

TO FIGHT OR NOT TO FIGHT¹

by

Evgenia Kleidona

Introduction(s)

I have always considered myself polite enough to never skip introductions. But, lately, I have come to realize that if the purpose of introducing oneself is to disclose one's identity, it seems unlikely that simply a name could do the trick, since people are much more than merely a name.

I have always known that being a fighter is who I am, what I am, why I am. Even as a child, I remember that just knowing what my life path was gave me more pleasure than actually walking it. Being a fighter came as natural to me as swimming is for fish and flying is for birds. But unlike fish and birds, I was not a slave to my "nature." I managed to harness it and direct it towards a specific direction, that of fighting for any noble cause. There were, of course, many who insisted that being a fighter is certainly not appropriate at all! After all, the sword would be too heavy for my *petit arm*! But, I was sure that my *petit arm* would not mind carrying it at all. Better a heavy sword than a heavy conscience.

The Journey...

They say good fighters can sense when a battle is bound to break out. But, one does not have to be a fighter to sense it in my Homeland. For too long we have been facing a crisis, or I should rather say an array of crises, attacking us on all fronts. If we ever stood one chance against this challenge, it is only because we would be standing united. But ironically, that is exactly one of our biggest crises. My Homeland lies broken down into pieces like a shattered glass. A battle is waging all right, but this is not the crisis we will be fighting against, it is each other. You can smell the rage in the air like gunpowder; and we are only one match away...

They also say good fighters know how to pick their fights. But, I can tell you with certainty, it is easier said than done. Too many battles, too many sides, too many questions. What to fight for, who to fight for, and more importantly... is it worth it anymore? Is it truly possible to glue a shattered glass back together? Even if you gather all the pieces, once you touch them they will cut you or make you bleed. So is it really worth the bloodshed? Perhaps, we have grown too old to engage in such fights, or even worse, too complacent. I fear that along with our faith and hope we have also lost our

¹ This essay is inspired by Manic Street Preachers' song "The Everlasting." More specifically, the narration draws upon the main themes of the song and tackles them in a creative way within the scope of Greek and global reality.

own sense of selfhood. And perhaps the biggest price we have to pay is that we have also lost each other.



Throughout human history, people have been building barriers to keep themselves protected from all the enemies around. The question, however, is: how do we define our enemies before we raise these barriers? Or, is it actually the barriers that define who our enemies are? Almost every aspect of our human identity – our origin or the color of our skin, our religious beliefs or our mating choices, our language or our education, our profession or our income – has become an excuse for further and further segregation. We seem to have drawn too many lines among us, among people who were not supposed to be fighting against each other. It makes you wonder if there is really any war that is not a civil one.

For the last couple of decades, my Homeland has become a destination for thousands of people who have fled their own Homelands in search for a refuge or better yet a new home. But I wonder if they have ever found what they have been looking for. I wonder if they have ever really felt, or what is perhaps more important, if *we* have ever made them feel at home.

Now the gap is only growing wider and wider between us. The swarming “foreignlanders” from the East are considered a plague. At the same time, hatred and wrath spread among the natives like poison. We are trapped in a circle of violence and vengeance but the worst thing of all is that we are not just the ones who bleed, but the ones who shed blood as well. Both sides have drawn their knives and both have mourned innocent victims. But, to avenge an innocent by shedding innocent blood in return is not who we are, who we were supposed to be. Some lines are not meant to be crossed.

A close friend and fellow-fighter brings news from the capital, which now resembles a war-zone. “Things have really gotten out of hand,” says my friend referring to the increasing acts of indiscriminate violence against the outcasts, and adds in a lower voice stressing every word:

“I’ve heard they nail them on trees.”

The phrase is launched from my friend’s mouth like a fire bomb that explodes in my brains. My friend keeps talking but I am not listening; and, although my eyes are still fixed on her, all I see is the horrific image that becomes more and more vivid, as if my mind is forcing me to witness every detail of that horrible crime. The biblical connotations of a human nailed upon a piece of wood send chills down my spine. At the same time, the image brings to my mind the words of a familiar song: “Sometimes they tie a thief to the tree / Sometimes I stare, sometimes it’s me” (Sting, “Jeremiah Blues Pt. 1”). The image of my own body being nailed to a tree makes my stomach twist. Yet, it is exactly this sickening image that makes me fully grasp the stunning truth hidden in these words. Just like any one of us, in one way or another, I am, or have been, or could be that “thief” on that tree, an incidental casualty fallen in the battle or simply one more scapegoat picked to bear society’s sins. Or perhaps it is my own conscience that ties me

to the tree, finding me indeed guilty enough to deserve a thief's punishment. I wonder which crime is worse, my doubt that has kept me from engaging into the fight so far or this unprecedented fear of falling into such savage hands that holds me further back. One thing is certain. For the first time in my life, I feel ashamed for daring to call myself a fighter.



The new Pedestrian Street in the centre of the city gleams with colors and radiant faces. Boys, girls, women and men, people of all ages and styles are full of excitement and cheer. Who could believe that so many people could actually be outcasts? And yet they are, all these people, one by one. They may not be "foreignlanders" but they bear a "stain" as well. What sets them apart from the rest of the community is that they violate the "sacred" law of mating, the one that allows only "opposites" to unite with each other. But, here they are now standing as one. For the first time they are about to claim their place in the world, a whole army of "freaks" ready to march through the streets of the city. And they are going to do it in their own unique, celebratory way.

As the marching begins, the loud music and the frenzied paraders draw the attention of those people who are strolling around or quietly sip their coffee in the surrounding coffee shops. A lot of "normal" people are now standing on the pavements watching this unprecedented event. Some of them have no idea what is going on, some are simply curious, some get shocked at the sight of so many "freaks" gathered together, and some are only here to shout them down. But paradoxically, the crowd does not include only enemies. One after the other people start joining the parade, becoming part of this feast and one with the "freaks." After all, that is exactly the purpose of this event. To make us realize that with all the fighting against each other we have forgotten what it feels to stand by one another.

In the front lines of the parade, the banner makes a statement of its own. Boys and girls are standing side by side holding in their hands rainbow flags. They wave it up and down rhythmically creating the illusion of a colorful rough sea. It is only natural to think of the rainbow as totally fitting, since it is after all the symbol of hope and a brand new beginning. But as I stare at it, its real significance now becomes apparent. As the rainbow waves up and down, the colors start to mix, they become less and less distinguishable by finally blending together. In one second you have the answer to all these years of questioning. And this is nature's stunning response: if there is one thing that unity is made out of, that is diversity itself.

The sudden feeling of a hand grabbing my arm and pulling me back breaks up the stream of my thoughts. I turn and see the face of an old lady who asks me with a sober yet not angry voice, "What is this celebration about?" Her question catches me off guard and I start stuttering but before I give her an answer she asks again with a softer tone, "Are you too one of them?" putting suspiciously extra emphasis on the word "them." This emphasis makes me feel surprisingly offended, not because she has thought of me as one of "them," but because she has actually made it sound like a crime. But I just smile

without saying anything. I am not sure what she infers from that, so I am bracing myself for a tirade. But instead she gives me a light pat on the cheek as if she was petting her own granddaughter. This leaves me confused though relieved.

As the marching slowly reaches its terminal point, I realize that what I have been witnessing all this time is a group of animated people celebrating and enjoying themselves. Many wonder where all this energy comes from. After all, what is there to celebrate when you are hated, excluded or deprived? But I can tell. I can still recognize a fighter when I see one. They do not carry any swords but they are still fighters who dance their own way to victory. If suppressed pain can trigger revolutions, you can imagine what suppressed love can do.

With this thought the old lady comes back to my mind and the strange incident takes a whole new meaning now. What if it was her who was actually one of “them?” What if all she was trying to say to me was, “I can’t be in there with ‘them,’ but you can be in there for me.” I feel ashamed for being too quick to judge her. But at least I can say that one way or another, her wish will be granted.

As I walk back home, the words of another familiar song come to my mind, triggering a new epiphany. I now realize what it actually means to claim that “The world is full of refugees” (Manic Street Preachers, “The Everlasting”). Not only because millions of people who have fled their Homelands are spread around the world, but mainly because millions of other people are refugees even in their own Homelands. In every corner of the earth there are outcasts, segregated societies, people who are struggling to define their place in the world. Whether we are foreignlanders or freaks or any kind of outcasts, disconnected from the people around us or even from our own selves, in one way or another we are all refugees just the same. I am not sure whether I should actually feel sorry or rather take comfort in the fact that my Homeland and I are not the only ones suffering but millions of other people suffer as we do. At least, we can now be sure that the roots of these crises lie in our own nature as human beings, and so does their solution. We just have to know where to look.

Could this single event really do the trick? Could it summon a brand new beginning? Could our city really change overnight? Probably not but the first step has already been taken.

For the rest of the road, I silently sing to myself:

The gap that grows between our lives
The gap our parents never had
Stop those thoughts control your mind
Replace the things that you despise
Oh you're old I hear you say
It doesn't mean that I don't care
I don't believe in it anymore
Pathetic acts for a worthless cause

In the beginning when we were winning
When our smiles were genuine... (Manic Street Preachers, "The Everlasting")

Finally there...

If there is one thing that is certain about this world is that the only constant thing is change itself. And in an ever changing world crises are only to be expected. Yet, although we know it is change that has led us to these crises, we often forget that it is change that will get us out of them as well. Change, however, is like a little war in itself: you need to be part of it in order to make it happen. But now, we have turned too numb to act. Like fighters who dream about the ultimate fight or brag about the glorious deeds of their ancestors, we find solace in dreaming of the world we would like to live in or taking pride in our conquests as Humankind. But what about the time we find ourselves standing in the middle of the battlefield? When the barrels are pointing at us and the swords are ready to strike? Do we run or do we fight? Whatever we think it is we are gaining by abstaining from any kind of effort, is it really worth having when there are less and less people to share it with?

People once used to say that there is no "I" in "We." But, in my point of view, this is totally untrue. No community can stand if it does not allow each individual to be unique, nor can it stand unless each individual is solid enough to stand itself as equal among the others. It is only when you know who you are that you can appreciate any uniqueness and difference that any human "self" can be built upon. And that only means that the crisis we face as a society and as individuals nowadays are in fact two sides of the same coin.

What my journey has also taught me, however, is that crises are not solely catastrophic forces as we usually see them, but merely periods of testing, challenges we are supposed to face and overcome. By doing so we grow strong, we mature, both as individuals and as a community. So the question we should be asking ourselves is not whether fighting is worth it, but whether not fighting is. And when in doubt about what to fight for and what to stand against, deep down our humane self will probably hold the answer. Whether we win or lose, no one can tell beforehand. But at least we will be rewarded with the honor of knowing we have done our best to forge our 'selves' and our world to the better.

Works Cited

Manic Street Preachers. "The Everlasting." *This Is My Truth Tell Me Yours*. Epic Records, 1998.
Sting. "Jeremiah Blues Pt. 1" *The Soul Cages*. A&M Records, 1991.