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Title: A Thematic Content Analysis of National Anthems: Europe vs. Members of the Arab League

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\*\*\*The following article was authored by Dr. Michael Moore, Department of Education in Science and Technology Technion - Israel Institute of Technology, and Daniela Kramer-Moore, Oranim Teachers' College, Israel.

Abstract: The authors conduct a political psychological analysis of national anthems from European, African, and Middle Eastern nations. Their results focus on the difference between anthems of European nations and members of the Arab League, and potential reasons behind those differences.

National symbols act like calling cards ("self-stereotypes" in Bums, Branscombe & Jackson 2000; see also Feinstein, 2001): A country's flag and anthem often serve as its most visible identifiers, not only toward outsiders, but vis-a-vis its own citizens, as well. We associate emotionally charged acts with such symbols. Think of the story of the Star-Spangled Banner (Molotsky, 2001), of the flag on Iwo Jima (Edwards & Winkler, 1997), of numerous instances of flag-burning (Helwig & Prencipe, 1999; Moore, 1977. See also Howard & Gill, 2001; Lawson, 1978; Moore & Kramer, 1993). National anthems have a similar symbolic value: The singing of the anthem at public ceremonies ([I]inter alia[I]), at international sport events) can serve as a solemn occasion, associated with both pride at current achievements and sorrow for past sacrifices (see Diaz de Chumaceiro, 2001; Dumbrava, 1998; Edgewater, 1999; Taj & Rekha, 1995).

Proceeding on the quite safe assumption that texts influence their readers and listeners (see Kramer & Moore, 2001b; Kramer-Moore & Moore, 2002, pp. 32-33), there arises a natural interest in the verbal content of national anthems. A brief perusal of a random selection shows that these relatively short documents convey rich, condensed, myth-packed messages, teeming with highly significant concepts; it also confirms the aptness of Leidman's (1994) observation: "National anthems are chauvinistic by design".

The preliminary character of the study at hand is dictated by the lack of previous work in this field. (An exception is a content analysis of the broadcast style and design of national anthems on Middle Eastern television; this work did not touch upon the content of the anthems; see Leidman, 1994). We shall approach the problem through the use of the extreme cases technique, analogous to concurrent validation by known groups. The groups selected were members of the Arab League vs. countries of Europe (excluding the former Communist bloc). It is hypothesized that a thematic content analysis of representative hymns of these two groups will reveal significant differences between them.

## Method

Ready availability of a relatively large number of usable texts dictated the choice of the countries participating in this study. Of the 22 members of the Arab League, we located the English translation of the national anthem of 15 on a single web site ([www.thenationalanthems.com](http://www.thenationalanthems.com)). We then randomly selected 15 European countries whose anthem in English appeared on the same site. The content of these 30 anthems (belonging to Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy,

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Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Turkey, Sweden, Switzerland, UK; Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Yemen) was analyzed by counting every occurrence of words or expressions that indicate:

A: aggression, such as war, fight, (enemy's) blood or death, killing, weapons, revenge, enemy

P: pain, such as suffering, (own) blood or death, victim, sacrifice, martyrs, danger

L: liberty, independence, rejection of slavery

I: other abstract ideals, such as truth, glory, honor, pride, unity, courage, loyalty, justice, peace, immortality

N: nature, mountains, rivers, specific places

C: cheer, such as songs, gladness, happiness, love, bloom, beauty

R: religion, faith, god, prayer, prophet, sacredness, blessing H: nostalgia, such as history, remembering, ancestry; as well as

T: total number of words

The themes constituting category I above (abstract ideals) were further separated; those that appeared at least once in both groups were individually analyzed.

The choice of the above categories is based on both an examination of the texts and on the authors' prior experience with the analysis of myths (e.g. Kramer & Moore, 2001a).

The decision to use absolute rather than relative-to-length-of-text frequencies rests on the assumption that longer texts, and therefore a more frequent occurrence of a theme, have a potentially larger effect on the audience than shorter ones would have. True to the descriptive nature of this research, the basic hypothesis is non-directional and t-tests are two-tailed.

## Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the significance of differences found between two sets of national anthems (those of selected European countries and those of the members of the Arab League).

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of the frequency of major content categories, and the significance of difference between them for two groups

[TABLE BORDER=2 WIDTH=80% CELLPADDING=5 ALIGN=center]  
[CAPTION ALIGN=bottom]\*Both in this and the next table, where the F test for equality of variances was significant (p less than 0.05), a t-test for unequal variances was applied.[/CAPTION]  
[TR ALIGN=left]  
[TH ALIGN=left]Categories[/TH] [TH ALIGN=center] A[/TH] [TH ALIGN=center] P[/TH] [TH ALIGN=center] L[/TH] [TH ALIGN=center] I[/TH] [TH ALIGN=center] N[/TH] [TH ALIGN=center] C[/TH] [TH ALIGN=center] R[/TH] [TH ALIGN=center] H[/TH] [TH ALIGN=center] T[/TH]

Europe									
Mean	0.60	0.67	1.40	2.93	2.07	2.47	2.27	1.00	96.93
s.d.	2.16	0.90	1.30	2.58	2.99	2.33	4.32	1.20	45.82
Arab League									
Mean	3.33	1.87	0.53	6.00	0.60	0.87	1.93	0.93	111.00
s.d.	4.19	1.92	0.92	4.21	0.99	1.30	3.59	1.67	60.31
Significance of									
2-tail t-test	0.17	0.04	0.04	0.02	0.09	0.03	0.82	0.90	0.48
F for variances*	0.02	0.01	0.20	0.08	0.00	0.04	0.50	0.23	0.32

Table 2 provides similar information regarding specific ideals, summed under category "I" of Table 1.

- C: Courage
- G: Glory
- H: Honor
- I: Immortality

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J: Justice  
 N: Nobleness  
 PC: Peace  
 PD: Pride  
 T: Truth  
 U: Unity  
 O: Other

Table 2. Means and standard deviations of the frequency of various ideals, and the significance of difference between them for two groups

[TABLE BORDER=2 WIDTH=80% CELLPADDING=2 ALIGN=center font size=5]  
 [CAPTION ALIGN=bottom]\*\* "Other" includes: determination (7), loyalty, safety, (3 each), equality (2), harmony, tolerance, patience, generosity, perfection, dedication (1 each). \*\*\* undetermined, due to zero variance in one group [/CAPTION]

Categories	C	G	H	I	J	N	PC	PD	T	U	O**
<i>Europe</i>											
Mean	0.53	0.07	0.13	0.47	0.33	0.20	0.00	0.07	0.07	0.67	0.00
s.d.	0.74	0.26	0.35	1.06	0.82	0.41	0.00	0.26	0.26	1.05	0.00
<i>Arab League</i>											
Mean	0.27	1.60	0.27	0.53	0.00	0.13	0.40	0.47	0.33	0.07	1.40
s.d.	0.46	1.92	0.59	0.64	0.00	0.35	0.00	0.35	0.35	0.35	0.35

	0.63	1.06	0.72	0.26	1.55
	Significance of				
	2-tail t-test	0.25	0.01	0.46	0.84
		0.14	0.64	0.02	0.18
		0.20	0.05	0.00	
	F for variances*	0.08	0.00	0.06	0.07
		***	***	***	0.00
		0.00	0.00	0.00	***

Before considering the differences between the means, it is important to notice the significant differences between the variances in 5 out of 8 categories in Table 1, and in 7 out of 11 cases in Table 2. This is largely an artifact, due to the peculiarity of the frequency data: Low frequencies are almost necessarily accompanied by low variances.

As for the means, a comparison of 4 of the main content categories in Table 1, and 4 of the specific ideals in Table 2 (including the aggregate of several ones under "other") revealed significantly ( $p < .05$ ) different mean frequencies. Taking only these themes into account, it is shown that anthems of European countries contain fewer references to [I]pain[I], and more mentioning of [I]liberty[I] and of [I]cheer[I] than anthems of Arab League members. The former also contain a lower frequency of assorted [I]ideals[I] than the latter. When these ideals are examined more closely, it appears that anthems of Arab League members contain more allusions to [I]glory, peace[I], and miscellaneous [I]other ideals[I] (detailed in Table 2), as well as fewer references to [I]unity[I] than those of European countries.

Of the remaining content categories and ideals we wish to draw attention to those in which the difference between widely divergent means failed to reach significance (mainly due to large variances). Here we notice that the anthems of European countries contain more references to [I]nature[I] and to [I]justice[I], while those of members of the Arab League deal more frequently with [I]aggression[I], [I]pride[I], and [I]truth[I].

Lastly, it is no less important to note the categories and ideals where there are no apparent differences between the means of the two groups. This set includes [I]religion, history,[I] as well as [I]bravery, honor, immortality,[I] and [I]nobleness[I]. Furthermore, the length of the anthems (category "T" in Table 1) belonging to the two groups did not significantly differ.

It appears then that anthems are indeed a rich source of information about the national identity a country is interested in projecting. Furthermore, their content analysis clearly differentiates between

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two world views. (Though we must note the large standard deviations associated with the above findings, indicating considerable within-group variability). As a group, the anthems of Europe are more optimistic, relaxed, and humanistically oriented, while anthems originating in members of the Arab League project more pain, violence, a wish for peace, and a concern with pride and glory (cf. Gutmann, 2003). Since 13 of the above European countries sampled belong to the European Union (whose anthem, based on Beethoven's [I]Ninth Symphony[/I], has no words), it is of some interest to compare the above findings with the founding principles of the EU and of the Arab League. On the one hand, according to Article 2 of the 2003 Draft Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (<http://europa.eu.int/>), the "Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. These values are common to the Member States in a society of pluralism, tolerance, justice, solidarity and non-discrimination." On the other hand, Article 2 of the Charter of the Arab League (U.N. Treaty Series, vol. LXX, pp. 237-263; see <http://www.mideastweb.org/arableague.htm>) states that "The purpose of the League is to draw closer the relations between member States and co-ordinate their political activities with the aim of realizing a close collaboration between them, to safeguard their independence and sovereignty, and to consider in a general way the affairs and interests of the Arab countries".

In summary, we have shown that national anthems reflect some of the major agendas in the lives of the two groups sampled. While the countries of Europe are relaxed, with their wars a matter of history, many members of the Arab League feel threatened and express a need to fight for recognition. Since the anthems serve as a rallying point for a country's citizenry, there is little doubt that they also shape the opinions, goals and expectations of those who sing them.

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