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### 13.

#### Music, ice hockey Lions and the construction of a national community

*Kaj Ahlsved*

##### Introduction

This chapter explores the construction of national identity through music in a sporting context. In Finland, ice hockey is the country's most popular sport, and the men's Ice Hockey World Championship is a yearly carnival – a sight of spring – uniting the Finns like no other sport or musical spectacle. The men's world championships have evolved into the culmination of the Finnish ice hockey season, and it gathers the masses in front of their television screens.

This also means that the different identities, communities, teams, and associations that players and supporters identify themselves with during the winter, when local and nation leagues are played, is now complemented with a common national identity with its own representative symbols. United by a common foe, this identity and its values are now fought for on a symbolic level on the ice. Mass media gives people the possibility to be a part of this symbolic reality. Especially the gold medals won in 1995, 2011, and 2019 are milestones in Finnish sports culture.

The large interest for the Finland's men's national team in ice hockey, the so-called Lions<sup>1</sup>, unites a big part of Finland's population, functioning as a representation of an *imagined community*. According to Benedict Anderson (1992, 21), most communities are imagined, which means that one does not have to know or meet all its members to sense a feeling of belonging to the group. This concept was also the departure point for my research on the Finnish ice hockey culture. However, the national team itself does not have to be imagined since its members are named, which according to historian Eric Hobsbawm makes the community feel more "real" (1992, 143). Hobsbawm suggests further that even those who support can become a symbol of the nation. Supporter culture as an activity – where the national identity is expressed with collectively accepted symbols – ties people together to larger communities. In line with Joseph Maguire et al. (2002, 137-138), I see sports, to large extent, as one of the most typical expressions of imagined communities in which the symbols, flags, and supporters' songs and musical works as forms of expressions and identity marquees. The Lions have a unique repertoire of music through which the feeling of national belonging is manifested.

The "flagging" of the nation and the ideological actions in which the nation is reproduced on a daily basis can be called *banal nationalism*, as suggested by Michael Billig (1995, 5-6). Banal is in this context understood as everyday, and I see the songs associated with the Lions as *banal nationalism* that contribute to the construction of "us", an imagined community that, on a symbolic level, wages war against other nations. Even though emotions burst in the rink, in the stands, and in front of televisions at home, no territorial borders are redrawn after the winner has been crowned. Nevertheless, the tournament contributes to the reproduction of the participating teams as nations.

The cyclical nature of sport with reoccurring seasons and tournaments also make sports, as well as the nation, a part of everyday life and topics of conversation around coffee tables throughout the world. This commonplaceness and predictability separate banal nationalism from a "hot" nationalistic passion (Billig 1995, 43-46) that is driven by agendas of disruptive

social and extreme organizations. My interest in the music culture around the Lions emerges from the circumstances of it being an everyday manifestation of the nation, and in line with Billig (1995, 8), I see national identity as something to be looked for in everyday routines. This everyday repetition of nationality rejects essentialism and promotes the idea of Finnishness as socially constructed, a representational system (Hall 1999, 46) that adds to the idea of the nation.

By studying the songs and music used in association with the Lions, I explore how nationalism is constructed in Finland through mediated music during the Ice Hockey World Championships tournament. What kind of music is associated with ice hockey nationalism and how does it happen? Which meanings are attributed to the music and by whom? What role does the media have in this musical construction of Finnishness and how have the changes in media structures influenced its processes?

As a result, I have distinguished different categories of processes in which the nation can be imagined from a musical perspective, and these categories outline the structure of this chapter. Media plays a wider role in these processes, and the chapter also explores the changes in the media environment since the beginning of the 1990s.

This chapter originates from research material gathered for the Finnish research and book project “Kiekkokansa” (Hockey nation) (Heiskanen and Salmi 2015). The project studied the Finnish ice hockey culture from several perspectives and conducted a comprehensive online survey in Spring 2014. The data was complemented with field work at the world championships in Minsk 2014. My contribution to the anthology was expanded and published as a research article in Swedish (Ahlsved 2016), which is main source for this chapter. The research was also a part of my doctoral thesis on practices related to the use of recorded music during team sporting events in Finland (Ahlsved 2017).

### **The sound of the nation**

Sport and sport events are a part of the everyday and the use of national symbols, for example the performance of the national anthem or the raising of the winning team’s flag is an expected but solemn part of the event. Such national anthems have symbolic implications at international events: they are the characteristic sound of the nation and representations of national identity. In a sporting context, the purpose of using national musical symbols and symbolism is to honor the exceptional: they are used to underline and lift up individual or team efforts for the community.

As a national symbol, the role of a national anthem is nowadays as established and central as the flag and the coat of arms. However according to historian Matti Klinge (1999, 101), they represent a later stage where the message is communicated as part of a program, through music and words. National anthems are often performed as part of opening or victory ceremonies. Contrary to situations where flags are waived unnoticed and “turn background space into homeland space” (Billig 1995, 43), the performance of the national anthem (and raising of the flag) in a sporting context is a ceremonious occasion, not an activity that takes place in the background. Nevertheless, it is banal in the respect that is an everyday cultural activity that takes place among citizens in peace time, not the result of nationalistic or extreme movements in the periphery of mainstream politics or in the outskirts of established societies.

National anthems can, if only temporarily, turn a physical space to a transnational acoustic and patriotic room and serve as a link between the nation, its citizens, and the athlete's performance. Normally, the winning ice hockey team's anthem is played after the game in the world championships. In ice hockey, according to the official rules of the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF 2018, 14), the players have to respect the ceremony by facing the flag, removing their helmets, and acting in a respectful manner. This can be compared to how people are expected to remove their headgear when listening to the national anthem. Also, certain respectful participation is demanded from those who are only listening (even the losing team).

The removal of helmets brings facial expressions, as signs of affect, more visible especially for television viewers. In this "holy" moment where solidarity to the nation is manifested, it can even be possible to hear the voices of those players who sing along. Close up camera shots of participating victorious players connect the players emotionally with those members of the national community who participate in the song in the stands or at home. The Finnish ice hockey fans, of course, hope that the Finnish national anthem "Maamme" (Our Land) would be the song that is played after the fight has ended. This means that the song becomes not only a victory symbol but also a sacrificial symbol that, along with the flag, symbolizes sacrifices made for the nation (Tepora 2011; Välimäki 2015a, 257).

Players often emphasize that it is an honor to represent Finland, to be dressed in the Lions uniform, and putting your body at risk for the greater good of the team and the nation. Jean Bethke Elshtain (cited in Billig 1995, 124) argues that the compelling theme driving young men to the battlefield is indeed sacrifice, not aggression. Sports as a symbolic war reported in the media creates the possibility to forfeit the body for an honorable cause, one greater than the individual. The national anthem ceremony unites and convinces the participants that sacrifices have been made for the given nation. Music researcher Susanna Välimäki (2015a, 257) states that sacrificial symbols give war and violence an explanation and become representations for the struggle and what the nation stands for. Apart from the national anthem in Finland, the hymn part from Jean Sibelius's orchestral work "Finlandia" op. 26 (1899/1900) has especially become a symbol of Finland's struggles. It is common to use sacrificial symbols in the beginning and the end of war movies (Välimäki 2015a, 257; 2008, 84–86), and the tone poem "Finlandia" was used in Edvin Laine's 1955 adaption of Väinö Linna's 1954 magnum opus *Tuntematon sotilas* (The Unknown Soldier).

The two first times Finland's men's team won the World Championships (1995 and 2011), the Sibelius's hymn part was performed by Finnish actor and singer Sakari Kuosmanen at the victory party on the Market Square in Helsinki. In the ice hockey context, "Finlandia" has become Kuosmanen's bravura piece and was also featured on the record *Leijonat 2012* released in conjunction with the joint world championship tournament in Helsinki and Stockholm 2012. The "Finlandia" hymn was performed by singer and actress Paula Vesala at the victory party in Helsinki when Finland's third gold was celebrated in Spring 2019. Even though the "Finlandia" hymn does not have any central role in official state ceremonies, it has achieved status as a national symbol, and suggestions have even been made (Yle 2018) for it to replace the current national anthem.

As a result of the mediation of sports events, new traditions and rituals are born. One of the most famous is the public service corporation Yle's ritual of playing the Finnish defense forces honorary march "Porilaisten Marssi" (March of the Pori Regiment) for Olympic gold medalists. Even though Finland has never won an Olympic gold medal in ice hockey, the

march was included as an opening track on the record released in 2012. The men's tournament is a yearly event, and as such, it does not enjoy the same high status as the Olympics. Nevertheless, national symbols are used as part of sacrificial cultural practices through which national belonging and the honor and non-everyday practice of representing and defending the Finnish colors in front of the nation is emphasized. National musical symbols are connected with historical struggles, sacrificial symbols, and wars. This symbolic capital is transferred to those sporting situations where nations do war on a symbolic level. The sacrifices of the athletes are then linked to those who have fought for the nation before them.

### **Music written for the Lions**

The pieces of music that explicitly highlight the Lions' fights and struggles against other ice hockey nations are not characterized by ceremonial rituals. Nevertheless, the Lions' fight is manifested with war metaphors, but the patriotic virtue of sacrificing oneself for something greater than the individual is converted into songs of a more playful character.

These songs are usually written and recorded before tournaments and are mainly aimed at the part of the community that is not on site in the stadium. In its mediated form, the song, the so-called *Kisabiisi*<sup>2</sup> (championship song) disseminated via television or radio is a way to situate the fight in the everyday experience of the national community. These playful championship fight songs penetrate the media landscape in a different way than, for example, the national anthem and other patriotic songs that are regulated by their ceremonial status. These songs produced for the national community are not to be confused with "neutral" championship or World Cup anthems which address an international community of fans and media and are a part of branding the tournament. The often multilingual songs invite audiences to be included in a transnational "we"<sup>3</sup> while the nations own songs are aimed inwards and construct national "us" and "them".

References to war, the ultimate sacrifice for one's country, is a salient feature of many championship songs written for the Lions. One prominent example is "Suomi!" (Finland!) recorded by the band Karelina Division. The name of the group<sup>4</sup> itself is reference to warfare, especially the Continuation War (1941-1944), which followed the Winter War (1939-1940) against Soviet Union in the Second World War. The song kicks off with the chanting of the word "Suomi", the Finnish word for Finland. After the male voices have belted out their war chant four times against a background of distorted electric guitar and dramatic bass drum hits, the group charges into battle, strengthened by a longer collective scream. The final scream is a sound effect that ties the song to how (chaotic) close-battle warfare is represented sonically in movies. Throughout the history of both film and real infantry, soldiers have used screams as a means to strengthen fighting among comrades and to scare the common enemy they face. When the war cry dies out, it evolves into crowd noise associated with sports. The listener is transported from the battlefield into the ice hall where it, according to the song's lyrics, "rains tackles and shots". When the shouts reoccur after the guitar solo, they have the character of crowd chants, and the six "Suomi" shouts near the end become powerful victory shouts. The ambivalence within the sport-war metaphor (Billig 1995, 123) makes the banalization of nationalism innocent and benign even in its musical form.

The banalization of war is a way of constructing togetherness and linking the ice hockey hero with those who, before him, have fought for the nation in actual wars. This is especially effective in combination with the repetition of common peculiarities that represent "us" and

are to be defended. In this repetition of stereotypes, which Billig (1995, 102) calls “playing the patriotic card”, there is a fantasy that these idealized features are under threat. Usually, the right to one’s own state is motivated with references to language, religion, or cultural heritage (Alasuutari 1999, 35). Representations of stereotypical national characteristics be displayed (flagged) as strategy to mark who “we” are and what the nation stand for. For example, the song “Kendo<sup>5</sup> Anthem” by the Finnish hip hop band Teflon Brothers (2014) is packed with stereotypical identity markers for Finnish culture: Linna’s 1954 novel *Tuntematon sotilas* and the Finnish national epos *Kalevala* but also ambiguous references to Finnish sauna culture and high alcohol consumption. Linna’s war novel is written from the perspective of ordinary Finnish soldiers and has achieved unique status in Finnish culture. Laine’s (1955) film adaptation of the book is broadcasted every year on Finland’s Independence Day, 6 December. In Teflon Brothers’ “Kendo Anthem”, singing about “poika” (the boy) can refer to a homecoming sauna for either the trophy or the player (or person) carrying it. However, in Finnish popular culture, “poika” is also recognized as the nickname for the vessel in which the soldiers in *Tuntematon sotilas* secretly and with great care made a home brew. This ambivalence is prominent both in the “Kendo Anthem” and in the song “Poika saunoo” (Boy is in the sauna), a popular victory song in Finnish sports. “Poika saunoo” was initially written by Pasi “Poju” Heinonen as a potential victory song for the Jyväskylä-based ice hockey team, JYP.

Even though Finland officially has two national languages, Finnish and Swedish, this has not resulted in a canon of songs in Swedish written for the Lions. On the contrary, when Swedish words and phrases are used in Finnish ice hockey songs, they are most commonly used to indicate Swedishness and thus poke fun at Finland’s dear rivals, Sweden. This language praxis reinforces the idea of Finland as a solid and strong homogenous (Finnish) country even though the reality in a globalized society is more complex and differentiated.

A common feature of many songs recorded for sports, and especially national teams, is that some are claimed to be “official” even though they have no ceremonial function. The epithet official implies that the Lions, to some degree, participated in production, either direct through players acting as musicians or indirect through the Finnish Ice Hockey Federation’s power position to ascribe the recording the value of being official. The official song is then given a special position in relation to other unofficial songs, even though it can be hard to define the difference just by listening. The need for the status of “official” emerges from the lack of historical praxis of use. This contrasts with anthems whose formal role often is undisputable.

I suggest that official songs are to be seen as playful *carnivalized* national anthems, written for the context of the fest that surrounds the very regulated championships. In his writing on the carnival, Mikhail Bakhtin (2007 [1965]) stated that the carnival both denies and confirms societal hierarchies. This thought can be applied here since the songs are both official and carnivalized real anthems. In both cases, the songs and their surrounding context provide a framework for carnivalization of ice hockey related issues.

The carnivalization of the players status as national heroes can be exemplified with one of the first ever written songs for the national team: “Ice Hockey” by the group Laulavat Leijonat (Singing lions, 1991). The song featured many players, among them the young star Teemu Selänne. A reviewer for music magazine *Rumba* (1991, 10–11) stated that in the performance consisted of “utter joy in making a fool of himself” (translation by the author). In contradiction to how heroes often are celebrated with songs, the situation is here reversed.

The Lions have stepped down from their pedestal and sang for, and possibly with, the people. The vulnerability one can show using one's own voice is collectively ridiculed. Through their musical performances, the players show they are of the people and thus the hero status is carnivalized.

For a musician to be given the possibility to participate in the official song is often seen as an honorary task, just as is representing the national team. As the players might be poked fun of as acting musicians, a "real" musician's national achievements are confirmed by the honor to perform on a national stage.

Twenty-two years, two gold medals, and several songs later, the carnivalization reached a new high in 2013 with Samppa Linna featuring Timo Jutila's song "Ny rillataan" (Let's barbecue). In the song, the fictional character Samppa Linna, created by actor and comedian Aku Hirviniemi, sums up the carnival that today surrounds ice hockey in Finland.

In the song, both the machinery of power and hero status are carnivalized. The whole culture surrounding the national team is ridiculed and confirmed. The pathos and national romantic imagery that are common features in national anthems has been carnivalized and replaced with Samppa Linna's hysterical references to ice hockey, sauna culture, and sausage grilling. Timo Jutila, the captain from the golden team of 1995, features the song with famous expressions, especially the main phrase "ny rillataan". The honorable fight and symbolic war between hockey nations is here compared to a big barbecue where the opponents are to be "grilled to the bitter end". The character of the carnival laughter is universal: it is aimed at everybody (Bachtin, 2007 [1965], 23). Samppa Linna's facial mask (seen in the music video) was a reference to the Finnish Ice Hockey Federation's long-time chairman Kalervo Kummola. As Jutila's finest moments are celebrated, his hero saga is at the same time shot down by the jester Samppa Linna.

### **Media as distributor and constructor of music associated with the Lions**

Benedict Anderson (1992) has stressed the role of mass media in creating and upholding imagined communities. At the core of this process is the knowledge that the like-minded are addressed. This can be illustrated with a unique chapter in Finnish music history, especially the role television as a medium had in the construction of the narrative that made team Sweden's song "Den glider in" (It [the puck] slides in) Finland's victory song of the World Championship tournament in 1995.

Preceding the tournament, which was arranged in Sweden, Swedish songwriter Peter Karlsson actually wrote the song "Den glider in" for the Swedish national team. The song was recorded with vocalist Nick Borgen and was the opening track of the official championship record *Golden Hockey Night*. The phrase "den glider in" was borrowed and sampled from a popular commentary by Swedish television legend Lennart Hyland in 1962. The song topped the Swedish charts a week into the tournament (Sveriges Radio 1995). After the final, it was no longer in the top ten but was tremendously popular in Finland, since Finland won its first gold medal by beating the rivals Sweden in their home arena in Stockholm 4 to 1. The song had been played extensively throughout the tournament, and after the game, the Finnish broadcasting corporation Yle showed live coverage from the Finnish dressing room where the players fooled around with the song. Especially the images of the backup goalie Jukka Tammi dancing wildly with the championship trophy to the tune of "Den glider in" became iconic moments in Finnish television and sports history. The next day, at the live broadcasted victory

party from Market Square in Helsinki, Jukka Tammi played air guitar with the trophy in front of about 100,000 euphoric Finns singing “Den glider in”. This collective reinterpretation of the song from a Swedish fight song to a Finnish victory song was fueled by the conception that the Swedes had written a victory song beforehand. This interpretation was common in the questionnaire for the Kiekkokansa project.

To fully grasp this conception, one must understand that the Lions had never won gold before, which partly explains why by 1995 a song as confident as the Swedes’ had yet to be written in Finland. At this time, Swedes had won many gold medals while the Finns had bitter memories of late goals scored by “Finn killers” like Anders “Masken” Karlsson and Mats Sundin. The Finns attached a symbolic value to this song, and this was also shared by television media, for example, the prime-time sports news program *Urheiluruutu* (Sports screen).

Even though mass media communication is, for the most part, one-way communication, it also includes interplay since it ties individuals together and invites them to take part in a common symbolic reality (Seppänen and Väliaverronen 2012, 68). In this symbolic reality, the Lions had robbed the Swedish team of their gold medals and their pre-written “victory song”. The media also communicated the tools in which this reality be manifested outside the media sphere. In many places across the country, people acted like the Lions on television: dancing and singing “Den glider in” (see Välimäki 2015b, 10-11). The song became a tool for the Finnish community to act out shared feelings of euphoria.

Even though the song today is still among the most recognized ice hockey tunes in Finland, many who took part in the Kiekkokansa questionnaire also questioned its authenticity, since it was actually written for the Swedes. According to Peter Karlsson (e-mail message to author, August 18, 2015), a translation of the song was never on the table after the tournament, but a “Finnish version” of the song where the Lions, the Swedish head coach Curt Lindström (surprisingly), and the Finnish artist Kirka sang the song together was released. The perception that “we” Finns robbed the Swedes of the song is related to the song’s original context as a representation of “them”, the Swedes. Karlsson, who still receives royalties from Finland when the Lions are successful, emphasizes that the song was also a huge success in Sweden and was played at their home games for a very long time. The thought of the song as being “stolen” is a social construction, which at the same time, highlights that music’s meanings are context bound.

The events surrounding “Den glider in” accentuates that national communities can be imagined and manifested with music not originally written with the Lions in mind or even to be used by that community. In fact through media praxis, music can be assigned “blue-white” (the colors in the Finnish flag also featured on player uniforms) connotations. By framing music, media can use its power to depict one or several ways to interpret the amalgamation of sound and images. While “Porilaisten Marssi” is used to honor Olympic gold medalists, popular music and subjectively directed images can be used to create new and entertaining media representations. In the spring of 1995, Tom Jones’ song “If I only knew”, the first single from his gold-selling album *The Lead and How to Swing It* (1994), was used in a popular music video-like goal reel that ended Yle’s broadcast from the final game in the Globe Arena of Stockholm. The song’s characteristic long “Yeah” shout was synchronized with moving images of rejoicing players and supporters and depicted as a lion roar of joy. The interpretations can be linked to societal discourses surrounding the Lions, Finnishness, and sports. In Spring 2015, a dance floor hit “Peto on irti” (The beast is on the loose) by Antti Tuisku was used in the background to a compilation of the best tackles by the Finns and as a



humorous way to depict fighting spirit. The song was later given new and ice hockey related words by artist Villegalle in the highly popular television show *Vain elämä*<sup>6</sup> (“Life only”), and the new version of the song has, since 2016, been used as a goal song for many of the different national teams in ice hockey (men, women, and junior).

As a result of the strong media influence on constructing its “official” songs, the Finnish Ice Hockey Association has not needed to adopt an active role in commissioning official songs. The initiative and power of creating and linking songs to the Lions has been, in part, taken over by stakeholders within the media industry, especially by the commercial channel MTV3, the official media partner for the World Championship broadcasts during 2012-2016. MTV3 licensed the production of *Leijonat* (The Lions) records to record companies. The Lions are a partner in a complex network of stakeholders, and a championship song as a pop cultural product and social construction is dependent on the media industry’s power to frame a song as an official song or by assigning it blue-white meanings. This can be supported by the Lions authenticating the released songs by using them, for example, at friendly home games before the actual championship tournament. This strategic use of such songs frames those songs and creates a web of relations and cultural texts that together construct a song as “official” even though there might not be any references to the Lions in the actual song (see Robin 2015). These strategies can be compared with “Den glider in” where the initial popularity stemmed from a seemingly spontaneous (but supported by media) appreciation and which cannot be explained with media industrial strategies alone.

### **The participating audience**

Changes in the media landscape, occurring as a result of the digitalization of society, have led to a renegotiation of media’s power and preferential right of interpretation. Modern digital technology has made it possible for the audience to become active creators of music related to the Lions, which challenges the top-down dissemination of “official” songs. As observed, this can happen in two ways: the possibility to distribute an own song has led to an increasing amount of unofficial songs spread during the World Championships, and the possibility to build on existing products and participate in the co-creation of new cultural products.

I see this participatory culture related to what Lawrence Lessig (2008, 28–29) has coined “read only” culture (RO) and “read/write” culture (RW). RO refers to passive consumption of the products distributed by the culture industry and RW to the possibility of also creating something new with the help of digital technology. In the ice hockey context, digitalization has empowered the audience, and as such this democratization process has challenged the media industry’s power to create the products that reflect national belonging.

When discussing imagined communities and mediated sport, one cannot overlook the role of the radio or television commentator. The commentator mediates collectively perceived experiences to an invisible community. It is common to use sound clips from well-known commentators and games as musical elements in songs associated with sport. Most spectators do not attend World Championships games on site; including the commentator in the music implies the perspective of a radio- or television consumer, a listening perspective characterized by sport as a mediated experience. This underlines the role of mass media in the construction and upholding of communities.

While “Den glider in” already included samples from a commentator, the praxis reached a new high and unforeseen popularity in Finland in 1999 when the artist A-tyyppi connected the

characteristic verbal style of Antero Mertaranta, one of the best-known Finnish commentators, in their techno beat song. The song “Ihanaa, Leijonat ihanaa” (Wonderful, Lions, wonderful) was released before the World Championship tournament in Norway, and it became a huge success, topping the Finnish single list for three weeks. A-tyyppi illustrated that music for the Lions can be produced outside the championship establishment and that the song can be seen as an early “pre-YouTube” example of RW culture. The case also addresses the issue of media *convergence*. Convergence can mean the possibility to package different media content on one platform (Seppänen and Väliverronen 2012, 26), and it can mean the flow between different media platforms (Jenkins 2012, 15). A-tyyppi took a sample from a TV commentary and used it in a new piece of music. “Ihanaa, Leijonat ihanaa” then made a transition back to the television-medium where it was used by Yle with new visual material as a part of highlight reels in their broadcasts. The exposition it got in television broadcasts was crucial for its popularity and commercial success.

Digitalization and especially the launch of YouTube has further facilitated small distribution of music from the grassroots level without middlemen. This has, on one hand, resulted in more unofficial songs<sup>7</sup>, but on the other hand, in more or less forced convergence between institutions and grassroots initiatives.

Twelve years later in 2011 – a very long time in the digital era – another interesting example of participatory culture emerged. In this year, Finland did not have its own official tournament song, instead the rights holders of the Finnish broadcast company Yle ran a segment where a mix of old and new songs could be voted for the championship song of the year. The songs were showcased in best-of reels from the tournament. The competition was won by the oldie but goodie “Ihanaa, Leijonat Ihanaa”, but the song that accompanied the golden spring of 2011 was not the original “cut and paste” song from 1999. The song “Taivas varjele!” (Good heavens!) by Finnish Hockey Mafia featuring Antero Mertaranta (2011) became immensely popular when Finland won its second gold medal. Just like “Ihanaa, Leijonat Ihanaa”, this song is based on Mertaranta’s television commentary. In the song, tribute is paid to the spectacular goal scored by Mikael Granlund in the semifinal game against Russia. Various videos of Granlund’s shot, a maneuver known in Finnish as ilmaveivi (airhook), went viral on the internet. The song was supposed to be only a minor joke by techno/house artist Joonas Hahmo (Findance 2011), but after being uploaded to YouTube the day after the semifinal, it quickly spread on social media. The song was later published digitally by Sony Music and was included on the platinum-selling *Leijonat 2011* (Lions 2011) record that was released in Finland as a celebratory compact disc after the tournament.

The week after the tournament, four of the five most downloaded songs (IFPI 2011) had some connection to the world championships without being official championship songs. In addition to the viral success of “Taivas varjele!” by Finnish Hockey Mafia, these included the aforementioned Poju’s “Poika saunoo” and A-tyyppi’s “Ihanaa, Leijonat ihanaa” as well as Jare and Villegalle’s “Häissä” (At the wedding), which all had been included in the Yle competition. “Poika saunoo” became Finland’s most sold single of 2011.

Most importantly, digital co-creation has rendered it possible to quickly interpret, comment upon, and carnivalize themes related to the Lions. Following the predecessor “Ihanaa, Leijonat ihanaa”, both professionals and amateurs have made their own sample-based pieces of music. For example, screen name Casstum (Casstum 2011) created a “Poika saunoo remix (Juti rillaa)” where the melody from the song “Poika saunoo” is mashed up with television images where Timo Jutila, the former player, talks about barbequing. Screen name Slebari

(Slebari 2011) combined the same commentary as Finnish Hockey Mafia used in “Taivas Varjele!” but instead used video footage of Finnish goalkeeper coach Pasi Nurminen making his own ilmaveivi: tripping, seemingly drunk, when exiting the airplane upon arrival from the tournament to Helsinki airport. These are good examples of how the border between media consumers and producers have been blurred.

In May 2019, during the writing of this text, another example of RW culture with background in the World Championships was topping the charts in Finland. An inexperienced Finnish team was, against all odds, led to gold medal by the two-meter-tall captain Marko “Mörkö” Anttila. Anttila scored a late equalizer in the quarter-final against Sweden, and Mertaranta’s outburst “Löikö Mörkö sisään?” (Did Mörkö shoot it [the puck] in) was quickly musicalized. Mörkö, the Finnish word for “monster” is not only the nickname of Anttila, it is also the Finnish name of the ghost-like character the Groke that, in her search for warmth and friendship, leaves a trace of ice in Tove Janssons Moomin stories.

The first version of the song was first spread on Twitter by the popular Finnish musician Arttu Wiskari just hours after the game against Sweden. Later, the creator of the song was identified as DJ ILG, a musician from Wiskari’s band who supposedly created the song in 30 minutes on the tour bus (Kilpamäki 2019). Two days later, after the song had gained additional popularity thanks to Anttila’s two goals in the semi-final, the song was picked up from social media to be distributed by Warner Music on Spotify and YouTube. Even though the song is only 52 seconds long, it got radio air time, topped Spotify’s Finnish Top 50 list for days after the final (the Finnish Viral Top 50 was dominated by “Ihanaa, Leijonat Ihanaa” and “Den glider in”), and was featured in MTV3 and Cmore’s television broadcast from the tournament –thus completing a full loop back to the context from where the sample was taken.

Apart from changing the songs name from “Mörkö” to “Löikö mörkö sisään? (featuring Antero Mertaranta)” the version that was released by Warner was modified in at least two ways. In the first version, the “cover” of the song was an illustration of the Groke to which had been added a hockey stick, a helmet, and Anttilas name and number. The official release featured an avatar of DJ ILG and thus potential problems with the copyrights holders of the Moomin characters was avoided. The second difference is also related to copyright since the melody repeated about 30 seconds into the song was modified so its resemblance to the chorus of “Den glider in” is less obvious. Like its predecessors, DJ ILG’s song seemed like it could have been written by anyone since the musical material is familiar. However, behind the artists’ names are professional musicians and media industry structures difficult to uncover.

The songs made by professionals, in the cases of Poju, Finnish House Mafia, A-tyyppi, and recently even DJ ILG, have interested the established music media. The many mashup clips that are spread on social media, in turn, cannot as easily be picked up or transferred to institutionalized mass media platforms or be commercialized in a traditional manner. However, from the spectator’s point of view, taking part in and consuming this on inter-contextuality based grass root culture<sup>8</sup> via a second screen (i.e., mobile phone or tablet) can, as a compliment to the television broadcast, be a substantial part of the sports experience and the construction of communal belonging.

Whereas the most popular grassroots content is hailed for its ingenuity, the music fed “from above” – from the media industry – is often criticized on social media. Such music is often regarded as not representing the music taste of Finnish people or being representative of the

players' presumed taste. The rise of rap music in Finnish has challenged rock 'n' roll as the undisputable sound of ice hockey but one established the music for the Lions as a genre dominated by (white) male artists. Some criticize the war rhetoric, or the alcohol culture reflected in the songs. Such harsh reactions are indications of people imagining a national community, but not reaching consensus of how such a community should be represented musically.

## Conclusions

The concept of a national community – a nation – is the driving force behind team sports on a national team level. National symbols are used to underline the dignity of the situation while the new music produced is an extension of the banal nationalism and the ubiquity of the nation in everyday life. In the new patriotic songs with more a playful character, the concept of the nation's progress has been banalized and carnivalized to take place in everyday situations, for example in television and radio broadcasts and other commonplace situations where national belonging is manifested. The informal status of the songs gives them better prerequisites to penetrate the media landscape. Such songs' sacrificial symbolism has been carnivalized to playfulness to the extent that the symbolic war between nations is conceived as a party, in some case even a big barbecue.

These non-ceremonial pieces of music are usually called “championship songs” or even “fight songs” since they are written with the intention to raise the spirit for the upcoming fight. Though some songs do allude to earlier performances, as pieces of music they first and foremost aid the construction of a national community.

Preceding international tournaments, there has been a tradition to release “official” songs. This possibility to ascribe a cultural product a certain status and value conjures media interest for the recording. On this point, praxis in Finland has somewhat changed, earlier existing conceptions of the necessity of participating players is no longer essential. A phonogram can achieve the status of being official without professional hockey players making a fool of themselves.

This is in line with the thought of the music not only having a function of constructing identity but also becoming a commercial product that can be used strategically. To be given the chance to represent the Lions musically is not only an honor, it can also be a career choice. The media exposure of being associated with the Lions can boost careers, and in a Finnish context, official championship songs have to a larger extent become media constructions whose greater interest are kept in the shadows for the supporters. Repeated use of a song by the media gives it authenticity and constructs it as the *official* song. Digitalization has democratized the means of production, and as a form of participatory culture, the members of the community can themselves create and re-create the cultural products with which the community can be both imagined and commented upon. The official song is often the song that dominates in the media sphere, and this preferential right of interpretation is hard to challenge from a grassroots level.

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<sup>1</sup> In this text, I refer to the Finnish national ice hockey team for men as the “Lions” (*Leijonat* in Finnish). The team in ice hockey appeared with the lion symbol from Finland’s coat of arms for the first time in 1948 and were soon to be given the nickname the Lions by journalists.

<sup>2</sup> The songs written for specific national teams World Championship endeavors are in Finnish colloquially called “MM-kisabiisi” or just “kisabiisi”. “MM” is short for “Maailman mestaruus” (World Championship) while “kisabiisi” can be translated as “competition song”. In this text I refer to this “type” of songs as championship songs.

<sup>3</sup> An illustrative example is the video for Dario G’s *Carnaval de Paris*, which was the official song for the men’s World Championship in football in Paris 1998.

<sup>4</sup> The musicians in the so-called super group were from many prominent Finnish heavy metal bands, especially Nightwish, Mokoma, and Kotiteollisuus. Karelian Division was the name of a group where many of the members played Fantasy hockey together.

<sup>5</sup> Finnish football supporters mockingly refer to ice hockey as kendo, likening the players’ sticks to Japanese swords, while ice hockey supporters similarly refer to football as potkupallo (kickball).

<sup>6</sup> *Vain elämää* is the Finnish version of the reality television series concept The Best Singers that has been broadcasted under various names in many European countries. It builds on the successful Dutch series *De beste zangers van Nederland* (The Best Singers of the Netherlands) and airs on the Finnish commercial television channel Nelonen.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Blackout Junkies (2012), Runo and The Zatelite Ft. Sunan koulun kuoro (2013).

<sup>8</sup> I also see memes as belonging to the same sphere of digital, internet-based humor.