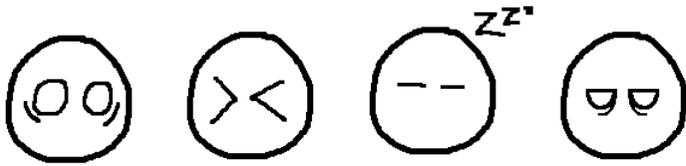


# NATIONALISM IS AN INFANTILE THING. IT IS THE MEASLES OF HUMANKIND.

A. Einstein ft. Clusterduck



Clusterduck presents:

## UN\_COUNTRYBALLS vs. THE NATION STATE

We live in times of hate and division.

Uncertainty and fear are pushing an increasingly fragmented social body towards shallow and polarizing answers, while the scattered remnants of late modernity are seeking protection behind the ancient walls of abstract identities: the eternal return of 'blood and soil'.

But like the fascists of yesteryear, today's neoreactionaries are ruthless tacticians, cynically exploiting the very technologies they claim to despise. Social Media Platforms and digital communication technologies have become essential tools of their political propaganda. In this context, even (or especially) seemingly innocent formats have proven very effective at inoculating neoreactionary views into the unknowing public. Memes, in particular, have lately shown to be powerful vectors of social change, shifting global narratives.

With their new work, Clusterduck want to take a look at an important example of such a seemingly trivial format, the so called "Countryballs" (or "Polandballs"): very simple, comic representations of national identities and stereotypes, which in their interactions reflect widespread cliches and an overly simplistic view of world history.

The age of Salvini, Wilders, Lucke and Le Pen needs national identities to exist even if outdated, and the Countryballs' format, even if often used to laugh at presumed national identities, actually naturalizes their very existence, once again demonstrating the extreme resilience and pervasiveness of the cultural technology we call "nation-state". So how to escape this rusty iron cage? How to formulate an alternative?

The first step would be to demonstrate that national identities don't exist – or, more precisely, they exist only as long as our discourses and their constant reiteration allow them to do so. They are 'imagined communities', as Benedict Anderson showed in his eponymous masterpiece. We need to imagine alternative communities, capable of satisfying the human desire for social connection and belonging while transcending old divisions and obsolete identities.

Clusterduck Collective wants to use and subvert the Countryball format to explore alternative notions of identity. Whether they are based around gender, politics, pop-culture or post-national institutions: the 'UNCOUNTRYBALLS' show that different collective identities are not only possible, but already existing.

To favour their circulation and reflect the channels and tools used by the original Countryballs, the UNCOUNTRYBALLS are being presented both as a digital Telegram sticker set and as a real-life sticker pack to be spread in public space.

The UNCOUNTRYBALL project is part of Clusterduck's EMAP-EMARE residency at IMPAKT.

## WHAT ARE POLANDBALLS?

Polandball, also known as countryballs, refers to user-generated visual art, typically manifesting as online comics, where countries are personified as (typically) spherical personas decorated with their country's

flag, interacting in often broken English (with the exception of countryballs that speak English natively), usually with regional and/or national variations (e.g. France's Engrish is interspersed with French words). The characters poke fun at national stereotypes and international relations, as well as historical conflicts. Countryballs have also been used in videos and comics involving alternate and speculative history. It is an Internet meme which originated on the /int/ board of German imageboard Krautchan.net in the latter half of 2009. The comics style may be referred to both as Polandball (by convention, even in cases where there is no Poland among the cartoon characters) and countryball (or, collectively, countryballs).

Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polandball#Background>

## ORIGINS AND HISTORY:

Polandball is a cartoon character drawn in the shape of a ball with the color schemes of the Polish flag (white & red). It was originally featured in the multi-pane comic series that became popular in /INT/ (international) board on Krautchan, a German-language imageboard community similar to 4chan. These user-generated cartoons typically follow the lives of ball-shaped creatures representing different countries (also known as Countryballs) and "international drama" surrounding their diplomatic relations.

Origin:

Polandball comic strips were created by a British individual known as "FALCO" in the /INT/ board of Krautchan[1] around September 2009. Unlike other image-boards on the German-language site, /INT/ board[2] is frequented by English-speaking netizens from the rest of Europe and the world. According to several sources[3], FALCO's original comics were decidedly apolitical and aimed to poke fun at a fellow Polish /INT/ user "Wojak", who frequently posted in less than perfect English. One of his memorable quotes "I Know That Feel" also became a meme in May 2010.

Source: <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/polandball>

## COMMUNITIES AND RELEVANCE:

(...) countryball comics have become a global internet phenomenon, with multiple internet platforms being dedicated to the peculiar characters. On Facebook, the POLANDBALL page has gathered over 400.000 likes, and other Facebook pages such as USABall, EUBall and Germanyball also gained a fair share of followers. Apart from these usual suspects, the countryball culture on Facebook is quite a deep rabbit hole of obscure countryballs, with pages dedicated to Ancient Empires (SPQRball), meta-pages (The Polandball Report) and religions (Christianityball). The Polandball Wiki is another bastion of countryball information, which features 12.779 page-entries, 480.159 page-edits and 30.380 media files. In China, the Polandball page on Baidu Tieba forms an alternative to the often-blocked Western platforms.

(...) the most prominent Polandball-sphere on the internet [is] r/polandball on Reddit. This 'subreddit' (a subplatform on Reddit) has gained significant traction, and (...) has seen a sudden increase in attention in 2017. In the current day, Polandball is especially interesting in light of (1) an alleged increase in geopolitical drama, (2) memes being used for political meme-ing and meme warfare, which awkwardly positions the countryball comics who have been satirizing politics for a longer time and (3) Polandball in comparison to omnipresent 'regular' internet memes.

Source: <https://networkcultures.org/longform/2017/11/15/polandball-is-of-reddit-how-rpolandball-transcends-memes-through-carefully-curated-geopolitical-satire/>

## ON NATIONS AS IMAGINED COMMUNITIES:

In *Imagined Communities* (1983) Benedict Anderson argues that the nation is an imagined political community that is inherently limited in scope and sovereign in nature. It is imagined because the actuality of even the smallest nation exceeds what it is possible for a single person to know—one cannot

know every person in a nation, just as one cannot know every aspect of its economy, geography, history, and so forth. But as Anderson is careful to point out (contra Ernest Gellner) imagined is not the same thing as false or fictionalized, it is rather the unselfconscious exercise of abstract thought.

The imagined community is limited because regardless of size it is never taken to be co-extensive with humanity itself—not even extreme ideologies such as Nazism, with its pretensions to world dominance, imagine this; in fact, as Giorgio Agamben has argued such ideologies tend to be premised on a generalization of an exception. Its borders are finite but elastic and permeable. The imagined community is sovereign because its legitimacy is not derived from divinity as kingship is—the nation is its own authority, it is founded in its own name, and it invents its own people which it deems citizens. The nation can be considered a community because it implies a deep horizontal comradeship which knits together all citizens irrespective of their class, colour, or race. According to Anderson, the crucial defining feature of this type of comradeship is the willingness on the part of its adherents to die for this community.

The nation as imagined community came into being after the dawning of the age of Enlightenment as both a response to and a consequence of secularization. It is the product of a profound change in the apprehension of the world, which Anderson specifies as a shift from sacred time to 'homogeneous empty time', a notion he borrows from Walter Benjamin. In sacred time, present and future are simultaneous. Because everything that occurs is ordained by God, the event is simultaneously something that has always been and something that was meant to be. In such a conception of time there is no possibility of a 'meanwhile', or uneventful event, that is a mode of time that is empty of meaning rather than full of portent. Secularization, however, gave prominence to empty time, the time of calendars, clocks, and markets, which is concerned with temporal coincidence rather than destiny and fulfilment. This mode of time is perfectly embodied by the newspaper

which places in contiguity news of events that share only their temporality.

It was the establishment of print culture, firstly through the mechanical production of Bibles and then even more strongly through the distribution of newspapers, that was the most important causal factor in creating the cultural conditions needed for the idea of nation to become the political norm. Print had three effects according to Anderson: first, it cut across regional idiolects and dialects, creating a unified medium of exchange below the sacred language (Latin in Europe) and above the local vernacular; second, it gave language a fixity it didn't previously have, and slowed down the rate of change so that there was far greater continuity between past and present; and thirdly it created languages of power by privileging those idiolects which were closest to the written form. Anderson's emphasis on the print culture in all its forms, but particularly the newspaper and the novel, has been extremely stimulating for a number of scholars working in a wide variety of different disciplines.

Source: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095958187>

Download the telegram stickerpack:



#uncountryballs  
#clusterduck

Ig Tw: @realclusterfuck  
Fb: @realclusterduck  
Web: clusterduck.space

EMAP /  
EMARE

IMPAKT

