

Joana MOTTA⁵⁸, Maria BARBOSA⁵⁹

NATIONAL ANTHEMS AS SYMBOLS OF IDENTITY: THE CASE OF THE EU27

Introduction

National identity is the basis for any society, becoming particularly important in the rapidly changing human geography of a growing European Union. This social learned process gives a sense of belonging to the community that shares it. The present research consists in identifying each EU member state's national identity as expressed through its national anthem, by trying to discover underlying cultural values and confronting them with one another. The English lyrics of the national anthems of each EU27 country were analyzed and compared by applying the method of the thematic content analysis.

1. Literature review

National identity

According to Dr. Mitja Žagar, the director of the Institute for Ethnic Studies at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, identity can be defined as a “social phenomenon, a process and not a state; it appears, changes, transforms and eventually ceases to exist”.

The sociological and cultural importance given to the concept of “identity” was largely discussed in the literature by such authors as Giddens (1991, 1994), Hall and du Gay (1996), Sarup (1996), du Gay *et al.* (2000) and, more recently, Edensor (2002).

In the last two centuries the nation has been the foundation for identification and a sense of belonging on a collective basis. In sociological and psychological terms the individual distinguishes himself from the “others”⁶⁰, whether on an individual or a collective level, by “expressing, feeling and embodying” a sense of national identity⁶¹ (Jenkins 1996). According to Hall

⁵⁸ Ph.D Researcher at CIGEST – Centro de Investigação em Gestão at ISG – Instituto Superior de Gestão, Universidade Lusófona das Humanidades e Tecnologias, Lisbon.

⁵⁹ Ph.D Sociology of Culture and Communication, Instituto Superior de Ciências do Trabalho e da Empresa (ISCTE), Lisbon.

⁶⁰ Distinction between in-group and out-group.

⁶¹ Jenkins (1996) explains that “(...) identity is a process, not an essence, which is continually being remade in consistent ways, through an ‘internal–external dialectic’

(1996, 1997), identity is a process of “becoming”, rather than “being”, making use of history, language and culture⁶². Hall (1996) acknowledges that national identity is “cross-cut by deep internal division differences, and ‘unified’ only through the exercise of different forms of cultural power to provide an illusion of Commonality”.

According to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the “in-group” needs a comparable “out-group” to affirm its distinctiveness (Nigbur & Cinnirella, 2007; Finell & Liebkind, 2010). Rituals and national symbols play an important role in the practice of this process (Brewer, 1999), as does discriminative behavior (Turner, 1999; Reicher, 2004) and in-group loyalty (Brewer, 1991; Mlicki & Ellemers, 1996). Nigbur & Cinnirella (2007) acknowledge the existence of two different dimensions in the social identity process: the “universal” search for uniqueness and the context-dependent desire for distinctiveness. Also Vignoles, Chryssochoou & Breakwell (2000) agree that distinctiveness is not a single construct⁶³.

Self-categorization theory has also contributed to the study of the process of distinctiveness construction (Turner *et al.*, 1987; Drury & Reicher, 1999). The need to “be different”, so argues Turner (1999), does not unavoidably lead to conflicting intergroup relations. Billig (1987) has noted that the recognition of other countries’ identities has become particularly important for young nations.

Furthermore, Brown (2000) proposes that social identities can also be sustained following two other strategies, besides building distinctiveness vis-à-vis the “others”, to be exact the comparison to abstract standards (Hinkle & Brown, 1990)⁶⁴ and secular comparison (Albert, 1977; Brown & Zagefka, 2006; Condor, 2006). This latter strategy can be understood as a change between the nation’s past and present situation (Mummen-dey, Klink & Brown, 2001). Quite on the contrary, Condor (2006) argues that history and continuity are the main sources of national identity (Sani *et al.*, 2007).

European identity

In geographic terms Europe can be defined by its natural frontiers, being confined by the territory that lays between the Scandinavian Peninsula to the

involving a simultaneous synthesis of internal self-definition and one’s ascription by others”.

⁶² To identify one’s culture the right question to be asked is “what we might become”, instead of “who we are”.

⁶³ Three different sources of distinctiveness are identified: position, difference and separateness.

⁶⁴ So far, no empirical evidence exists.

North, the European Mediterranean coast to the South, the Atlantic Coast of Portugal to the West and the Ural Mountains to the East⁶⁵. Furthermore, this geographic area can be divided by regions, namely Western Europe, Central (Middle) Europe, Northern Europe (Scandinavia), Southern (Mediterranean) Europe, Eastern and South Eastern Europe, rendering the boundaries of identity diffused.

If European identity is to be characterized by its historical and political dimensions that imposed themselves over the natural geography of the territory, the definition of Europe becomes even more complex and entangled. Political⁶⁶, religious⁶⁷, economic and social forces, all contributed, and still contribute⁶⁸, to the ongoing reshaping of cultural European identities⁶⁹.

In the past century the perception of Europe was mainly conditioned by the political division between the “liberal” West and the “Iron Curtain” that veiled over the East⁷⁰. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the extinction of Communism, the enlargement of the European Union (EU) towards the East instilled a new quest for the search of an European identity that can express simultaneously a pluralistic and unified Europe, a sense of “European-ness”⁷¹.

Regarding identity strategies all together, ideology plays a major role, since Nationalism can be seen as a set of beliefs (Billig, 1996). Dual identities⁷² allow a nation to be a member of a super-ordinate group, keeping at the same time in balance its subgroup differences (Hornsey&Jetten, 2004).

The definition of national identity thus refers to diverse perceptions of nations anchored in dissimilar versions of history, emblems, cultural icons and physical environments (Reicher&Hopkins, 2001).

⁶⁵ The Mediterranean islands of Cyprus and Malta, and Iceland, are included in this definition.

⁶⁶ For example, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire or the Roman Empire, and more recently the dismantling of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.

⁶⁷ For example, in the East of Europe, the division between the western (Catholic and Protestant) and the eastern (Orthodox) Christianity did not exist in the historical period of the Roman Empire.

⁶⁸ One typical example is the Basque people, which are still fighting for their independence.

⁶⁹ Urry (1995, 2000) presents a rather interesting approach to identity. Lifestyles seem to be based on an anthropological sense of sociality and consumer choices that characterize national identity and lead, therefore, to the construction of “multiple forms of identity” within Europe.

⁷⁰ According to Heffernan (1998), “the West feared the East and the East feared the West”.

⁷¹ As the American semiotic theorist Peirce would have called it.

⁷² Like the one proposed to its member states by the EU.

European symbols

National symbols are the visible part of the abstract concept of nation, giving its people a concrete “object of identification”(Durkheim, 1964.). According to the Official Website of the European Union⁷³ several symbols⁷⁴ were created to foster the economic and social unification of Europe: 1) the European flag⁷⁵, 2) the European Anthem, 3) the motto “United in Diversity” and 4) Europe Day on the 9th of May⁷⁶. Beethoven's "Ode to Joy"⁷⁷, played without words, has been adopted by the EU's heads of State and governments as the official anthem of the European Union since 1985.

The meaning of music

In 1832 Felix Mendelssohn wrote the first of a series of eight piano plays that he called “Songs without Words”. Mendelssohn himself resisted attempts to interpret the *Songs* too literally and objected when his friend Sou-chay wanted to put words to them to make them “literal songs”⁷⁸. For Middleton (1990), music inhabits a semiotic realm which has primacy over verbal language⁷⁹. According to C. S. Peirce's⁸⁰ work in semiotics⁸¹, musical meaning is conveyed by a sign system that can be defined as “natural” or “conventional” and the real source of meaning lies in the mind⁸². Dennett (1995) proposes that mental ideas and processes exhibit intentionality. The

⁷³ www.europa.eu/abc/symbols/index_en.html

⁷⁴ Peirce's terminology.

⁷⁵ The European Flag as a symbol is described as “the twelve stars in a circle symbolize the ideals of unity, solidarity and harmony amongst the people of Europe”.

⁷⁶ It was on the 9th of May of 1950 that the French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman put forward the idea of the European Union.

⁷⁷ Herbert Von Karajan was invited for the musical arrangement of the anthem. The official version was recorded in Lisbon in the Teatro da Trindade.

⁷⁸ Mendelssohn wrote: “What the music I love expresses to me, is not thought too *indefinite* to put into words, but on the contrary, too *definite*.”[Mendelssohn's italics]

⁷⁹ At both levels, the ontogenetic and phylogenetic one.

⁸⁰ See also Barthes' work (1977) for the aesthetic relevance he assigns to music. Barthes called for a “second semiology,” in contrast to classical semiology, which would explore “the body in a state of music.” Key concepts in his writings related to the meaning of music include terms such as gesture, pulsion, grain and jouissance. Barthes himself was a keen amateur pianist.

⁸¹ For further debate on different perspectives on the subject, see Lakoff (1987) and Jackendoff (1983, 1990).

⁸² The thought that the mind constructs meaning is the keystone to contemporary cognitive science.

relationship between music and meaning⁸³ has been extensively debated more recently by Cross & Tolbert (2008).

All musical work, including national anthems, is composed by several symbolic codes: melodic, phrase, harmonic, form, dynamic, rhythmic and orchestration codes (Westergaard, 1976; Benward *et al.* 1992; Benward, 2001). These codes are represented by the musical notes, each one gaining meaning according to their placement in a larger system.

Certainly the most intriguing study in this research field was conducted by Droettboom & Fujinaga (2001) whose intention was to interpret automatically the semantics of musical notation⁸⁴ using object-oriented systems⁸⁵, to be exact, Optical Music Recognition (OMR)⁸⁶. The authors concluded that differences in music notation occur both at the symbolic and the semantic level. When the right hemisphere of the brain is stimulated by musical impulses the language centers in the left hemisphere, i.e. Broca's and Wernicke's area, are equally stimulated. The assumption, that a musical composition without words, like the EU national anthem, is more capable in gaining the mutual consent and acceptance of all member states is now in question.

2. Methodology

National anthems in the EU Contrary to the EU's international anthem, all member states' national anthems have lyrics. The aim of this study is to verify how the rhetorical identity is constructed throughout these lyrics, in order to distinguish "in-groups" from "out-groups" in the context of a specific national symbol. For that purpose the English lyrics of all EU Member States' current national anthems were qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed and compared by applying the method of the thematic content analysis. The *corpus* consisted of the 27 national anthems existing in the EU⁸⁷. Since the con-

⁸³ For a discussion on the topic of what "state of affairs" can be considered to have meaning see also Johnson-Laird (1983), Tarski (1956), Sibley (1959) and Bourdieu (1990).

⁸⁴ For an extensive literature review on the numerous attempts to quantify music see Cerulo (1986, 1989).

⁸⁵ Otherwise, musical notations data can be introduced manually in a machine-readable format (Huron & Selfridge-Field, 1994) or musicians need to play scores on MIDI keyboards (Selfridge-Field, 1993).

⁸⁶ For further research on OMR consult Carter (1989), Fujinaga (1996) and Bainbridge (1997).

⁸⁷ Quite contrary to what was expected, it was very difficult to find the English lyrics for EU member states' national anthems. After searching the Google browser for the first 200 references on "national anthems English lyrics" the most complete site found was <http://www.national-anthems.net>. This site was not considered to be trustworthy by the authors, since no content source was identified. The texts were eventually retrieved from the Austrian School portal site, whose contents fall under

tent analysis required skills in poetry and lyric text interpretation the two authors worked together with a researcher with a Ph.D. in English Studies (Literature) and no panel approach was used.

A historical and contextual perspective was disregarded in this analysis, since it is ultimately a matter of power which discourse of identity gains supremacy (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001), namely the one chosen by the ruling hierarchy according to the political system of a nation.

3. Results

The construction of national identity through anthem lyrics: code system Regarding the communication process expressed through the lyrics of the national anthems, the following pragmatic results can be obtained: in average terms, the subject of the discourse is a collectivity (“we”) and a chorus is present (singing the refrain). The main theme is the “praise” of the nation and the addressee the own country.

Table 1
Code-system – Pragmatics of communication

Parent codes and sub-codes	Themes/ Representative words	Total sum	Talk to country	12
Pragmatics				
Subject	I	6		
	We	14		
	Use of chorus	21		
	Not specified	7		
Main theme	Praise	14		
	Instigation	8		
	Not defined	5		
Addressee				
			Talk to God	5
			Talk to folk	4

The following parent codes, sub-codes and themes were identified and the appearance frequency computed:

the supervision of the Ministry for Education in Austria:
http://webs.schule.at/website/Europa/Europa_anthems_en.html

Table 2
Thematic Code-system (continues on the next two pages)

Parent codes and subcodes	Themes	Representative Words	Parcial Sum	Total sum
1	2	3	4	5
Nation				275
<i>Definition</i>				110
	Name of nation		59	
	Homeland		27	
	Fatherland		15	
	Others	Motherland, Nation	9	
<i>Geography</i>				85
	Climate		26	
	Landscape		59	
<i>Characteristics</i>				80
	Beloved		25	
	Greatness		23	
	Beautiful		17	
	Others	Blessed, Conquered, Immortal, Brave, Fair, Envied	15	
Agents				167
<i>Civilians</i>				96
	Equalitarian	Brothers, Woman, Man, Citizens, Race	32	
	Descendants	Sons, Descendants, Daughters, Children, Grandchildren	23	
	Ancestors, Past heroes		41	
<i>Rulers</i>		King, Queen, Governors, Warriors, God		21
<i>Body allusions</i>				40
	Heart		15	
	Others	Blood, Hand, Chest, Head, Corps	25	
<i>Symbolism</i>				10
	Flag		7	
	Heraldic		3	
Values				173
<i>Competencies</i>				89
	Devoted		21	
	Loyal		19	
	Willing to sacrifice		17	
	Others	Honorable, Courageous, Strong, Virtuous, Magnanimous, Proud	32	

<i>Ideology</i>				84
	Unity		22	
	Freedom		17	
	Right		12	
	Glory		10	
[Values]				
	Others	Faith, Happiness, Peace, Truth	23	
Out-group				87
	Neighbours		1	
	Enemies	Accomplices, Mercenaries, Hordes, Traitors, Tyrants, Despot, Name of enemy (abstract)	51	
	Enemy\Characteristics	Ill fate, Wild, Insulting, Dishonest, Violent	35	
Wish for change				301
<i>Reason for change</i>				71
	Present condition	Persecution, Slavery, Sufferance, Anger, Sins, Asleep	21	
	Past condition	Death, Persecuted, Bad fate, Sufferance, Yoke, Divided, Anger	50	
<i>Actor of change</i>				19
	Divinity	Priests, God, Mother	3	
	People	Folk	1	
		Military	5	
	Nature		1	
	Time		9	
<i>Means of action</i>				25
	Senses	Speaking, Seeing, Sounds (Drums, Trumpets)	12	
	Battle	Land	2	
		Weapons	11	
<i>Desired action</i>				90
	Within nation/Passive	Pray, Believe, Embrace	10	
	Within nation/Agressive	Arise, Defend, Work, March, Fight	33	
	Divinity	Bless, Protect, Guide, Inspire, Give strength, Awake, Stop	47	
<i>Desired outcome</i>				89

	Salvation		15	
<i>[Desired outcome]</i>				
	Victory		29	
	Unity		11	
	Liberty/Freedom		12	
	Others	Longevity, Faith, Happiness, Peace, Truth, Beauty, Protection	22	
<i>Undesired outcome</i>				7
		Suffering, Plagues, Fear, Death, Tyranny	7	

The 5 identified parent codes were further reduced to two distinct dimensions:

It can be seen that the national identity of all EU member states' taken together is primarily defined as a static notion by references that allow characterizing the in-group (61,3%) and the out-group (8,7%), followed at a distance by the construction of identity as a process (30,0%).

Table 3
Parent codes and dimensions

Dimensions	Dimension frequency	Parent code	Parent code frequency
Identity	702	Nation	275
		Agents	167
		Values	173
		Out-group	87
Change	301	Reason for change	71
		Actor of change	19
		Means of action	25
		Desired action	90
		Desired outcome	89
		Undesired outcome	7

Conclusion

A subjective proposal for lyrics for the EU anthem

It is tempting at this point of the research to propose orientation for conceivable lyrics for the EU Anthem, considering that, according to Droettboom & Fujinaga (2001), when the brain is stimulated by musical impulses the lan-

guage centers are equally stimulated. The existence of words accompanying Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" would allow closing its interpretation. The most frequent mentioned themes of each parent code and sub-code and their partial and total sums were considered as a guideline. The following table reflects the authors' proposal for the themes that could be addressed by the lyrics of the EU Anthem, in accordance with the findings of the present study:

Table 4
Subjective proposal for the EU anthem

Sub-codes	Themes/Representative words
Pragmatics	Subject: Member states altogether (we), Use of chorus (children) Addressee: European Union Main theme: Praise of member states
Nation	Definition: Greek myth of Europa ⁸⁸ Landscape: Different geographies Characteristics / Greatness: "Old Continent" with history and tradition
Agents	People of Member states, People as descendants
Values	Loyal: Sense of belonging, Unity
Out-group	Other world regions
Wish for change	Desired outcome: Growth, Competitiveness

Last, but not least, since national identification relies mainly on the issue of idiosyncratic identity (69,8% of all references found in the *corpus*), emphasizing the characteristics of the nation and the naming of its people (62,9% of all identity references) over the values (only 24,6% of all identity references), it is also the strong conviction of the authors, that the motto of the European Union "United in Diversity", should be inversed to "Diversity in Unity". A good argument that also speaks for this syntax, is that national identity has been identified in this research as a static concept (69,9% of all references) rather than as a transformational action process.

Limitations

Due to the difficulty and subjectivity in interpreting poetic lyrics of anthems, and the fact that no panel approach was used throughout the thematic content analysis, the reliability of this research is expected not to be very high. On the other hand, the face value of the study relies entirely on the English translations of the EU Anthems. Even if a multicultural research team were to work together on this study, the issue of the restrictive nature of translations would always be present at some point of the research. Furthermore, the historical and contextual perspective of lyrics for each national anthem

⁸⁸ See Robert Graves (1990).

was disregarded in this analysis, based on the argument that the discourse of identity that gains supremacy is the one that is chosen by the ruling hierarchy according to the political system of a nation. However, from a sociological perspective, it may not reflect the nation's identity as "lived" by its people.

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RESUME

La recherche d'une identité européenne et d'une possible perte des identités nationales des États membres a été discutée au sein de l'Union européenne dans le contexte de son élargissement. L'identité nationale, processus social appris, donne un sentiment d'appartenance à une communauté. Elle se manifeste, entre autres éléments, à travers des symboles nationaux destinés à donner des représentations visuelles et verbales, voire emblématique des valeurs culturelles et historiques. Parmi ces symboles, l'hymne national, exaltant généralement les luttes historiques du peuple, tient une place éminente. Parfois, des entités plus importantes, comme les Nations Unies ou le Mouvement olympique, ont des hymnes qui sont déterminés par convention. En 1972, le Conseil de l'Europe, également responsable de la conception du drapeau européen, a adopté l' "Ode à la Joie" de Beethoven comme hymne international, invitant Herbert Von Karajan à l'arranger. Rédigé dans le langage universel de la musique, sans parole, elle a été adoptée par les chefs d'Etat et de gouvernement comme hymne officiel de l'Union européenne en 1985. Il ne s'agit pas de remplacer les hymnes nationaux de chacun des 27 États membres mais de promouvoir la devise européenne «Unité dans la diversité». Ce texte consiste à analyser et comparer les paroles en anglais de tous les hymnes nationaux des États membres de l'UE en appliquant la méthode de l'analyse de contenu thématique, en essayant d'identifier les valeurs culturelles sous-jacentes et en les confrontant les unes aux autres.

ABSTRACT

The search for a European identity and a possible loss of the national Member States' identities has been discussed within the European Union in the context of its consecutive enlargement and the Union's Constitutional Treaty. National identity, a social learned process, gives a sense of belonging to the community that shares it. It manifests itself, among other elements, through National symbols intended to unite by creating visual, verbal, or even iconic representations of cultural and historic values. Amongst these symbols, national anthems, generally by evoking and exalting the historical and traditional struggles of its people, hold an eminent place.

Sometimes, larger entities, like the United Nations or the Olympic Movement, also have anthems that are determined by convention. In 1972, the Council of Europe, also responsible for designing the European flag, embraced Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" theme as its international anthem, by inviting Herbert Von Karajan to arrange it. Written in the universal language of music, without words, it was adopted by EU heads of State and government as the official anthem of the European Union in 1985. Not intending to replace the national anthems of each of the 27 Member States its end is to praise the European motto "Unity in Diversity". The present research consists in analyzing and comparing the English lyrics of all EU Member States' national anthems by applying the method of the thematic content analysis, trying to identify underlying cultural values and confronting them with one another.