes to Obama, McCain recanted his accusations, and eventually even asked Obama to speak at his funeral. As for Trump, McCain was consistently critical of him till the very end (Shear and Rogers).

3.2.4. Respect for the flag

To complete the analysis of McCain's understanding of patriotism, his attitude to the American flag has to be considered. On flag burning, McCain commented: 'I think there should be some punishment, but, right now, the Supreme Court decision is that people are free to express themselves that way' ('John McCain: There 'should be some punishment)'). Even though McCain and Trump were pretty much on the same page here, McCain was not as

outraged over this as Trump who suggested a year in jail or the loss of citizenship as a punishment for flag burning. Concerning the taking a knee protests to which Trump took exception, McCain seemed wholly unfazed, saying only: ‘That’s their right to do what they want as citizens’ (Sanders).

3.2.5. Summary

According to McCain, American patriotism is love of fellow countrymen and love of and pride in the country whose fundamental tenet is the belief that God endowed all races and ethnicities with equal rights. American patriots know that the mission of the USA is to protect those rights. In order to do so, they will preserve democracy at home and try to spread it across the globe as much as possible. Patriots revere US soldiers who patriotically fight for freedom. Another important part of patriotism is the recognition that America’s duty is to be the leader of the world and that this leadership is beneficial for everyone. Patriots also believe that America is the land where dreams come true, where anything is possible. While patriots realize that America is not without its faults, they will not insult their wondrous country by intentionally damaging the American flag. Americans who believe all of the above are patriots though they may disagree about other things.

3.3. Barack Obama

Barack Obama served as the President of the United States from 2009 to 2017. There are pronounced ideological differences between him and John McCain who competed with him for the presidency (Whitesides) and the contrast with Donald Trump who succeeded him in the office is even starker (Smith).

3.3.1. 2008 speech in Independence—an attempt to define patriotism

Patriotism is something to which Obama devoted a lot of thought, in part because his own patriotism was questioned. He spoke of this in his speech in 2008, in Independence, Missouri, and proclaimed: ‘I will never question the patriotism of others in this campaign. And I will not stand idly by when I hear others question mine’ (‘Remarks in Independence’). He discussed how the concept of patriotism had been misused to divide rather than unite the American populace and to justify ‘questionable policies’, e.g. the internment of Japanese Americans in World War II. Obama advocated adopting a less divisive and nobler view of patriotism: ‘[N]o party or political philosophy has a monopoly on patriotism. And surely we can arrive at a definition of patriotism that, however rough and imperfect, captures the best of America's common spirit.’ However, he also says that arguments about patriotism should not vanish entirely because they are necessary when Americans debate what their country should be. Moreover, Obama indicates some behaviours which he considers unpatriotic in this section of the speech:

[S]ome of those in the so-called counter-culture of the Sixties reacted not merely by criticizing particular government policies, but by attacking the symbols, and in extreme cases, the very idea of America itself – by burning flags, by blaming America for all that was wrong with the world, and perhaps most tragically, by failing to honor those veterans coming home from Vietnam, something that remains a national shame to this day. (‘Remarks in Independence’)

The most unpatriotic action according to Obama is to despise the veterans. Also unpatriotic is to think that the USA is the source of all evil and to burn the American flag.¹¹ Nevertheless, ‘dissent’, Obama says, ‘does not make one unpatriotic’. On the contrary, ‘when our laws, our leaders or our government are out of alignment with our ideals, then the dissent of ordinary Americans may prove to be one of the truest expressions of patriotism.’ The greatest

¹¹ Despite that, Obama thinks that flag burning should not be punished as that would violate freedom of expression (Boyer).

American ideal for Obama is probably the one he mentioned at the outset of his speech when he spoke of the ‘first patriots’ who put their lives on the line in 1775 ‘not on behalf of a particular tribe or lineage, but on behalf of a larger idea. The idea of liberty. The idea of God-given, inalienable rights’ (‘Remarks in Independence’). This notion coincides with what John McCain called ‘the essence of patriotism’ and with his rejection of the blood and soil narrative, both of which were discussed in the chapter devoted to McCain. As for the belief that rights originate with God, it must be pointed out that Obama does not deem it absolutely necessary for patriotism. In his 2009 inaugural address he expressed that adherents of all religions and even of no religion have their place in America: ‘We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and non-believers’ (qtd. in Phillips).

In the above-mentioned speech in Missouri, Obama incidentally referred to patriotism as ‘the commitments that bind us to our nation, and to each other.’ Said differently, patriotism is love of both country and its people. However, Obama tells us much more about his concept of patriotism later in his speech after asking the question of what its definition would look like:

For me, as for most Americans, patriotism starts as a gut instinct, a loyalty and love for country rooted in my earliest memories. I'm not just talking about the recitations of the Pledge of Allegiance or the Thanksgiving pageants at school or the fireworks on the Fourth of July, as wonderful as those things may be. Rather, I'm referring to the way the American ideal wove its way throughout the lessons my family taught me as a child. (‘Remarks in Independence’)

We learn that patriotism is an intuitive loyalty and love instilled in childhood. Next, Obama proceeds to detail how his grandparents and mother taught him three important lessons about America: that Americans can do anything they set their minds to do, that defending America is a source of great pride, and that the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution protect all Americans no matter their skin colour from the injustices which people in other parts of the world experience. Some of this already hints at Obama’s belief that the USA is exceptional, but what he says afterward makes it perfectly clear: ‘As I got older, that gut instinct – that America is the greatest country on earth – would survive my growing awareness of our nation's imperfections’. It is notable that while previously the ‘gut instinct’ of patriotism was equated with ‘a loyalty and love for country’, now it is described as the feeling ‘that America is the greatest country on earth’. In other words, Obama matter-of-factly swaps patriotism with American exceptionalism, intimating that they are inseparable in his

mind. Nonetheless, his type of exceptionalism does not prevent him from insisting that the USA can become greater than it is now. He says that ‘what makes America great has never been its perfection but the belief that it can be made better.’

Informative of Obama’s view of patriotism is also his understanding of why the American Revolutionary War was waged:

[F]or the sake of that belief – that we could be governed by laws, not men; that we could be equal in the eyes of those laws; that we could be free to say what we want and assemble with whomever we want and worship as we please; that we could have the right to pursue our individual dreams but the obligation to help our fellow citizens pursue theirs. (‘Remarks in Independence’)

If this is true, the first patriots fought for the rule of law, equality before the law, freedom of expression, assembly, and religion. Last on the list are individual liberty in exchange for helping others. This emphasis on fellowship to counterbalance individualism is quite typical of Obama as will later be elaborated. After saying this, he greatly emphasizes ‘this essential American idea – that we are not constrained by the accident of birth but can make of our lives what we will – that has defined my life, just as it has defined the life of so many other Americans.’ It is evident that Obama believes in the American dream.

Obama argues that the ideas and beliefs which he enumerated form the backbone of patriotism, that it is they which give patriotism its unifying quality:

[F]or me, patriotism is always more than just loyalty to a place on a map or a certain kind of people. Instead, it is also loyalty to America's ideals – ideals for which anyone can sacrifice ... I believe it is this loyalty that allows a country teeming with different races and ethnicities, religions and customs, to come together as one. (‘Remarks in Independence’)

The notion that patriotism is what draws different groups of Americans together is also accepted by Donald Trump for whom this is a very important point. Nevertheless, as was discussed in the chapter about Trump, he puts the main stress on saluting the flag and allegiance to America as ‘a place on a map’, whereas Obama thinks that it is abstract ideals which play the major role in uniting Americans. These ideals are also the basis of American exceptionalism for him. He spoke of ‘the singular greatness of our ideals, and their proven capacity to inspire a better world’. It seems that Obama views the USA as ‘a city upon a hill’

which illumines the rest of the globe, but interestingly, in the next section of the speech he goes back to the idea that America is imperfect and patriots therefore always have to strive to make it better:

Of course, precisely because America isn't perfect, precisely because our ideals constantly demand more from us, patriotism can never be defined as loyalty to any particular leader or government or policy. ... The young preacher from Georgia, Martin Luther King, Jr., who led a movement to help America confront our tragic history of racial injustice and live up to the meaning of our creed – he was a patriot. The young soldier who first spoke about the prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib – he is a patriot. Recognizing a wrong being committed in this country's name; insisting that we deliver on the promise of our Constitution – these are the acts of patriots, men and women who are defending that which is best in America. ('Remarks in Independence')

Patriotic devotion to America as is should in Obama's view be anything but blind. Loyalty to America's founding ideals, on the other hand, must be unswerving, but though it is the most important part of patriotism it is insufficient on its own:

[P]atriotism must, if it is to mean anything, involve the willingness to sacrifice – to give up something we value on behalf of a larger cause. For those who have fought under the flag of this nation...; for those like John McCain who have endured physical torment in service to our country – no further proof of such sacrifice is necessary. ('Remarks in Independence')

Obama affirms that veterans, including his Republican rival McCain, are patriots. For other Americans who are not soldiers, nor have family members in the army, however, Obama complains, the 'call to service never came' (he refers to the period from 2001 when George W. Bush became president). In conjunction with that, he points out that '[t]he wealthiest ... saw their tax obligations decline, even as the costs of war continued to mount' and speaks of 'absence of leadership from Washington'. This suggests that Obama thinks that patriotic sacrifice does not have to be purely voluntary, but can be mandated by government, e.g. patriots accept that they have to pay taxes, knowing that by doing so they are serving their country. This is consistent with Obama's belief that one of America's founding principles is that Americans have 'the obligation to help [their] fellow citizens pursue' their dreams. We

can deduce from his remarks that the very rich should not seek tax cuts because they understand that by paying more they help the rest of the nation.

Besides obligatory patriotic service in form of paying taxes, Obama thinks there should also be voluntary service incentivized by government: ‘We should expand AmeriCorps and grow the Peace Corps. We should encourage national service by making it part of the requirement for a new college assistance program’. Nevertheless, Obama certainly does not believe that patriotism is essentially dependent on the state. His belief that it is supremely patriotic to defy the powers that be when they fail to live up to the American ideals runs totally counter to that. Obama soon clarifies that ‘true patriotism cannot be forced or legislated with a mere set of government programs. Instead, it must reside in the hearts of our people, and cultivated in the heart of our culture, and nurtured in the hearts of our children.’

The parents are to teach their children about how the USA was founded and how in face of challenges the American nation has been becoming ‘stronger, and more prosperous, and more united, and more just.’ The children should also know ‘that America has been a force for good in the world, and that other nations and other people have looked to us as the last, best hope of Earth.’ Like McCain, Obama espouses the type of American exceptionalism which entails the USA’s acting as the world leader. He continues, ‘It is up to us to teach them that it is good to give back to one’s community; that it is honorable to serve in the military; that it is vital to participate in our democracy and make our voices heard.’ Helping one’s fellow citizens and military service are again associated with patriotism. His comment about democracy probably refers to voting and making one’s voice heard could translate to political activism which leads us back to dissent.

Obama also says that parents should teach their children ‘a lesson that those of us in politics too often forget: that patriotism involves not only defending this country against external threat, but also working constantly to make America a better place for future generations.’ With this statement, he begins to infuse his political views into the concept of patriotism. Although he said earlier that no party has a monopoly on patriotism, he now seems to define patriotism along party lines when he critically alludes to Republicans’ policies or lack thereof. It is to be noted that he does not name the Republican party or any of its members, neither does he say that he is speaking of the then administration. He simply uses the general subject ‘we’, but anyone familiar with the political situation at that time can understand who he is talking about. Obama speaks of the ‘mountains of debt’ which Bush’s administration incurred. He also criticizes the lack of investment in sustainable energy, education, and science, implying that those responsible for it do not care for America’s future.

Obama ends his short commentary on the politics of the time by laying out this principle: ‘Just as patriotism involves each of us making a commitment to this nation that extends beyond our own immediate self-interest, so must that commitment extend beyond our own time here on earth.’

The last but not least important statement regarding patriotism in his 2008 speech in Missouri is this:

In the end, it may be this quality that best describes patriotism in my mind – not just a love of America in the abstract, but a very particular love for, and faith in, the American people. That is why our heart swells with pride at the sight of our flag; ... For we know that the greatness of this country – its victories in war, its enormous wealth, its scientific and cultural achievements – all result from the energy and imagination of the American people; ... (‘Remarks in Independence’)

3.3.2. 2004 Democratic National Convention Keynote Address

In this speech, Obama plainly demonstrated his belief in American exceptionalism when he said he knew ‘that, in no other country on earth, [was his] story even possible.’ The story he was talking about was that he was born to a father from Kenya and a mother from Kansas, was given the African name ‘Barack’, but despite that got into politics and was even asked to give the Keynote Address at the DNC. Apparently, he thinks that the USA is exceptional among other things in that it is the most open and least racist country in the world. He does not see America’s true greatness in ‘the height of [its] skyscrapers, or the power of [its] military, or the size of [its] economy.’ According to him, ‘[Americans]’ pride is based on a very simple premise,’ expressed in the Declaration of Independence: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. That they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights. That among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.’ This is what Obama considers ‘the true genius of America’ (‘Keynote Address’). However, he thinks that the patriotic sense of community is needed for this idea to be put into practice:

[A]longside our famous individualism, there's another ingredient in the American saga. A belief that we are connected as one people. If there's a child on the south side of Chicago who can't read, that matters to me, even if it's not my child. ... It's that

fundamental belief - I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper¹² - that makes this country work. It's what allows us to pursue our individual dreams, yet still come together as a single American family. ('Keynote Address')

In the same speech, we can see that Obama is against using patriotism to sow division. He says: 'There are patriots who opposed the war in Iraq and patriots who supported it.' One more relevant part of the speech is Obama's characterization of Americans as an optimistic nation. In his view, hope 'is God's greatest gift to us, the bedrock of this nation; the belief in things not seen; the belief that there are better days ahead' ('Keynote Address'). The faith in brighter tomorrows is a significant part of patriotism also for Trump who promised that America will be great again.

3.3.3. 2015 speech in Selma—contrast with Trump

In 2015, on the 50th anniversary of the so-called Bloody Sunday when police attacked marchers for civil rights after they crossed a bridge in Selma, Obama gave a speech there in which he extolled the marchers as heroes and patriots. He argued that their actions were an important step on the way toward a just society which is yet to be achieved. The themes of making America an ever more perfect union and of dissent which were already present in his speech in Independence, Missouri, in 2008 reappear here very prominently. He puts to the forefront of the American story civil rights activists, feminists, and minorities and forcefully asserts that they are just as American and patriotic as those who fought for America's independence in the Revolutionary War. Notably, he even depicts illegal immigrants as animated by the same impulse as patriots:

The American instinct that led these young men and women to pick up the torch and cross this bridge is the same instinct that moved patriots to choose revolution over tyranny. It's the same instinct that drew immigrants from across oceans and the Rio Grande ... We're the immigrants who stowed away on ships to reach these shores, the huddled masses yearning to breathe free¹³ – Holocaust survivors, Soviet defectors, the Lost Boys of Sudan. We are the hopeful strivers who cross the Rio Grande because

12 An allusion to Genesis 4:9 where Cain, having slain his own brother, asks, 'Am I my brother's keeper?'

13 see pp. 4-5

they want their kids to know a better life.¹⁴ That's how we came to be. (qtd. in Rhodan)

By describing illegal immigration as part of American identity, Obama presented a vision of America which contrasts with Trump's who believes it imperative to 'build a wall' (SatisfactionTV) to keep away illegal immigrants from Mexico whom Obama styled 'hopeful strivers'. Trump thinks that very many of them are 'bringing drugs', 'crime', and are 'rapists' (Trump of the Day 0:17-0:44). Another, smaller difference between Obama and Trump that emerges when we compare Obama's speech in Selma with Trump's utterances has to do with the attitude to the past. Obama says, 'We respect the past, but we don't pine for it. We don't fear the future; we grab for it' (qtd. in Rhodan). His patriotism is more forward-looking in that it lacks the nostalgic quality which Trump supplied by promising to make America great *again* and saying, 'We are proud of our history.'¹⁵

3.3.4. On the protests of African Americans

However, even Obama thinks that American history can be a source of pride for Americans, although not just because it was glorious but also because understanding the injustices of the past lets Americans appreciate how far they have come. In the speech given at the dedication of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in 2016, Obama said:

[O]ur glory derives not just from our most obvious triumphs, but how we've wrested triumph from tragedy, and how we've been able to remake ourselves ... It is in this embrace of truth, as best as we can know it, in the celebration of the entire American experience, where real patriotism lies. ... It is an act of patriotism to understand where we've been, ... (qtd. in Reilly)

It is not patriotic to ignore the dark chapters of American history. One reason is that tragedies when overcome give rise to victories. The other is that they make us realize that America has never been perfect and that those who love it need to address its imperfections. Obama said of the museum:

This is the place to understand how protests and love of country don't merely coexist, but inform each other. How men can probably win the gold for their country, but still

14 a reference to illegal immigrants from Mexico (Yaffe-Bellany et al.)

15 see section 3.1.4., p. 19

insist on raising a black-gloved fist. How we can wear an I Can't Breathe T-shirt,¹⁶ and still grieve for fallen police officers. (qtd. in Reilly)

Obama's reference to 'win[ning] the gold for their country, but still insist[ing] on raising a black-gloved fist' shows that he is not unsympathetic even to protests during the national anthem, which were roundly condemned by Trump. At the 1968 Olympics, black American sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos who won the gold and the bronze respectively raised black-gloved fists to protest how blacks were treated in the USA while its national anthem was playing (Cosgrove). Since Obama approved of the protest at the Olympics, or at least defended the patriotism of the two protesters, it is not surprising that he did not call into question the patriotism of the rugby players who at the end of his second term in office started taking a knee on the field when the anthem was played. When Obama was asked by a soldier about his feelings regarding the players who refuse to stand for the anthem, he answered in a very careful manner. He began his answer by saying, 'honoring our flag and anthem is part of what binds us together as a nation'. Shortly after that, however, he started to emphasize that the players are within their rights to protest as they do. He even connected this fact to American exceptionalism, saying, 'part of what makes this country special is that we respect people's rights to have a different opinion'. Obama did not try to paint either the protesters or the people who are angry at them as bad or unpatriotic, but he encouraged the two sides to try to understand each other: 'I want Mr Kaepernick and others who are on a knee ... to listen to the pain that that may cause somebody who for example had a spouse or a child who was killed in combat ... But I also want people to think about the pain that he may be expressing about somebody who's lost a loved one that they think was unfairly shot.' Obama finished his answer by paying respects to the soldiers who protect Americans' right to 'express any political view of any sort' (CNN, 'Obama discusses Kaepernick'). Overall, Obama was not supportive of taking a knee, but he would not accuse those who took a knee of not loving America.

3.3.5. Not wearing the flag pin

Although the national symbols are certainly not disregarded by Obama, whether one pays homage to them is on its own not a very good indicator of patriotism in his mind. When Obama was first running for president, a reporter noticed that he did not have the American

¹⁶ 'I can't breathe' were the last words of Eric Garner who was a black man killed by police. Some players in NBA started wearing T-shirts with those words written on them to draw attention to police brutality (Strauss).

flag pin on (Wright and Miller). Obama explained his decision not to wear it in this way: ‘[The pin] became a substitute for ... true patriotism, which is speaking out on issues that are of importance to our national security ... Instead, I'm going to try to tell the American people what I believe will make this country great, and hopefully that will be a testimony to my patriotism.’ He seems to think that there is a phoney kind of patriotism which Americans should be wary of. True patriotism is in his view about doing what is beneficial for the country. Obama later said, ‘You show your patriotism by how you treat your fellow Americans, especially those who serve. And you show your patriotism by being true to your values and ideals.’ Symbolic displays are not the core of patriotism for him. Eventually, though, Obama started wearing the flag pin (CNN, ‘NM: OBAMA FLAG PIN’), possibly to avoid suspicions of being unpatriotic.

3.3.6. Obama on patriotism of his opponents

As we have seen, Obama has a lot to say about patriotism, but he rarely uses the concept to openly attack certain people. He launched one such personal attack on July 3, 2008 when speaking about Bush’s increase of the national debt: ‘[T]he way Bush has done it over the last eight years is to take out a credit card from the Bank of China in the name of our children, driving up our national debt from \$5 trillion ... so that we now have over \$9 trillion of debt that we are going to have to pay back ... That's irresponsible. It's unpatriotic’ (maywhitley31). Though in this speech Obama seemed to say Bush is not a patriot, in the speech at Georgetown Waterfront in Washington, D.C., in 2014 he was much more generous to his opponents. He strongly criticized Republicans for preventing him from passing the economic policies which he wanted, but in spite of that, he said: ‘Republicans in Congress, they’re patriots, they love their country, they love their families. They just have a flawed theory of the economy that they can’t seem to get past’ (‘Remarks by the President on the Economy’). In other words, they mean well for their country, but do not know what is actually good for it. Interestingly, Obama presented in the same speech his idea of ‘economic patriotism’ to which Republicans would not adhere—government help for the working-class, higher taxes for the rich, investment in education, passing a law ensuring that women are remunerated fairly. Set against such a standard, Republicans would not qualify as ‘economic patriots’. Although Obama explicitly said that they are patriots, he was apparently trying to show that he is more patriotic than they.

3.3.7. Summary

According to Obama, American patriotism is the intuitive love of and loyalty to the USA which is usually taught by one's family. It is based on the belief that America is the greatest country on earth, the country which is steadily becoming better while it is doing good and giving hope to other countries thanks to its singular ideals—inalienable rights and equality of all humans, freedom of speech, of assembly, and of religion, and the liberty to make of one's life what one wills, but also the duty to help other citizens to do the same. Patriots respect the US Constitution and the Declaration of Independence whence are drawn these principles which enable American patriotism to unite people of various ethnicities and beliefs. Honouring the American flag and anthem is also a unifying, though less important part of patriotism. A crucial aspect of patriotism is the respect for US veterans and soldiers. Patriotism is caring for all Americans which manifests itself both in helping people directly, but also in the willingness to pay taxes to the government which gives aid to those who need it. Despite that, patriotism is also the readiness to stand up to the government when its policies conflict with American ideals. Patriots realize that America does not yet fully embody its lofty ideals and for that reason they persistently work to make it better. It is patriotic to vote, to argue for what one believes is good for America, and even to peacefully protest in order to raise awareness of an issue. Patriotism is to proudly defend the country from enemies without, but also to make sure that one's own actions do not have destructive consequences for the coming generations. Patriotism is the faith in the American people who can achieve anything that they resolve to do. Patriots respect the American history and want to learn even about its tragic elements, but they are even more keen on the future toward which they gaze full of hope. Patriots can subscribe to different political philosophies and they may happen to support policies which harm the country, but they are still patriots if they do so in good faith. People who are migrating to America or who live there illegally can be American patriots as well.

Like Trump, Obama developed quite a complex concept of patriotism which supports his own politics. For instance, the idea that the USA was never perfect, but is in the process of improving legitimized Obama's call for reforms. Sometimes, also like Trump, he utilized patriotism to attack his opponents, though at other times he was gracious to them.

4. Conclusion

It is undeniable that Trump, McCain, and Obama agreed on several points regarding patriotism. Unsurprisingly, they concurred with the Merriam-Webster definition of patriotism as ‘love for or devotion to one’s country’. All three spoke of love of country in a way that plainly shows that it is synonymical to patriotism for them. They agreed as well that love of fellow countrymen is a crucial part of love of country. As for ‘devotion to one’s country’, Trump closely linked it to patriotism by proclaiming National Day of Patriotic Devotion. McCain said that both he and Obama are ‘dedicated to the proposition that all people are created equal’. ‘Dedication’ is a synonym of devotion and equality of all people is what McCain considered America’s cause.¹⁷ Obama did not often say ‘devotion’, but he frequently equated patriotism with loyalty, another synonym of devotion. Notably, besides love and devotion they all connected patriotism also with pride. This is especially evident with Trump who spoke of ‘national pride’ and ‘pride in our country’. Obama said, ‘[O]ur heart swells with pride at the sight of our flag’, and McCain called himself ‘a proud citizen of the greatest country on Earth’. None of the three men when discussing patriotism failed to voice his belief that America is better than other countries, that it is somehow exceptional. Another part of patriotism which all three identified was military service and respect for those who serve or did serve.

When it comes to other topics, disagreements start to emerge. The politicians agreed that patriots honour the flag and the anthem, but Obama and McCain did not specify what it means except that patriots will not destroy the flag, while Trump made his idea of honouring the national symbols clear: ‘You have to stand proudly for the national anthem’; ‘we salute our flag’. Although Obama and McCain did not say they approve of kneeling for the anthem, they did not condemn it as unpatriotic like Trump did. Interestingly, Obama praised as patriotic the black sprinters’ protest at the 1968 Olympics which was similar to the recent taking a knee protests. Though the sprinters were standing, they bowed their heads and each raised a fist. I think it safe to assume that Trump would denounce such a protest were it to happen today. Differences are also visible in their understanding of American exceptionalism. McCain, and Obama described the USA as ‘the last best hope of earth’, the country whose job is to help the rest of the world, whereas Trump rejects this aspect of exceptionalism, insisting that America must protect only its own interests since other countries would bring it down.¹⁸

17 see p. 30

18 see p. 15

On the related topic of American dream, Trump is again in opposition to McCain and Obama. He thinks that the American dream is meant for those who already are American citizens, while McCain and Obama emphasized that it is for immigrants too. McCain called it ‘the immigrant’s dream’ and Obama fully embraced the notion that America is the nation of immigrants when he said, ‘We are the hopeful strivers who cross the Rio Grande because they want their kids to know a better life.’ The point that divides Trump from Obama and McCain as well is the question of whether one’s opponents are patriots. Trump accused Democratic politicians who did not clap during his 2018 State of the Union of lack of patriotism and he never affirmed the patriotism of any Democrat. McCain and Obama on the other hand would explicitly confirm that their opponents are patriots, though neither confirmed that Trump is.

It seems we are dealing with two substantially different types of patriotism—one is represented by Obama and McCain, the other by Trump. To confirm that, let us see what the basis of each man’s patriotism is. Obama and McCain put most emphasis on the belief that all humans have inalienable rights—a cosmopolitan ideal stressing that we should care about all humans everywhere. Trump’s fundamental principle of ‘America First’ says the opposite of that in a way—we should care less about people abroad and always put ourselves first. The other thing that Trump puts tremendous stress on is the flag and anthem. This fixation on national symbols is suggestive of extreme patriotism and is not shared by Obama and McCain who espouse more of a political patriotism centred on the ideas found in the Declaration of Independence. Lastly, an underlying opposition of inclusivity versus exclusivity may be detected. It can be illustrated on the different ways these politicians invoke God. McCain and Obama point to God as the source of every person’s rights, whereas Trump speaks of God only in connection with Americans and even excludes unbelievers by saying that ‘America is a nation of believers’. To conclude, I consider my hypothesis to be confirmed since it is manifest that at least two clearly conflicting notions of patriotism are at work in the US political arena.

5. References

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