

Patriotism in Real and Virtual Narratives

Jean-Jacques Rousseau once said “the love of one's country [...] is a hundred times more lively and delightful than the love of a mistress” (Rousseau, 1755). However, what does it mean to be a true patriot? The first concept that people internalize when they hear the term “patriotism” is to put supporting your country as a high priority. At what costs do we follow our country’s words and directions, though? Do we lose our sense of self-autonomy as we do so? Patriotism is a belief system that many individuals seem to have definitions for in everyday life, as well as the media. As far as media is concerned, video games can play a vital role in shaping these kinds of definitions because of their sense of narrative immersion. In a video game, the developer is not only trying to create an entertaining experience for the player, but he is also trying to portray a specific set of philosophies constructed by the game’s world and story. The following will look to discover these patriotic applications in everyday life, as well as especially highlight the video game that most consider to represent the ideologies of patriotism – *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*.

One of the most common ways of patriotic expression that the public recognizes is through war and supporting the troops. While wearing flags, praying, and donating money are all common ways of showing this kind of public, nationalistic support, they are temporary acts in nature. This is where films play an integral role in encapsulating the ideas of the time and preserving them for future generations. For example, after World War I, American and Soviet relations were rather weak. Clearly, this did not bode well for Russian immigrants living in the United States. Yet, some filmmakers of the time took it upon themselves to craft works with

Soviet protagonists, under the positive backdrop of working together with Americans. By doing so, “Hollywood was indeed not simply providing diversionary relief for war-fatigued American workers, but was, among other things, actively working to express a changed attitude toward the Soviets” (Peck, 1977, p. 62). Overall, it helped Americans be even more proud of their identity as a diverse population that is accepting of all people. Another example of films representing war-time patriotism is the growth of movies that reflect on World War II giving rise to “America’s greatest generation.” In particular, these help “reaffirm a particular conception of US national identity and military patriotism in the post–Cold War era” (Godfrey & Lilly, 2009, p. 295). These concepts of what patriotism is may change, depending on the time period represented, but times of war usually bring out nationalistic motivations in the public at large. These can be used to solidify national strength, attack enemy forces, or anywhere in between. However, media can be used in a variety of ways to document these feelings and interpret them alongside history.

Few historical events shook the United States to its core like the September 11th terrorist attacks did. However, on top of all the patriotic feelings that arise during a time of war, one facet of American life helped lead the public back to a sense of normalcy more effectively than others. When sports, particularly the national pastime of baseball, started again after the attacks, the public truly started to show that America was ready to transition from a time of grief to a time of strength. Yet, nationalistic elements from 9/11 still remain, such as the seventh-inning stretch song change at baseball games from “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” to “God Bless America.” These athletic events mean a great deal to many people, mostly because “sport, in fact, long has played a notable role in the reflection, construction, and maintenance of American cultural values” (Butterworth, 2005, p. 111). In a way, sports are a kind of representation of ideals passed

down from generation to generation. Just like the core mechanics of various games remain the same over time, quintessential elements of nationalistic beliefs are taught over generations. This compares to another kind of metaphor that people apply to sports, particularly baseball, claiming it is a religion. Butterworth claims that this is not too far of a stretch, as “overly romanticized notions about the game’s spiritual inspirations notwithstanding, the clarity of religious imagery in baseball gives it a quasi-religious symbolic power” (2005, p. 113). Sports give rise to icons and give people something to believe in, as following a team or a player acts as a way of life. For fans in every nation, that kind of faith burns inside everyone, even if the targets of that belief are different. Patriotism allows for the people of one nation to see what’s similar about themselves and then use that passion for the love of the country.

Now, as the paper is being typed, America is in another uncertain period of history, where economic downturns have caused public unrest. By using social media as a communication distribution platform, the Occupy movement has become a nation-wide uprising. The concept of the oppressed 99% wanting political change from the mighty 1% is a powerful social movement, but it also calls into question a dichotomy. Specifically, when a person’s patriotic choices are considered, “it raises the troubling question of how will as self-choosing and will as right-acting are to be brought together” (Barnard, 1984, p.258). This applies to the debate that exists about the Occupy movement because those against the movement broadly paint the 99% as a mob mentality that is acting out of line. The thought that Barnard has brings about an intriguing question of any action of patriotism – is the acting person choosing to do so willingly and do they consider it to be the right choice? Of course, acting in the right is a point of contention for those of differing philosophies, as each may think that what they are doing is the correct thing to do. Personally, my academic interests lie in media studies, particularly in film

and video game convergence. Fortunately for this analysis, one of my favorite games has a story that focuses on Cold War, patriotic, and philosophical clashes.

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater (2004) is a stealth action video game designed for the PlayStation 2 and created by Japanese developer Hideo Kojima. It is a title that is especially well known for its use of cinematic cut scenes that portray the game's narrative. While the *Metal Gear Solid* (MGS) franchise had usually involved philosophical aspects in its games, *MGS3* was the first to have its plot be solely driven by characters with varying patriotic motivations. It is also a staple of *Metal Gear Solid* games to attempt to put their own fictional spin on history, specifically the mid-1960s with *MGS3*. At the very beginning, the game specifically informs the player when the game's narrative takes place, with the line "After the end of World War II, the world was split into two – East and West. This marked the beginning of the era called the Cold War." This heavily implies that Cold War tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States will be a significant element in the game.

The plot consists of the player controlling a CIA operative code-named Naked Snake, whose mission is to retrieve a defected Russian scientist named Nikolai Sokolov and bring him back to the United States from the Russian jungle. Sokolov is currently developing a nuclear-armed tank dubbed the "Shagohod" under forced direction of the Soviet Union, so while he wishes to return to the United States for freedom, it is implied that that the U.S. would force him to continue the work for them. This power struggle becomes even more complicated when Naked Snake's mentor and World War II hero The Boss defects to the Soviet Union, aligning herself with Colonel Volgin of the GRU faction. As the introduction sequence ends, Volgin deploys a miniature nuclear weapon on his homeland so that the act is blamed on The Boss, and thus, the United States.

After a private conversation with U.S. President Lyndon Johnson and Soviet Union Premier Nikita Khrushchev, Naked Snake is tasked with restoring America's innocence and international peace. To do so, he must eliminate Volgin's faction, destroy the Shagohod tank, and kill his mentor, The Boss. Even though Snake is supposed to meet up with a contact code-named ADAM, he is helped by the gorgeous agent EVA. During the mission, Snake encounters Major Ocelot, a subordinate of Volgin's. Ultimately, everything in the plot revolves around The Philosophers Legacy, which the game constructs as a \$100 billion sum amassed by the three world powers of the time – the United States, the Soviet Union, and China. After World War II, the money was supposed to be split up equally, but Volgin illegally stole the Legacy. As it will be discussed, the resulting plot involves an orchestrated conflict to act as a proxy to take back possession of at least part of this massive wealth. With the plot's framework in place, it is time to discuss each of the five main characters – Snake, Volgin, EVA, Ocelot, and The Boss – along with their patriotic motivations, from least complicated to most, and how the game represents them.

Naked Snake is portrayed as the prototypical soldier. He is put in the player's hands to control and generally is informed as much as the player. As most soldiers are, Snake is informed on a need-to-know basis, yet he accepts this. Since he has devoted his life to the CIA, Snake is very loyal to the American government and is willing to die for them. This trust is put to the test as Snake's mission casts him into the ruthless Russian jungle, forcing him to use stealth, as his very presence there is a breach of peace treaties. Over the course of the game, he falls in love with EVA, is tortured by Volgin, loses sight in his right eye, and ultimately succeeds in his mission. When he learns the truth of what he's done and how he has been used as a pawn in the quest for money and power, the player observes great sadness from the emotionally-hardened

operative. He is awarded the title of Big Boss by Lyndon Johnson, surpassing the ranks of The Boss, and while Snake accepts the honor, he hesitates to thank the men that rank as superiors ahead of him. Snake's patriotic actions are rather simple, in that he follows his country's orders without question, but seems to do so because it is duty, without regard to personal choice or moral correctness.

Colonel Yevgeny Borisovitch Volgin is the main antagonist of *Metal Gear Solid 3* and is established as a sadistic individual who carries an electric charge of ten million volts.

Throughout the game, the player learns that Volgin's father was in charge of transferring funds amassed in The Philosopher's Legacy. After his father's death, Volgin stole most of the money and uses it as leveraging power in regaining the Soviet Union's world dominance. As Snake and Volgin are protagonist and antagonist, Volgin carries the same patriotic passion for his country that Snake does. However, since Volgin is in a greater position of power, he is able to change things around him. His ultimate goal is to use the Shagohod as the trump card to remove Khrushchev and the KGB from power, install Kosygin, Brezhnev, and the GRU in his place, and from there, have the Soviet Union take its place at the top of the world. He seems to want this above anything else, as he will even attack his own country as he did with the miniature nuclear device, in order for his plans to succeed. This places Volgin as the perfect antagonist in the game because of his volatile fervor for his country.

While Snake and Volgin have simple patriotic motivations, things become more complicated with the seductress EVA. Throughout the game, EVA plays the role of assisting Snake during his mission, yet also acting as Volgin's lover Tatyana. At the end of the game, EVA reveals through a message left behind for Snake that she was not a KGB spy sent by Khrushchev, as the narrative portrayed her all along. Instead, she was a spy for the Chinese,

“raised in a joint U.S.-Soviet-Chinese facility to become a sleeper agent” (2004). As she explains, these camps took children from all over the world and raised them to become agents of the Philosophers, who created the Legacy. This is similar to concepts of patriotism that exist today in female American groups such as the Camp Fire Girls and Girl Scouts, as “through their recruitment tactics, organizational histories, and regimens, these groups prompted the daughter of the foreign-born to stylize her conduct as a virtuous American girl” (Hahner, 2008, p. 128). As a result of this training, EVA’s goal was to infiltrate Volgin’s layer and steal The Philosopher’s Legacy for China. This double-crossing establishes one of the more complicated character motivations in *MGS3*, as EVA’s pale skin and blond hair could have her pass as having either American or Russian descent. Yet, the player is introduced to her as a spy sent by the KGB, acting as Volgin’s lover in the GRU, but has really defected to help the CIA as EVA. However, the truth that she has been working for China all along acts as a blind-siding, crushing Snake and the player. Ultimately, even though EVA believes she has successfully stolen The Philosopher’s Legacy, it turns out she has the stolen a fake microfilm. The player learns after the game’s credits who is in possession of the real Legacy, revealing an even more twisted patriotic allegiance than EVA’s.

Ocelot’s level of patriotic subversion is likely the most fascinating case in all of *Metal Gear Solid 3*, as the player learns that he has been triple-crossing everyone the entire time. Up until this revelation, the player knew of Ocelot as a major in Colonel Volgin’s GRU faction. He is portrayed as skilled and wise for his age in his early twenties, yet prone to small mistakes due to hubris. Naked Snake corrects him on these over the course of several battles the two share and it becomes evident that Ocelot looks up to Snake as a rival and role model. Ocelot never appears to act as a very patriotic type of individual during his time as a major, which is intended to be a

subtle hint for the player. He has no qualms killing his own comrades and even outright disobeys his own superior's orders, as Volgin orders Ocelot to shoot Snake while Snake was winning a battle against the colonel. All in all, Ocelot is represented as a character who only acts on behalf of himself, which makes sense when he reveals in a phone conversation that he is really ADAM that Naked Snake was supposed to meet with at the start of the mission. This is capped off with the declaration "Of course, I am always at the CIA's disposal...Mr. Director" (2004). It turns out that Ocelot was working for the CIA all along, embedded in Volgin's faction, deceiving not only the colonel, but those who were against him as well. Ocelot was also behind deceiving EVA with the fake Legacy film, as the real money was ultimately split between the United States and the Soviet Union. It takes a special, twisted kind of sense of patriotism to outwardly show no true feelings for a country, yet be working for another land all along. As Ocelot's motivations couldn't seem to be any more complicated, there is still one character that *Metal Gear Solid 3* seems to deify for her actions.

With the addition of *Metal Gear Solid 3* to the franchise's canon, the character of The Boss became a legendary figure, as everything in the series' narrative is able to be tied back to her. The Boss was a honored soldier from World War II, as she and her created Cobra Unit is claimed to be responsible for American victory in the great conflict. *MGS3*'s narrative even implies that she gave birth to a son on Normandy Beach that would grow up to be Ocelot, even though it is made unclear that the two ever knew their relation to each other. Even though she was dubbed "the mother of America's special forces," there was some implied falling out between The Boss and CIA after the events of World War II. So, to regain her honor, The Boss was tasked with defecting to the Soviet Union, stealing The Philosopher's Legacy from Volgin, and bringing it back to America. However, once Volgin used the miniature nuclear device on his

homeland, the United States had to place the blame on The Boss as a traitor. As a result of this, she knew that her new mission was not only to steal the Legacy, but to have her disciple Naked Snake kill her once she completed this. Snake's will is broken not just because of how and why he was used by the government to kill the boss, but also because of the true meaning of what The Boss did with her life. Even though her life was already marked for its end, The Boss is exemplified as the pinnacle of patriotism for completing the initial assignment set out to her by those that represent her country. There is a reason when Snake visits The Boss' grave that is it unmarked, except for the words "In Memory of a Patriot Who Saved the World" (2004).

While each character has their own role to play, The Boss is the representation of *Metal Gear Solid 3*'s true narrative question – what does it mean to be a patriot? Some may follow orders blindly, while some may show such zeal to stop at nothing in order to have their country prosper. Some may even double-cross two parties for the benefit of their homeland, or even hide all associations to secretly help their true loyalties. For the video game that best addresses this issue, which takes place in a Cold War setting, the answer is to follow the orders of your country to the very end, even at the sacrifice of your own life. Yet, through academic sources that discuss patriotism, the word can take on other meanings in today's world. Patriotism may be framed in terms of war, sport, social movement, or even in a prominent, immersive video game, but uncertainty regarding the term still remains. As Barnard discusses, "For while the will of the patriot undoubtedly entails consciousness and activity, it is less clear to what extent it involves choice and discursive reasoning" (1984, p. 249). So, while many definitions of the word "patriotism" may exist in the world today, the real decision lies in which path we are willing to take, as we live our life to the fullest.

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