CHAPTER - IV

NATION
CHAPTER - IV

NATION

"My safety ground as a writer is based on what I saw or heard or experienced, a reality which I never mixed up with fiction, only elaborate".\textsuperscript{1} It may help make our study more concrete if we now limit our attention to one of the social groups to which an individual belongs, namely the state. The State or the Nation has been given the largest place in her discussions although the State, often in common speech, has been identified with the Government of the state, an institution to which the ordinary subject may not even feel he belongs to.

Nationalism is the amalgam of attitudes and emotions that has to do with the sense of belonging to a group of people who consider themselves a Nation. After a careful study of Miss Porter's works we are forced to conclude that in her view Nation stands for the organised social life of a group of people under a single government implying that the individual is conscious of his share in it. If the individual does not regard himself as part of the state in this sense, he regards himself to some extent as a slave, for the dictates of the state will be bonds imposed on him from outside and not part of the fabric of his own moral life.

George Hendrick, \textit{Katherine Anne Porter}, p.15.
Even though political nationalism continues to be the most powerful secular emotion animating collective behaviour in the late twentieth century, a common tendency within social thought in the Western world, at least since the end of the Second World War, has been to argue for the subordination of the affairs of the nations to the common interest of humanity. "In Miss Porter's world the past is merely the genesis ... and the future, quite simply, is the destruction. She has pointed out to us the far reaching consequences of demonic national love". ²

After spending many years in different parts of the U.S.A. and Mexico she set out for Europe in 1931. During her active young days she had herself worked in Mexico among the revolutionaries. She firmly believed that no body has the right to rule other states under one pretext or the other. As an eyewitness to the happenings in different parts of the world in the name of nation and nationalism, she had certain very concrete ideas about the nationalistic spirit of the people which was terribly exploited by the powers that be.

During an interview with Barbara Thompson in 1963 when Porter was asked why she chose to go to Mexico in preference to Europe which was the choice of many other writers, she answered as follows:

Well, I know it was good for me. I would have been completely smothered - completely disgusted and revolted by the goings on in Europe. Even now when I think of the twenties and the legend that has grown up about them, I think it a horrible time: shallow and trivial and silly.  

In 1931 itself she had the same opinion about Europe as is evident from her views she confessed to James Ruoff:

The point is, I had seen these criminals - those clowns - like Hitler, and was stricken by an idea; if people like this take over the World; Of course there were all the good people who did not believe in the clowns, but they still let the clowns commit good worthy people would commit if only they had the nerve. How else to account for the collusion with evil that enables a creature like Mussolini, or Hitler, or Hey Longer, Mc Carthy (make your own list petty or great) to get hold of things? 

Her trip to Europe, from Vera Cruz to Bremerhaven provided her with an excellent opportunity to come into contact with people of different nationalities. She did not of course adopt the philosophical system of pragmatism but demonstrated over and over again her recognition of the value of the experience, and free use of intelligence as well as her aversion to the fixed principles of closed systems. The omniscient author reports on her characters and their reactions and can thus demand of her readers that they take her word for it, as her word is reasonably convincing. "The allegory of good and evil is implicit in Porter's work,

3 "Katherine Anne Porter An Interview", Katherine Anne Porter: Conversations, p.87.

4 Ibid., p.67.
but she made her meaning clear by using as a focal point, the rise of fascism in
the 1930s, and the worldwide calamity, that resulted from the mass movements led
by Hitler, Mussolini and Franco".5

She stayed in Berlin for sometime where according to a later statement of
her own she met Hitler, Goring and Goebbel. The author devises a particular and
consistant point of view and places the relevant data in the reader's view to enable
him to arrive at the right conclusions. The author often separates herself and only
occasionally makes her presence felt. This technique gives her material the greatest
possible realisation.

The time was Pre-Second World War time. Her analytical mind was capable
of seeing things with minutest details. She had seen the horrors of the First World
War and never believed in the slogan that "war is for peace". Her knowledge of
the history of the world created in her an instinctive dislike for war. During her
voyage to and stay in Germany she realised that another World War was in the
offing to bring with it untold miseries to the human race. In her essay 'The
Necessary Enemy' written in 1948 she observed : "We create our own suffferings,
and out of these suffereings we salvage our fragments of happiness".6

5 Willene Hendrick and George Hendrick Katherine Anne Porter, p.111
6 Ibid., p.126.
Though in her short stories and short novels she has given expression to some of her views on nationalism as it existed then, it is in *Ship of Fools* that she confides everything to the reader. A thorough study of the book reveals to us that the particular type of nationalism which had taken deep roots in different nations at that time was a major cause of the Second World War. The fact that the novel published in 1962 expresses such a view without any reconsideration of the original standpoint suggests that the attitude of the people still remains unchanged.

"The year of the fictive voyage, 1931, was a time of severe economic and political unrest in Latin America when many Europeans who had settled there were returning to their homelands. But the tragic historical irony of the German passengers' hope for a safe arrival of the *Vera* in Bremerhaven is all too apparent. For only two years later in the real world, Hitler was to become Chancellor of Germany".\(^7\) German nationalism as eulogised by Hitler was based on untruths and half truths. Such an edifice was bound to fall and Miss Porter foresaw the doom. "Her stories show her great mastery of techniques as she explores the human personality and society. She recorded through art, the disorder of life".\(^8\)

---

\(^7\) John Edward Hardy, *Katherine Anne Porter*, PP. 120, 121

\(^8\) George Hendrick, "Preface" to *Katherine Anne Porter*. 
The first chapter of M.M. Liberman's *Katherine Anne Porter's Fiction* is entitled "The responsibility of the novelist and the critical reception of *Ship of Fools*". There he maintains that Miss Porter is indirectly criticising the contemporary international community. Literature is a social product and as such it inevitably reflects the life of the era out of which it springs. Since it is the record and expression of life, it is likely to reflect the particular set of ideas through which life is seen and lived. Literature as an institution grows and evolves in conformity with other social institutions. Miss Porter had an international outlook and she, from her experiences as a journalist and traveller came to the conclusion that the nationalistic spirit of the countries was not based on healthy conceptions. And this was sure to end up in a great human tragedy.

In her short stories and short novels we can see only traces of her views on nationalism. But the short stories were mainly intended to bring home to the reader certain other aspects of personal and family life. Though she herself was actively connected with some nationalistic movements especially in Mexico, she does not use her experiences in the field to propound any comprehensive view of nationalism. The short stories too suggest that the type of nationalistic spirit emerging slowly but steadily might lead to international confusions.
A frank statement made by her in a reprinting of the 1940 introduction to ‘Flowering Judas’ where she explains why she had not chosen to publish more is very helpful to us. "I was not one of those who could flourish in the conditions of the past two decades. [My stories] are fragments of a much larger plan which I am still engaged in carrying out, and they are what I was then able to achieve in the way of order and form and statement in a period of grotesque dislocations in a whole society when the world was leaving in the sickness of a millennial change". She always defended the freedom of the people but she could not endorse the hatred campaign indulged in Europe especially in Germany in the name of nationalism by the members of the National Socialist Party under the leadership of Hitler.

In this context some of the ideas existing in the minds of the Americans at that time should be remembered. She was herself an American. In the United States in the early part of the 20th century the need for a moral order was upheld by everyone. The universal acceptance of the doctrine of the moral order suggests that it had uses in national and international culture. A national civilisation can only be observed in the character and the behaviour of the individuals. Although many elements enter into the sentiments of nationalism and though these vary from people to people there is something basic and universal in it.

---

9 Katherine Anne Porter, Introduction to *Flowering Judas*. 
But Miss Porter understood that the Europeans had no real sense of security and many nations were propagating nationalistic fantasies either to oppress or to swallow the weak neighbours. Frustratuion and insecurity, she thought, were the roots of the demon, nationalism. She belonged to the category of the writers who believed that a commitment to art however intense is still a commitment to life and not an escape from it.

She was also aware of some of the antiques which confound the life of art in society — the terrible contradictions in relationships of status with sensibility, of opportunity with appreciation. She believed that eventual divine consensus of the educated and the dauntless should come, and then only ideal civilisation can flourish.

But it goes to her credit that "dogma in Ship of Fools is attached only to dogmatic characters".\(^\text{10}\) Nationalistic spirit was flourishing in different parts of the world just before the Second World War and the Latin American countries were fertile grounds for violent revolutions. Though Miss Porter herself was actively involved in the national upsurges in countries like Mexico and Nicaragua, without much delay, she understood that many of the leaders were self-seekers and the very incarnation of evil. This realisation forced her to have a second look at

\(^{10}\) Enrique Hank Lopez, *Conversations with Katherine Anne Porter*, p.190.
the spreading rancour — Nationalism. About a Nicaraguan poet who was supposed to be a true leader Miss Porter remarked to E.H. Lopez: "He was totally without scruple. Salmon was the man I wrote about in 'Virgin Violeta', although I did not use his real name".\textsuperscript{11}

Miss Porter had a meeting with Hermann Goring, the German Lieutenant of Hitler in the winter of 1932 which prompted her to conclude that German nationalism was going to become detrimental to humanity. "My instincts had long before settled me against those people, and my notions about them were not in the least altered by close-up observations of the passengers on that ocean voyage from Veracruz to Bremerhaven, many of whom I have sketched in \textit{Ship of Fools}".\textsuperscript{12} This frank admission shows how disgusted she was with the uncivilized nationalistic impulses which existed then.

It is in \textit{Ship of Fools} that she has made her best efforts to make it clear to the public that the horrifying nationalistic feelings are becoming a menace to the harmony of the international society. She once said to a student:

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{11} Enrique Hank Lopez, \textit{Conversations with Katherine Anne Porter}, p.172
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p.173.
\end{flushleft}
The tragedy of our times is not an accident but a total consent. Any way, my novel is a tiny drop of water to illustrate this vast ocean of accord. For me as a writer being on that ship was a godsent experience, although I would not have been able to see any of these things if I had not seen them first in Mexico. Still in Mexico there was always something good about it in Mexico there was always a chance for salvation. As for all the evil that threatens us here and now we haven't an alibi in the world. We let all the evil come up on us  

Though Scientific developments have brought the nations together each nation has its own pet theories and no one wants humanity as a whole. Any coming together is only with ulterior motives and the collusion of evil forces leads to the inevitable human catastrophe. Miss Porter hints in the novel that the evils that caused the First and Second World Wars were essentially the same, and narrow minded nationalism has played havoc with humanity. The nationalism which was strongly defended by Van Wyck Brooke is the type which will lead to international harmony.

There are times when even political nationalism seems to be a necessary step in the development of international feeling - for instance, in the case of the colonial mind for which another nationality has an obsessive power over one's own. As a boy must react against his parents in order to become a man, so colonies must assert themselves to become nations before they can play their full part in an international order.  

---

13 James Ruoff, "Katherine Anne Porter Comes to Kansas", Katherine Anne Porter: Conversations, p.67.

Miss porter also upholds and appreciates such nationalism. But the nationalism which is nurtured by the vast majority of the important characters of *Ship of Fools* is of a different variety. Hatred and vanity are its governing traits and it has become a "planetary nuisance". The spirit of solidarity is used to assert a nation's superiority over other nations and this leads to confrontation. *Ship of Fools* is a prophecy of the Second World War in retrospect. The arrogant nationalists instead of creating universal oneness sowed seeds of war which involved every young man on the planet and the doom of the World seemed imminent.

Herr Thiele, the Captain of the S.S. *Vera* is a symbol of German nationalism and racism. Like the liberty bond salesman whom Miranda has to confront in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, he is a bullying type and has a feeling that a German can do no wrong. He derives his importance from the helplessness of the people on board his ship whom he can harass with impunity. He has the conviction that by virtue of his nationality he is superior to the people of all other nations. He and his crew represent a clearly conceived order based on obedience to authority whose order is Germanic.

The chosen ones who are given the privilege to sit at the Captain's table are all Germans. Though they form only a minority they keep themselves aloof from the rest with an inhuman awareness of Germanic superiority. They find it
impossible to accommodate the rest of the passengers with real mental peace. They refuse to be drawn into any relationship with the non-German nationals. Thiele being the Captain of the ship, his responses acquire particularly a representative significance. If he does not treat La Condesa as an ordinary prisoner it is because of his typical German respect for nobility. But the nationalist German in him cannot approve of any activism of the Cuban lady. She is inferior to him and so he will not establish any contact with her directly.

The private thoughts of the Captain when he sees the steerage passengers are typical of a perverted nationalist. Indeed he recognised it for what it was, the perpetual resistance of the elemental forces of darkness and disorder against the very spirit of civilization — the great Germanic force of life in which — and the Captain began to feel a little more cheerful — in which science and religion moved hand in hand with Christianity. The obsession with German superiority limits his intellectual and emotional range. To him the steerage passengers are the elemental forces of darkness to disrupt the superior Germanic order. His orders to put off the lights two hours in advance have their origin in this illogical thought. Though the steerage people play in candlelight the Captain cannot understand the good souls in them. He received the deported poor people only as so many "heads of cattle". To find them at the very beginning of the journey asserting themselves is a shock to him.

15 *Ship of Fools*, p.216.
The note the Captain sends to La Condesa is highly revealing. "Dear Madam, We Germans no longer use the word champagne — nor indeed drink that pretentious stuff any longer. So I am happy to say this modest offering is not French, but only good Schaunwein from an honest German Vineyard sent to you by one who wishes you well in the cordial hope that it may bring you an evening’s refreshment and enjoyment".¹⁶ These words reflect the Nazi mentality. The feeling of superiority is mingled with hatred. In this case his contempt for the French is obvious. It was this kind of nationalism which Hitler propagated later.

The Captain’s German mind is known to all the other German passengers and they feel protected in the ship. They have complete faith in the Captain as the Germans had in Hilter later. Herr Rieber wants to go away from the cabin allotted to him once he knows that his cabin mate Herr Freytag’s wife is a Jewish woman. His intention is to go with the Americans but the Americans do not want him. When the purser informs him of this, Herr Rieber cannot control his fury. "You let them insult Germans in a German boat, do you? Well, the captain shall hear this, we’ll see what he has to say to such goings-on in his ship".¹⁷ This remark comes from his conviction that Herr Thiele is a German first and a Captain second. The Germans are the chosen ones and their superiority should be accepted by everyone else. To them, European mind or universal mind, all mean German mind.

¹⁶ Ship of Fools, p.234.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.252.
The Captain's prejudices against other nations have far-reaching consequences. The Captain thinks about the Americans and their movies. "There was no good reason why this should be so and it was a state of affairs that could exist in a barbarous nation like the United States. It was true that all the Americans were devoted to crime and criminals, to indecent dancing and drug-taking".¹⁸ This absurd thinking is based on self-assumed German superiority. The reference to the U.S.A, has a greater significance as the population of the country is drawn from other nations. The widely travelled Captain becomes a prisoner of narrow-minded nationalism and all his thoughts either centre round German greatness or the weaknesses of others.

In an interview with Josephine Novak in 1969 Miss Porter categorically stated. "So many things have happened to me and almost everything I wrote, when I did write, was based on real experience, either mine or some one else's".¹⁹ As for the Captain, it is her own experience.

In contrast to the uncivilised Americans, the Captain's childhood Germany makes him nostalgic-that Fatherland of order, harmony, simplicity and prosperity". It cannot be taken just as the patriotic sentiment of a loyal citizen. When pride for the country is carried beyond all proportions and to the underestimation of other

¹⁸ *Ship of Fools*, p.426.

nations it only adds to international disharmony. The Captain thinks that the Germans are singled out and insulted everywhere for no fault of their’s. At Southampton one of the British Officers asked the Captain politely to explain a puzzling entry on a certain page. "The captain’s face was scarlet, he was awkward, baffled, fuming, his wattled jaw puffed up over his collar, his eyes turned bloodshot".\(^{20}\)

It is his national spirit that is instrumental in all these external changes. His hatred for other nations naturally comes out. "Of course, the French, the Americans, the British, they have everything, they can do as they like, it is only the Germans who need not expect any justice or even decency at this point".\(^{21}\) This persecution mania was also a by product of the irrational nationalism of the Fascists and Nazis.

If the Captain is an embodiment of Nazi type nationalism, the other Germans also are acutely aware of German superiority. Lizzy Spokenkeiker introduces herself to Arne Hansen. "I am Fraulein Lizzi Spokenkieker and I live in Hanover. I have been visiting with my aunt and uncle in Mexico and oh, and with what delight I find myself on this good German boat going back to Hanover

---

\(^{20}\) *Ship of Fools*, p.491.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., p.491.
again".  Rieber asks him whether his unmannerly occupation is because of his
Swedish origin implying that good manners are the monopoly of the Germans. Frau
Lutz imagines that Hansen is Danish and asks him whether he is in the dairy
business. This spontaneous enquiry is the result of a soundly registered bias against
the Danish.

Professor Hutten carries home with him an unrealistic view of his own and
other countries. He cannot tolerate the behaviour of the Cuban students. "One of
our most constant problems was to protect our German youth from their influence
in our school. I am happy to say relying as we did on the infallible combination
of German character and German methods of discipline, we enjoyed a modest
success".  Frau Schmitt's attitude is also not different in any way. "In
Guadalajara how often I have heard my dear husband deplore the state of affairs
where our beautiful German children are exposed to the pernicious foreign
customs".

Frau Rittersdorf, the self-important German lady crosses all bounds of
decency in her generalisations. She has only contempt for Americans. Her
opinions of Jenny Brown are highly biased and very mean. "She is a dry thing like

22 Ship of Fools, P.492
23 Ibid., p.107.
24 Ibid., p.108.
too many American women — even the beautiful ones have no real freshness, but seems either like painted wood or just on the point of fading. This is caused, I am told on good authority, by their almost universal custom of losing their virginity at puberty or even earlier and thereafter leading the lives of utmost promiscuousness".25 This statement is unwarranted and the fact that it comes from a lady makes it all the more ugly. The German psychosis of the post-First World War time was such that it cannot be brushed aside as the private thought of a frustrated individual. Though the Germans cannot be branded as solely responsible for the World War the German attitude was a major cause.

Frau Rittersdorf cannot tolerate the inconvenience caused to her by her cabin mate and she decides to be severe with her. "The effective practice of severity — I learned this with those beastly English children — lies in ceaseless, relentless, utter persistence, never an instant's let down, but vigilance all the way or they will be up on you like a pack of hyenas".26 Her prejudices are so strong that she can compare the English children only to beasts. Severity in action, even if it is to children, is the German way of solving the problems. The English children should be severely dealt with lest they should have their evil influence on the children of Germany — the chosen country. The German is the ideal one and all the evil forces of the world are conniving together to put Germany into shame

25 *Ship of Fools*, p.254

26 Ibid., p.274
and disgrace. Like the Captain she also entertains the idea that the Germans are not guilty in any way and yet they are made to suffer unnecessarily.

A very ominous aspect of German nationalism is a strong bias in favour of German literature and an attempt to undervalue the great literatures of other nations. This tendency started to flourish in the pre-Second World War Germany. Hitler was very eager to cash in on that tendency of the elites of Germany. Professor Hutten uses his social position and persuasive ability to convince others of the greatness of his fatherland and the inferiority of all other nations. According to him by uttering the great German names of Nietzsche and Kant in a casual way the Cuban students are bringing disgrace to those hallowed names. He cannot see any intellectual sobriety in them. He has no doubt that though Shakespeare and Dante are great writers, they are definitely inferior when compared with the great German writers. The opinions of the Professor are not disapproved by any of the German passengers. The Captain also airs similar views about German music and dance.

Though the people of other nations are not as adamant as the Germans about their national superiority many of them suffer from this weakness. The Mexican priest Carillo has certain foolish notions. "The Tenerifans for example were mostly decent pious folk. The trouble would be found among the Austrians and Andalusians, between them there existed old enmities at best, and he Father Carillo, was not surprised to discover that anti-religious faction consisted almost
entirely of Austrians with a sprinkling of Basque".\textsuperscript{27} John Edward Hardy in \textit{Katherine Anne Porter} points out:

At one level, as we have noted, the book is about Fascism. But the great folly of Fascism, the absurd objective of enforcing by political means national and racial standards for membership in human community, is revealed in \textit{Ship of Fools} as one manifestation of the Supreme and timeless folly of man in his compulsion to set the limit of any and all kinds to his human identity, to circumscribe his human potential.\textsuperscript{28}

Though most of the important characters in the novel are intoxicated with a wrong type of nationalism, there are a few exceptions. Doctor Schumann the ship's doctor does not carry his nationalism to any ridiculous extent. He too, like Professor Hutten disapproves of the behaviour of the Cuban students. His conclusions are in no way influenced by the nationality of the students. They are strictly from the standpoint of fundamental decency. He refuses to spy on the Spaniards though the Captain desires him to do so. On board the ship no one gets any preferential treatment from him on account of nationality. Many of the passengers hate the two children Ric and Rac mostly for their mischief and at least partly for their being the children of the Spanish Zarzuela company. They look down upon the Spaniards as cheats and generalize the statement. The Germans with the exception of the Doctor cannot relish any equation of Spain with Germany.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ship of Fools}, p.172

\textsuperscript{18} Hardy, \textit{Katherine Anne Porter}, p.127.
It irritates all the Germans to hear the members of the Spanish company, at the party given in honour of the Captain, say that the Spanish nation and the German nation are equals and friends. It is true that the members of the Zarzuela company indulge in all conceivable malpractices. But most of the Germans want to trace it to their Spanish origin and the Doctor alone thinks differently, though he is not vociferous in his condemnation of this attitude of the fellow Germans. The Doctor catches Ric and Rac red-handed when they are trying to throw the dog overboard.

"Doctor Schumann, holding them firmly but with practiced gentleness, examined the depths of their eyes for a moment. With dismay at their blind unwinking malignance, their cold shyness - not beasts, though, but human souls. Oh Yes, human, more's the pity, thought the doctor losening his hold". This reveals a noble trait in him and this difference in outlook occasionally alienates him from the rest of the Germans. The remark in the book that Schumann believed in God "in a particularly Bavarian Catholic way" is not to implicate him in any narrow creed. The Doctor never tries to mix religion, politics and nationalism. "Dr. Schumann is not a bigoted fraternity man, but a professional man of talent, a trustworthy observer with a clinical eye and human compassion. He is representative of what was good in a Germany of the past — but he is dying of

29 *Ship of Fools*, p.112.
heart disease, just as the ‘good’ Germany is dying". But unfortunately the good man is incapable of protesting against the evil doers who are aggressive and untamable. Silence is not to be treated as a great virtue on such occasions. In fact it amounts to collusion with evil.

The artist-lovers David and Jenny are not as dogmatic as the Fascist Germans. Their views are the same about the question of nationalities and national traits. During a conversation with Freytag, Jenny confides to him about her mixed ancestry. She is proud of it. "No Tartar, no Jew, no Chinese, no Bantu, just the old home mixture. Dutch, Scotch - Irish - English., Welsh, French and one great-great — grandmother with a Spanish name who was just the same half Irish — no Hungarian even above all no German. No German at all". This statement may make one think that though she is not constrained by any narrow minded nationalism, she is an anti-German. Freytag guesses wrongly that the First World War might be the cause of such a remark. She rushes to correct his misconception and asserts that she has no prejudices. She repeats that nothing can be more vulgar and dogmatic than even the faintest shade of disapproval of anything or anybody on the grounds of nationality or religion.

30 Willene Hendrink and George Hendrick, Katherine Anne Porter, p.114.

31 Ship of Fools, p.89
Her dislike for some of the actions of Germans is not because the actions
are committed by Germans but because they are uncivilised. When David, Jenny
and Mrs Treadwell are engaged in another conversation, Mrs Treadwell observes
that she has a desire to go to Bologne. Jenny whose choice was Paris and who had
to change it out of compulsion bursts out: "The more I think of it the more I hate
going to Germany".\textsuperscript{32} This again may be mistaken by the reader. She has nothing
against Germany as a nation. This statement of hatred has its genesis in a
disappointed mind whose aspirations were thwarted by the adamant attitude of
David.

Some German reviewers have complained that by caricaturing the Germans,
Miss Porter has done them great wrong. But the fact is that she has no clearly
identifiable protagonist or antagonist. The author does not make any attempt to
idealise any non-German. The insistence upon a general failure of humanity creates
not only a feeble portent of Hitler’s Germany but also of an inevitable international
catastrophe. She has drawn upon all her years of experience, all her artistic powers
and artistic methods to tell the truth to her readers.

There are a number of incidents to prove in her books and articles that she
had not exempted the non-Germans from her criticism. The atmosphere of the
whole of America in the Winter of 1930 was bleak. The calculated hate campaign

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Ship of Fools}, p.138.
against Germans had reached a crescendo and resulted in a fearful hysteria about acts of domestic sabotage such as germ warfare and poisoned water supplies. Under the pressure of this torment Porter’s childhood neighbour Mrs. Wilhelmain Schlemmer lost her health and died of a massive heart attack at the age of 58. Inspite of all these Miss Porter exposed only the truth and did not portray the Germans with any exaggeration of their follies.

During the beginning of the Second World War she was already suffering from personal misfortunes. But she was one who had the ability to see what was happening to other human beings in different parts of World. She listened to radio and each News Bulletin brought news of greater disasters. As she listened to the radio accounts of events in Europe, her thoughts however turned instead to her months in Berlin in 1931 and it was the story of that time which claimed her attention. She was convinced that there were clear-sighted men in a misguided society even in Nazi Germany. Washington during the Second World War was in a ferment of military and diplomatic activity. She was doubly sure that the main reason for the World Wars was the peculiar type of nationalism propagated by Germany and other nations.

It might appear that she found Nazi nationalism a greater evil. But as she was one who loved all humanity, the narrow outlook of other nations also did not appeal to her. Undoubtedly she was a patriot but at the same time she could never approve of the destruction of human values in the name nationalism. Those who
have read only *Ship of Fools* may feel that she had very strong anti-Nazi feelings but those who are familiar with her wartime despatches will clearly see Katherine Anne Porter as a broad-minded nationalist. Through out her works she has pinpointed that narrow-minded nationalism is one of the major causes for international disharmony.

During a conversation with James Ruoff in 1961 Miss Porter said:

That ship was like a basket of snakes on a hot stove. People were drawn together by religion, separated by language or nationality; drawn together by nationality, separated by caste or politics, you see, all my life I’d been a completely free agent experiencing one thing and then moving on to experience something else, but aboard that ship I was stuck — stuck with people I never dreamed existed and I started keeping a diary of everying I saw and heard. Strangely enough, I don’t think I spoke a half dozen words to as many passengers, yet I could not take my eyes and ears off them.\(^{33}\)

Through some of her short stories in general and *Ship of Fools* in particular she has established her viewpoint that the pre-Second World War nationalistic tendencies were detrimental to harmony in human life and played a vital role in increasing international tension.

\(^{33}\) James Ruoff "Conversation with Katherine Anne Porter", *Katherine Anne Porter: Conversations*, p.66.