

The making of a national symbol

A transnational and digital exploration of national and regional anthems in Europe

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Since the 1980s, the European Union has sought to stimulate a sense of European unity rooted in a shared history, common cultural legacy and set of symbols (Plantel 2005). Recently, the Stockholm Programme (2010-2014) stated that a remembrance of shared history is necessary to understand contemporary Europe. An important symptom of this political quest to define a common historical memory are recent attempts to designate a Europe-wide remembrance day. With the implementation of the 'European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism' that commemorates the Molotov Ribbentrop Pact between the USSR and Nazi Germany on 23 August 1939, anti-totalitarianism was chosen as the main common denominator of the European political legacy (Clarke 2014). This was met with little enthusiasm: only nine of the twenty-eight member states have formally adopted the remembrance. It was stated that commemorating instead of celebrating the common legacy reduces European heritage to tragedy and political fights.

This collaborative project proposes an alternative approach to this shared European legacy by focusing on the transnational origins of an archetypal national symbol. Stepping beyond the usual references to the Greek-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions as the roots of European culture, we propose a down to earth, empirical approach by dissecting the interconnected literary and musical ingredients of national and regional anthems in Europe from the 18th century to the 21st. The focus on the inter-connections of a content that is intrinsically linked with national identity will reveal the often neglected international roots of national cultural artefacts. This approach will enable us to

trace the different overlapping and intersecting registers at which the development of national symbols occurred. This way we plan to bring into light the multi-layered architecture of European identities, namely the infra-, trans-, inter- and supranational levels at which transfers of ideas and agency were played out.

National anthems have been described as 'possibly the strongest, clearest statement of national identity' (Kyridis, Mavrikou, Zagkos 2009). While individual case-studies point out that many of these national symbols had in fact transnational roots, historiography of this genre remains remarkably secluded within the national borders. This innovative research will study national anthems in a much broader sense, including the cultural and intellectual transfers between different national and regional musical and literary traditions and language areas in Europe. This approach may show that transnational networks and traditions might well have been essential for the construction of this national symbol. Studying the anthems in this way allows to reflect on how markers of national uniqueness are constructed, and offers a counter-narrative to the essentialist approach in nationalism research.

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This study will be guided by two central clusters of research questions, that explore the cultural and intellectual transfers and patterns (1) in the making and (2) in the performing of the anthems. The first set of questions focuses on the production of the anthems, and will shed light on the authors and composers. What was the background of the creators? Where did they live and worked? In which social networks did they function? Which songs and poems served as an inspiration? The second set of questions focuses on the organic way the songs grew into national or regional anthems, and examines the link between the anthems, nation building and the emergence of popular culture. Where and when were the songs performed abroad and at home? Where and when did unofficial, parallel anthems emerge through performances? Which networks and persons played a key role in those performances? Who was the target audience? How was that perceived in other nations or regions?

In order to trace the transfers and patterns in the creation of a Pan-European phenomenon as national anthems, an international scope and collaboration is needed. For this purpose, we chose to adopt an innovative European-scale and digital approach for this project. The research collaboration

is organized by *National movements and Intermediary Structures in Europe* (NISE), a strong network of 75 researchers and institutions from 27 countries specializing in nationalism, who will work in an online virtual environment where they will share and analyse texts and source-materials. This new instrument, named *Digital Infrastructure for the Analysis of National movements in Europe* (DIANE), allows large-scale collection of data, and will generate new insights on how national anthems were constructed. The content will be immediately shared and analysed in the research environment. Collaborating within a web based infrastructure provides the immediate benefit of each other's expertise and research data. Instead of investigating anthems as separate projects, collaborators can take into account the coherence, parallels and transfers existing between individual songs and persons. Moreover, they can immediately and easily project the evolutions, patterns and links using a comprehensive set of powerful tools for analysing and visualising social networks, geographical movements and chronological evolutions. Empirical data will be gathered and linked in a database, in which the range of researched anthems will grow organically, depending on the voluntary input of the collaborators and guided by the full-time employees of the NISE-coordination centre. In a first stage, two anthems will be examined at full length. Data on the Flemish and Belgian anthem will be entered by the NISE scientific coordinator Nel de Mûelenaere (Antwerp University), and the Croatian anthem will be analysed by a group of master students supervised by Drago Roksandic (University of Zagreb). These case-studies will demonstrate the capacity of the infrastructure and stimulate further sustainable and reliable scholarly crowdsourcing within the NISE-network.

This project will deliver a major contribution (1) to the scholarly field of nationalism studies, (2) to the emerging field of digital humanities and (3) to public understanding of Europe's shared cultural heritage.

Firstly, the transnational, broad-scaled approach will allow a historiographical reconsideration of the place of national anthems in Europe's cultural and political formation, while fostering new forms of scholarly exchange and analysis. Building on the ground work of NISE, the digital infrastructure can consolidate a transnational virtual scholarly community within this and cognate fields. It will create a platform for a radically multilateral scholarly collaboration on a very concrete theme that is well researched within national communities but has not been systematically explored on a Pan-European scale. This platform will facilitate the pooling of fragmented data on individual case studies, allowing scholars to navigate efficiently through research material on national and regional anthems. Because of the broad geographical range of the data, the most effective way of interrogating and comprehending the material on national anthems will be social network,

geographical and chronological visualisations. Networking scholars using these new tools will transform the understanding of how national anthems emerged in the modern period, and help lay the foundation of a truly transnational history of national symbols in Europe. It will help generate fresh perspectives on the transnational transfers that lay on the basis of these markers of national identity, make this data available to scholars and stimulate new research questions and case studies. Secondly, this joint effort is not only a major contribution to transnational research on nationalism, but equally stimulates the use of revolutionary digital tools in this field. DIANE, the digital environment that will host this project aims to be a starting point for cutting edge research on national and regional movements in Europe. This collaborative work on national anthems aims to discover how DIANE should be further enhanced in order to effectively function as a digital platform for data sharing, textual and network analysis. It will allow us to test and improve the design while gathering data for a first showcase of the infrastructure. Throughout the project, a detailed manual and user guide will be developed, and the user-friendliness of the system will be constantly evaluated.

Thirdly, this project will be of great public and educational value. The audio-visual character of the anthems makes this project exceptionally suitable for public consumption, and the digital tools that will allow researchers to interpret the data will also provide ideal means of rendering the results of cutting-edge scholarship accessible to a non-specialist audience via a visual appealing public website. This will extend the impact of this work into both the classroom and the broader public sphere.

The project will provide a counter-narrative to the wave of ultra-nationalism that has been recently felt in Europe. Singing of national anthems has been treated as a symbol for this re-emergence of strong national identities. Using a universal marker of national uniqueness such as national anthems is a particular powerful way of showing that international cultural exchange is an inherent part of our history. This endeavour can transform current understandings of national symbols, and inject distilled illustrations of how transnational many of these symbols actually are into the public sphere, and thereby help reinforce European values and identities. This will contribute to a more balanced picture of Europe's shared cultural heritage.

References

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