

GET US OUT FROM HERE!

From: Stories, Parables and Fables of life of P. Ribes, s.j.

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Intent of the story:

- ✓ *On social values, attitudes to others, nationalisms, patriotism, oppression, unjust structures, exploitation and liberation*
- ✓ *To reflect on the relationships between man to man, and man to structures*
- ✓ *To criticize the 'depersonalized' character of our 'consumerist' society*
- ✓ *To 'explode the myths' of nationalism, patriotism, nation-states, love for one's country and the like as they are used or rather miss-used by politicians and those in positions of power.*
- ✓ *To realize that very often the so-called 'motherland' is sort of an imaginary entity created by those in power and others moved by vested interests. In most cases, it is just a 'socio-political make believe'.*
- ✓ *To realize that persons, however good as individuals, when they are caught up in a collectivity, or forming part of a socio economic and political structure, unawares, they may turn to be both agents and victims of alienation, injustice, oppression and exploitation.*
- ✓ *To realize that true freedom from exploration, discrimination and injustice will hardly ever come from those who hold the reins of power, be political, military, economical, cultural or otherwise, but from those below, the exploited and marginalized.*

Target audience

Perceptive and educated adolescents, youth or grown-ups. The impact of this story on the participants will depend on their education, intuitive capacity and cultural background. .

The Story

Once upon a time, there was a shipwreck on the high seas. Swimming across rough and treacherous waters, a number of survivors reached the shores of a lonely and unknown island. Not a man or a woman had ever put their feet there!

However, desperately they tried to get out from there and return to their country, they never succeeded. They were trapped in that little island.

Out of sheer necessity, they built some simple shacks and cultivated a few patches of soil to keep their bodies and souls together. Their existence was miserable and lonely. Yet, they hoped against hope that some day; somehow, some one would come up there, and restitute them to their homes.

One day, with excitement, they sighted a warship-casting anchor not far from the island's shores. **A crowd of military men and politicians** wearing all sorts of insignia and flags

came ashore. None of them, however, took notice of the terrible plight of the ship wreckers in the island.

The visitors held a rally on one of the beaches of the island. There were speeches, a parade, the hoisting of an unknown flag, salvos and salutes to the flag.

At the end of the ceremony in his final speech, one of their big bosses addressed the islanders: “Dear compatriots, new citizens of our great nation. Today is a red letter day for you, inhabitants of this island. Today, this beautiful paradise of yours has been annexed to our great nation. You have become part of our glorious history and cultural heritage! You are fortunate to belong to our ‘motherland’, so rich and proud of her ancient culture and history. From now on, according to our most honorable constitution, you will enjoy equality of rights along with all our citizens”.

After that, they made ready to leave the island. Our ship wreckers begged and begged from them: “Please, Sirs, get us out from here!” Shocked and amazed the politicians and military men replied: “To get out from here? How can you think of leaving this island, part and parcel of our nation? You have to stay here to protect the interests of “our” country! Remember, you have to be faithful and devoted citizens as we, ourselves, are. Our country needs you. You need our country!”

After singing some national anthem, the visitors left. Our ship wreckers remained behind, of course, very proud and most happy to know that they belonged to a great “unknown” nation.

After many days, the islanders spotted a large luxury liner approaching the island. They were very excited in the hope that the new comers would free them from there.

As the liner reached the island’s shores, a stream of strangely dressed people – **tourists**, of course – loaded with photo-cameras, video shooting machines, binoculars and other modern gadgets landed on the shore. No one of them cared to speak to the islanders and find out who they were and what their needs might be.

They rushed here and there all over the island taking snaps and shots of trees, flowers and birds, the beaches and of course, of the “islanders” clothed in rags.

Timidly, the islanders kept begging from them: “Please, Sirs, get us out from here!” But, the tourists were too busy to pay attention to them. After long bouts of drinking, eating, laughing, smoking and merry making, the visitors boarded their luxury liner, and off they went to visit some other exotic islands.

Many days later, a helicopter made its appearance in the blue and unvisited skies of the island. It landed right in the midst of the Islanders. In its tail, one could see the glorious colors of their country. Full of hope the ship wreckers waited for their visitors. From the belly of the helicopter, they saw some men emerging, loaded with big boxes and strange apparatuses. “Will these men get us out from here”, they wondered.

The new comers – **technicians, scientists and bureaucrats** - opened their boxes, took their measuring instruments and scientific gear and without waiting a minute they began their work. They measured the island, mapped every nook and corner of it, its beaches, its little rivulets and small lakes. Their scientific mission over, silently and in a hurry, off they flew, leaving the ship wreckers alone in utter disappointment.

Again many days later a big, bulky vessel arrived. The hopes of the islanders rose high again. They exclaimed, “At last our liberators have arrived! From the hold of that monstrous vessel their ‘would- be- liberators’ – **merchants, businessmen, entrepreneurs** - emerged bringing along tractors, bulldozers, cranes, lorries and huge machines. Mercilessly, for countless days, they went about the island felling trees, digging trenches, making timber, plucking fruits, excavating the soil, taking away valuable minerals and samples of stones, polluting the island and denuding it from its beauty and wealth.

When the islanders remonstrated against the depredation and denudation of their island, the intruders – **their countrymen, their compatriots,** – answered: “Our great nation, our motherland needs the wealth of this island! Do not forget that you too belong to our nation”. Months later, the looters loaded their trophies in the hull of their monstrous ship and off they went.

Our survivors were left behind again, this time, stripped of the little wealth, exploited, deserted and more forgotten than ever.

Years later, close to the shores of the island, there was another shipwreck. A large number of survivors – **shipwrecks of course** -reached the sands of the island on improvise rafters made out of broken pieces of their ship.

After long days, nay even moths of hard work, **all the survivors - the former and the latter ones** - with one mind and heart, helping each other, constructed out of the bits of their lost vessel, some strong and large rafters.

Finally, helping and encouraging each other, they sailed away to freedom, away from their ‘glorious motherland’.

(Inspired on a Spanish Audio-visual “ Sacadnos de Aqui!”)

HOW TO TRIGGER A DISCUSSION BASED ON THIS PARABLE

You may follow any of the two methods suggested below:

First Method: Open Discussion.

- After the story has been presented to the audience, by reading or by giving them Xerox copies of it, tell them to reflect on it and draw out of it as many lessons as possible.
- Request them to put down in writing their thoughts and findings.
- Then, initiate a discussion on the points brought in by the participants.

Second Method: *Restricted Discussion:*

- After the presentation of the story, ask the audience to reply in writing to all or to some of the questions suggested below.
- Request them to write their reflections
- Conduct a discussion based on the answers and the reflections coming up from the floor.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR A RESTRICTED DISCUSSION.

1. What mentalities, values and attitudes of modern man, in general, are portrayed in the various sets of persons mentioned in the story?
2. What socio-politic-economic evils are hinted at in the story?
3. Do you agree or disagree with the criticism the story is leveling– in a sarcastic way – against some of the existing socio-political and economic structures and ideologies.
4. What are the necessary attitudes of mind to effectively understand the plight of others, to communicate with them and help them?
5. In what way are we part and parcel of the unjust and alienating structures of our society? What can we do about it?
6. Explain the following statements:
 - ‘ The evil of today’s world is that we love things, not persons’
 - “We have to break away from a centripetal way of life towards centrifugal one”
 - “Only the exploited can understand and help the exploited”. *Only the later ship wreckers could help the former ship wreckers”*
 - Selfishness may masquerade as patriotism.
 - Patriotism is of human invention.
 - God made people, people made nations.
 - Love unites, patriotism divides.
7. What do you understand by the following words? What their right understanding should be?
 - Motherland
 - Country
 - Nation
 - State
 - Patriotism
 - Being a citizen of one’s country
 - Cultural Heritage
8. How did nations emerge in the course of history?
9. What were the forces underlining the process of nationhood?
10. Have nation and states been born out of the free will of the people or from other sources? *Political pacts and agreements,, Military Conquests? Force? Suppressions? Convenience?*
11. How much wars, pacts among powerful nations, kings, emperors, dictators, conquerors, wealthy people, etc. had to do in the ‘making and unmaking’ of countries, nations and states?
12. What have been the results? Beneficial and baneful?

13. What is meant by “The power structures? (*The Arm Forces, the Police, The Administrative the Legislative, The Judiciary, The economy and The Banking system, the Educational set up, and the Mass Media*) ,
14. In all the countries of the world, whose interests “the power structures” protect and defend? The interests of the masses or of those of the elite who hold the reins of power? Why? How?
15. What true patriotism should mean? Love for the land of the country? Love for one’s our past history, love for the economical interests of the wealthy, love for the interests of the political parties, love for one’s own class interests or what? Explain. (*Love for the people of our country*)
16. Is it worth dying for one’s own country? Why? Actually, what does this sentence should mean? (*Dying to defend the rights of the people of our country against aggressions both from outside and also from inside the country*)

IDEAS FOR AN INPUT:

- The liberation of the exploited and marginalized will not come from those in power, the wealthy, the politicians, the arm forces, the educated, and the scientific community. It will come only from the ‘grass-roots’ from within the marginalized themselves. (*Only the “ship wreckers of the world” can save their “likes”.*)
- In all countries of the world, century after century, the poor, the voiceless and the forgotten crowds, THE HAVE- NOTS have been by-passed by the HAVES, THE POWERFUL and THE PRIVILEGED ONES.
- It’s has not always been done intentionally or consciously, but in the course time, by the very dynamics of the existing structures., it happens as a matter of fact,
- The so called ‘patriotism’, love for one’s motherland and loyalty to one’s own nation, very often, is being used, by the elites, as sort of opium to put the poor, the simple and the oppressed masses to sleep.
- It’s unfortunate that the appeal to patriotism and love for one’s own country, has been used by the ruling minorities as a means for maintaining the existing inequalities and, the “status quo”
- It also works as a mechanism to pacify the consciences of the higher- ups and as a justification of their injustices
- The “status quo” has become an idol at whose altar the rights of the exploited and of the minorities are sacrificed!
- True patriotism means **love for the people of our country - our brothers and sister citizens - not a glorification of our ‘past exploits, of our old history and of an illustrious cultural heritage’.**
- All those things are dead entities; it is our brothers and sisters - rich and poor – and alive today who make our country. If they were not living persons today, our country wouldn’t exist.
- Any country minus its inhabitants would be just a desert, a desolate waste. Nothing lovable!
- If anyone says that he loves his country and exploits his countrymen is a liar.
- People in positions of power – consciously or unconsciously – try to use their influence to favor their own class and their interests not the greater good of their countrymen.

