

On the Social Life of a City Anthem

Semiotic Objects, Ideologies of Belonging and the Reproduction of Sociocultural Difference

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Abstract

This article takes a closer look at the role of semiotic objects such as texts, monuments, songs, and flags in the definition of both socio-cultural boundaries and legitimation of the resulting relations of difference. The focus is a specific anthem, *Z'Basel an mym Rhy* [In Basel on my

Rhine], which is the official anthem of Basel, a city in northwest Switzerland. In line with Appadurai's (1996) claim in favour of a complex analysis of an object's social life, this article is a historiographical investigation of the circulation of this semiotic object across time and space — from the moment of its conception as a poem in 1806, to the present day. The analysis centres on how this specific semiotic object has been re-appropriated and transformed continuously, throughout its social life, by new actors, in new contexts, and for new purposes. Indeed, from its origin as a romantic ode for intimate private consumption, this text gradually emerged as an object of cultural consumption on a larger scale, taking on the role of an instrument of pride and power, and becoming a tool to legitimize social structuration.

Keywords: Ideology, Nationalism, Semiosis, Sociocultural Difference, Anthem

Introduction

The starting point for this paper is Billig's (1995) argument stating that semiotic objects such as art, statues, literature, monuments, flags and other forms of material culture played a key role in the (re)production of public memory, and in the everyday *flagging* of what Billig calls *banal nationalism*. If indeed the emergence of the European nation-states in the 19th century was a means to create the conditions for modern capitalism, in order to compensate the working class's feelings of economic exclusion caused by the new economic order, the invention of myths, traditions, and customs became necessary to supplant feelings of inequality with a sense of civic equality and of national belonging (Hobsbawm 1990). In this context, semiotic objects emerged as key elements of nationalist investment, in light of their potential for building consensus and carrying ideologies, their capacity for performing and constructing collective identities, and their usefulness for constituting a shared social reality and public memory.

In the following, a closer look is taken at such semiotic objects' role in the definition and legitimation of both socio-cultural boundaries and the resulting relations of difference. The focus is placed on an anthem, *Z'Basel an mym Rhy* [In Basel on my Rhine], which is the official anthem of Basel, a city situated in northwest Switzerland. A discussion follows on the role of Basel's anthem for the (re)invention of a public memory of the imagined community of Basel at different moments in time. In line with Appadurai's (1996) claim in favour of an analysis of the social life of semiotic objects, as a means to understand how and why their meanings, values, and social functions change over time, this article analyses the circulation of the anthem through space and time. In particular, it examines two interconnected events in the history of Basel: a) during the *Wettstein und Riehen Festspiele* [Wettstein and Riehen Festival], in 1923, when Johann Peter Hebel's poem *Erinnerung an Basel* [Remembrance of Basel] was appropriated by the local elite and transformed into Basel's local anthem, *Z'Basel an mim Rhy*ⁱ; and b) in 2010, in the context of a political campaign regarding the introduction of a cantonal law that would give foreigners the right to vote, at which point the anthem reemerged as a site of tension with respect to who counts as a legitimate immigrant in Basel.

This historiographical analysis enables me to raise questions and propose answers to a set of empirical questions: How and why has the anthem been appropriated at these various moments in time? Who are the actors? What are their interests? Why has the anthem traveled across time and space so easily? What are the ideological, structural, and material conditions of possibility of the anthem's circulation? And what consequences does this circulation have for whom?

The semiotics of nationalism in a transforming world

The analysis of the (re)appropriation of Basel's anthem over the course of history put forward in this paper is inspired by an understanding of *meaning* as a historical process that is subjected to transformation and redefinition. For my work I rely on scholars who have worked

on the material conditions of semiosis (Fairclough et al. 2002; Scollon and Scollon 2003). In this regard, I approach *public memory* as a contested ideological object that can be reinvented, and that is instrumentalized by individuals for the sake of legitimizing relations of power, inequality, and difference.

Starting from these premises, several scholars in the field of the history of nationalism (Hobsbawm 1990; Gellner 1997; Smith 2002) have demonstrated that anthems and other forms of *banal nationalism* (Billig 1995) are instruments of power used to (re)invent a *public memory* about traditions, myths, rituals, territories, languages, and cultures of an imagined community. They are furthermore employed to formulate social values related to the imagined, or strategically constructed, community of a given nation (Gordon 2001; Kater & Riethmüller 2003; Meyer 1993; Nelson 2004). My argument is that the ideological “loadedness” of anthems lies in their capacity to strategically reproduce an ostensible “historical” social order, thereby legitimizing *political* practices (Clark 1997; Crozet 2010; Guy 2002). The term “*political* practices” refers to processes regimenting and controlling a people’s access to capital and legitimacy (Heller 2001). Anthems are inherently interdiscursive: Because they index a supposed *public memory*, these objects link two (or more) semiotic events in the same spacio-temporal frame. The resources are also performative because they reanimate the past event by making it part of the present (for a theorization of such processes see Agha and Wortham 2005; Briggs and Bauman 1992; Silverstein 2005). In line with that, the reanimation of a past event through the practice of singing an anthem results in a collapse of the cited event and the anthem; consequently, singing the anthem ensures that the anthem itself becomes the materiality of the events it cites. This semiotic process, which Irvine and Gal (2000) call *iconization*, is the condition of possibility for the successful circulation of the ideological meaning of anthems and of other semiotic resources across time and space. This ensures that anthems – as icons of a *public memory* of an

imagined community – can be cited and referred to as an effective means of legitimizing social action and (re)producing inequality and relations of domination in society.

Pierre Bourdieu (1996) and Michel Foucault (1969) have brought attention to the fact that both enactment and reception of such semiotic resources must be analyzed in their respective contexts of production and consumption. For a complete analysis, it is crucial to consider that these practices are strategically produced by individuals with specific positionings and interests (Bourdieu 1996) and that they are framed by institutionalized constraints organizing and regimenting what can be said and heard. Further, this strategic enactment, or “flagging,” of nationhood must be linked to the specific moment in history in which it arises, i.e. to the political economic conditions in which the practices occur (Duchêne and Heller 2012).

In this respect, a methodological focus on the circulation of semiotic objects across time and space, i.e. on the social life of these objects, enables a better understanding of the material and structural conditions, as well as of the interests and ideologies making this circulation possible (Appadurai 1996). This methodological fetishism, as it was called by Appadurai, is also a means of stressing the fact that when objects circulate, they do not circulate in a social vacuum. Their historical movement needs to be inscribed in specific social situations, i.e. events in which individuals ascribe a specific meaning to an object for specific reasons. If this implies that the meaning and social function carried by the object can change throughout its social life, it also implies that, in some cases, the object itself – its form and essence – must be transformed. In the case of the social life of the anthem *Z'Basel an mym Rhy*, circulation across time and spaces does not only influence its social function and meaning: In its social life, the anthem's circulation across orders of indexicality (Silverstein 2005) and political economies (Gal 1989), and its appropriation and enactment by different actors with different interests have also given rise to changes in its discursive content and in

its linguistic form. The obvious questions are: Why? Under what conditions? In whose interest? And with what consequences?

The analysis presented here on a historiographical study of the social life of Basel's city anthem. Sources drawn on include historical documents such as newspaper articles, statistical data, and historical accounts that have been collected in the context of archival research. The discussion also involves documents from websites of the main actors and associations, as well as political propaganda material and media reports collected during the political campaign for the introduction of a cantonal law granting foreigners access to vote in Basel.

Parallel to the theoretical considerations presented here regarding the circulation of objects, the analysis of the social life of the anthem *Z'Basel an mym Rhy* draws on Silverstein and Urban's (1996), Gal's (2007), and Briggs and Bauman (1992) methodological considerations on the circulation of cultural products. The focus is particularly placed on the way individuals appropriate semiotic objects, i.e. decontextualize them and recontextualize them in a new social frame for specific purposes. In doing so, special attention is given to the discursive work in terms of language choice (Gal 1978), semiotic processes of iconization, fractal recursivity, and erasure (Irvine and Gal 2000), but also to the discursive strategies (Gumperz 1982) that these practices of recontextualization necessitate. Finally, the ways the practices of decontextualization, entextualization, and recontextualization imply a transformation of the anthem's form are analyzed.

The invention of tradition – or how a poem was transformed into an anthem

In this initial example, I aim to reconstruct how and why the poem *Erinnerung an Basel – An Frau Meville* [Remembrance of Basel – To Mrs. Meville] written by Johann Peter Hebel in 1806 was appropriated in the context of patriotic and nationalist festivities 120 years later during the interwar period and how and why it was transformed into the aforementioned

anthem that today goes by the name *Z'Basel an mym Rhy*. To do so, it is necessary to analyze the source text on which Basel's anthem draws.

Erinnerung an Basel – An Frau Meville

Z'Basel an mim Rhi, / jo d'ört möchti si! /
Weiht nit d'Luft so mild und lau, / und der
Himmel isch so blau / an mim liebe Rhi. /

In der Münsterschuel, / uf mim herte Stuehl, /
magi zwor jetz nüt meh ha, / d'Töpli stöhn mer
nümme a / in der Basler Schuel.

Aber uf der Pfalz / alle Lüte gfallt's. /
O, wie wechse Berg und Tal, / Land und Wasser
überal, / vor der Basler Pfalz!

Uf der breite Bruck, / für si hi und zruck, /
nei, was sieht me Here stoh, /
nei, was sieht me Jumpfere goh, /
uf der Basler Bruck.

Eis isch nümme do; / wo isch's ane cho? /
's Scholers Nase, weie weh, / git der Bruck kei
Schatte meh. / Wo bisch ane cho?

Wie ne freie Spatz, / uffem Petersplatz, / fliegi um,
und 's wird mer wohl, / wie im Buebekamisol /
uffem Petersplatz.

Uf der grüne Schanz, / in der Sunne Glanz, / woni
Sinn und Auge ha, / lacht's mi nit so lieblich a, / bis
go Sante Hans.

's Seilers Rädli springt; / los, der Vogel singt. /
Summervögeli iung und froh /
ziehn de blaue Blueme no. /
Alles singt und springt.

Und e bravi Frau / wohnt d'ört ussen au. / Gunnich
Gott e frohe Muet! Nehmich Gott in treui Huet, /
liebi Basler Frau!

Remembrance of Basel – To Mrs. Mevilleⁱⁱ

In Basel on my Rhine, / it's where I want to be! /
Isn't the air mild and warm, / and the sky so blue
/ on my dear Rhine.

In the Minster school, / on my hard chair, /
though I no longer want, / my knuckles to be
rapped / in Basel's school.

But on the Pfalzⁱⁱⁱ / it pleases everyone. / Oh,
mountains and valleys alternate, / land and water
everywhere, / at the foot of Basel's Pfalz!

On the wide bridge [Basel's oldest bridge], /
strolling back and forth, / what men do we see
standing around, / what women do we see
walking around, / on Basel's bridge.

Someone isn't here anymore; / where has he gone
? / Scholer's nose, oh dear^{iv} / isn't giving shade to
the bridge anymore. / Where have you gone?

Like a free sparrow, / on St. Peter's Square, / I fly
around and feel at ease, / as in the BuebeKamisol^v
/ on St. Peter's Square.

On the green meadow, / in the sunshine, / where I
have senses and eyes, / isn't it smiling lovingly at
me, / to Sante Hans.^{vi}

The rope maker's wheel turns; / listen, a bird is
singing. / Butterflies, young and happy / follow
the blue flowers. / Everything is singing and
dancing.

And an honest woman / lives there as well. / That
God give her happiness! / That God will protect
her / dear woman of Basel!

In his text *Erinnerung an Basel*, Johann Peter Hebel, who was born in Basel, describes and celebrates his place of birth (*on my dear Rhine; In the Minster school; On the Pfalz; On the wide bridge; on St. Peter's Square*), his experience of this place (*what women do we see walking around; I fly around and feel at ease; listen, the bird is singing!*) and people he knew (*The rope maker; an honest woman; Scholer*) as a young man.

The text, written in a variety of Alemannic,^{vii} is dedicated to *Mrs. Meville*, a woman, recently widowed, who lived in Basel and with whom Hebel entertained an intense correspondence^{viii} (Habermaier 2010). The text has been classified as a nostalgic ode paying homage to both the woman to whom Hebel felt strongly bonded and to his city of birth (Habermaier 2010).

Johann Peter Hebel, born in 1760, was a son of a poor German family from a small German village near the Swiss border. His parents were in the service of one of the wealthiest families of Basel (Däster 1973). Despite his humble social origins Hebel made a successful career as a theologian, politician, and author of German and Alemannic literature (Viel 2010). His ode *Erinnerung an Basel* was a very personal, private text and not published during his lifetime. Only after his death was it added to a volume entitled “Allemanische Gedichte” [Alemannic Poems], a collection of texts written by Hebel in the Alemannic dialect (Habermaier 2010). Soon the ode was widely circulated among the educated social elites in Switzerland and became a popular object of educational instrumentalization, aesthetic value and consumption throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries.

However, in the first decades of the 20th century, the social function of the poem changed dramatically. This was partially due to the political-economic transformations that Europe, and Basel in particular, experienced at this time. While Switzerland did not actively participate in World War I, the country and border cities such as Basel, were strongly affected by the economic consequences of the war. Basel's economy was unable to deliver supplies to the nations at war, and therefore suffered greatly from the unstable geopolitical situation (Kreis and von Wartburg 2000). After the war, unemployment rates rose drastically among the local population and, with it, a sense of social and economic inequality. Inspired by the Russian Revolution and workers' movements throughout Europe and in other Swiss urban centers, Basel's working classes joined in political action and organised strikes, and demonstrations to protest against their precarious living conditions (Degen 1986). In fear of a

revolution, local authorities responded with violence against demonstrators which aggravated the situation of civil unrest (Mooser 2000).

It was in the context of this political climate that Hebel's text emerged as an object of nationalist pride and instrumentalization. While at the end of the 19th century, *Erinnerung an Basel* was produced, circulated and consumed predominantly in educational contexts, it took on a new form and meaning in the interwar period. It re-emerged with the title *Z'Basel an mim Rhy* [In Basel on my Rhine] and a melody composed by the German composer Franz Abt, the text and song became an anthem which was performed publically at occasions such as patriotic and nationalist festivals. This breakthrough as an anthem occurred in 1923, during the *Wettstein und Riehen Festspiele* [Wettstein and Riehen Festival] and from this moment on, the song has been considered to be Basel's official city anthem. Today the anthem continues to be regularly performed during political and military events, as well as during football games and other sports events, when a local team is involved.. The *Festspiel* [festival] celebrated the 400th anniversary of the reunification of Basel with the neighbouring village of Riehen (Seiler-Spiess 1988; Vögelin 1971).

The genre of the *Festspiel* has a long tradition in the theater culture of 19th and 20th century Switzerland (Stern 1986; Engler and Kreis 1988). The *Festspiele* were organized in the context of local, regional, or national festivities commemorating specific localised historical events. It was the function of a *Festspiel* to stage a play commemorating the events (Engler 1988) and to celebrate the common identity of a shared, imagined community represented by both, the actors and the audience (von Matt 1988). As a theatric representation of *banal nationalism*, the festival contributed importantly to the reproduction of a public memory and therefore to the sociocultural ideologies of difference that this memory implies.

This postulate is equally valid with reference to the *Wettstein und Riehen Festspiele*. The festival, attracting major parts of the local community, included a staged enactment of the events leading to the reunification of Basel and Riehen (Vögeli 1971). In these particularly

tense political times of the interwar period – when local social and economic inequalities threatened to destabilize the established social and economic order – the staging of the unification had strong political implications. In this context, *Z'Basel an mim Rhy* was recontextualised and endowed with a new social meaning. Herman Suter, the composer of the musical parts of the play, and Albert Oeri, the playwright decided to close the play with a performance of a choir singing *Z'Basel an mim Rhy* (Seiler-Spiess 1988). The moment was strategically chosen; and the patriotic song recalling the common origins of all members of the audience helped to create a feeling of unity and cohesion, across the divide of social class.

This raises an interesting question. How did a text that circulated as a poem and then a popular folk song for more than 100 years among people of a city become appropriated and consumed as a semiotic object of banal nationalism? What historical circumstances have led to this transformation from a song to an anthem? How do semiotic components, such as text, melody and rhythm, contribute to bring about such a transformation?

In what follows, I examine textual cues that provide potential semiotic resources for a patriotic reinterpretation. There are important place names, indexing loci of the city of Basel that have constituted the *public memory* of Basel's citizens for centuries (Helwig 2010): the *Rhine* (which is the city's symbol par excellence), the *Minster school* (Basel's most prestigious secondary school), the *Pfalz* (the hill where the Minster is situated), the *wide bridge* (the main bridge unifying the two parts of Basel which are divided by the Rhine), the *St. Peter's Square* (an important city market square). In terms of Billig's *banal nationalism*, place names representing familiar aspects of social life were recontextualized within the conceptual frame of a nationalist ideology to construct a common sense of belonging. Drawing on common places should invoke a feeling of shared experience and a common identity of "Baselness", a sense of patriotic pride prone to bridge the social divide and overcome the feeling of exclusion felt by the working class. However, it must be noted that this recontextualisation and semiotic shift also had its social costs. It erased the fact that the

locations celebrated in Hebel's text originally were accessible only to the local elite; while peasants and the foreign working classes were denied access. Hebel as son of immigrant working class parents was quite an exception in this respect, and did enjoy certain privileges because of his father's employment with an important bourgeois family (Viel 2010).

A second textual, linguistic property that is of interest here, concerns that fact Hebel's text was written in an Alemannic dialect, similar to the language variety spoken by his parents, from Hausen in Baden, Germany; a language variety for which no written standard existed at the time. For the text to be performed at the *Festspiel* play, it needed to be adapted to *Baaseldytsch*, a different variety of Alemannic spoken in Basel (Pilch 1976). The adaptation of the text to the local language variety represented an important element in unfolding the anthem's patriotic potential. The text performed during the *Festspiel* in 1923 was, therefore, not the original version of Hebel's *Erinnerung an Basel*, but a version of the text in *Baaseldytsch* that had emerged in the late 19th century under the name *Z'Basel an mim Rhy*.

The importance attributed to dialect here is in no way arbitrary, but must be viewed in light of the status of dialect in Switzerland more generally, and in Basel in particular. As Richard Watt has convincingly argued (1999: 69), in Switzerland "the symbolic value of the dialects in the majority of linguistic marketplaces in which they are in competition with the standard is not only believed to be much higher than that of the standard, but is also deliberately promoted as having a higher value." This is due to the fact that local dialects have been historically constructed as icons of the Swiss resistance from foreign powers, especially from Germany. The many regional dialects are also traditionally understood to represent the independence of "the [Swiss] commune, the canton, the valley, the region, etc." from the Swiss national political power – and as an expression of the independence of a given region from other Swiss localities (Watts 1999: 78, see also Pichard 1975). As such, Swiss dialects

have traditionally served – and continue to serve – as a powerful marker of distinction and as a site in which social difference is produced and legitimized.

Consequently, singing Hebel's text in the local dialect while commemorating the reunification of Basel created a conditionality for the enactment of Hebel's text as an icon of local authenticity and identity, and for the reproduction of an ideology of Basel's population as an imagined independent community of equal citizens. Furthermore, singing the song in *Baaseldytsch* was also a way to reproduce the relations of difference between the legitimate members of Basel's imagined community and an external "other." Among these "others" were immigrants, who were considered to be an unwelcome concurrence on the labor market during years of economic crisis (Mooser 2000). The "others," however, also included the neighboring Germans, who were constructed by part of the local population as having provoked the war and being responsible for the enduring economic crisis in Switzerland. They were, consequently, held to be responsible for the poverty of the Swiss working classes. Finally, those considered "others" were people from other regions in Switzerland, especially the political elite in Bern, who were accused of having underestimated the effects of the crises on the national working class and, more particularly, of having neglected the precarious living conditions of those Swiss who, like the Basel population, lived on the margins of the national territory (Mooser 2000).

The semiotic transformation of Hebel's text outlined above was consolidated during the 20th century, so that today it is called the official city anthem on the municipal website. The text is found in all official schoolbooks, and every child in Basel learns the song in kindergarten, or at the latest in the first year of school. It is still sung at various cultural and military events, and is the most popular song in the local carnival, which has a huge tradition in Basel. In addition, the anthem has been used for several years by the major local radio station as a brand song, and it is on sale in tourism shops in Basel. The question arises as to how and why – nearly 100 years after World War I and 65 years after World War II, and over

200 years since the text was composed – this song continues to circulate in the city's public discourse. To explain how and why the anthem continues to be made the object of appropriation and instrumentalization, the next section analyzes an instance of the anthem's reemergence as an object of exploitation in the contemporary history of Basel.

Secondos as heirs of hebel

In 2010, I was gathering information about a – in the end unsuccessful – political campaign that aimed to introduce a law on the right to vote for foreign residents in Basel. With this law, foreign residents who had been living in Basel for at least ten years and as such in the possession of a permanent resident permit, would have been allowed to vote at the cantonal level and to be elected to political positions at this level. Generally, and with only a few exceptions, foreigners in Switzerland are not granted access to political decision-making processes. It was in this context that the following text was produced:

Warum wird der Secondo Johann Peter Hebel nicht gebührend gewürdigt?^{ix}

Als Sohn deutscher Gastarbeiter kam Johann Peter Hebel vor 250 Jahren "Z'Basel an mym Rhy" zur Welt. Der tüchtige bis eifrige Secondo schaffte es trotz seiner tiefen sozialen Herkunft am Basler Gymnasium am Münsterplatz Fuss zu fassen. Die zwei Welten in seiner Brust waren für den jungen Hebel real erfahrbar, da er die kalte Jahreszeit als armer unter armen in der badischen Heimat verbrachte, während er vom Frühjahr bis zum Herbst als armer unter reichen im Umfeld des Basler Grossbürgertums, wo seine Eltern als Hausangestellten arbeiteten, lebte.

Der Baz ist aufgefallen, dass das Hebeljahr totgeschwiegen wird. Warum wird der Dichter der Basler-Hymne zu seinem 250 Geburtstag in Basel nicht geehrt? Wo bleiben die Stadtfeste und Sondermünzen? Die Weltwoche vermutet, dass es an der rot-grünen Regierung liegt, die mit den *Secondos*-Tugenden Fleiss, Ehrgeiz, Erfolgsstreben und Selbstverantwortung nichts anfangen kann. Die *Secondos* vermuten, dass die Weltwocheabonnenten, [...] nicht herausfinden wollen, dass der Parade-Basler ein Secondo war. Wie dem auch sei, der arme Hebel wird einfach

Why hasn't the "Secondo" Johann Peter Hebel received due respect?^x

As the son of German guest workers, Johann Peter Hebel was born 250 years ago "In Basel on my Rhine." The smart and diligent *Secondo* managed to gain access to the elite school at the Münsterplatz despite his socially disadvantaged background. He had the real experience of living in two worlds, spending winter as a poor boy among the poor in his homeland, and living as a poor boy among the rich from spring to fall in the milieu of Basel's Grande Bourgeoisie, where his parents were domestic workers.

The Baz [Basel's major daily newspaper] has noticed that the year of Hebel [the 250th birthday of Hebel] was hushed up. Why wasn't the 250th birthday of the author of Basel's anthem celebrated? Where are the city festivals and the commemorative coins? The "Weltwoche" [a national conservative newspaper] speculated that this is due to the green-red government^{xi}, which cannot relate to the typical virtues of the second generation of immigrants, such as assiduity, ambition, drive for success and self-responsibility. The *Secondos*, for their part, think

zur falschen Zeit 250. Zwischen den Blöcken zerrieben wird es wohl keinen anderen Ausweg geben, als dass seine Nachkommen, die heutigen *Secondos*, ihm ein würdiges Fest bereiten *uff dr Basler Pfalz, uff dr braite Brugg* und sonst überall *z'Basel an mym Rhy*.

that subscribers of the *Weltwoche* [...] were not keen on discovering that their archetypical citizen of Basel was in fact a *Secondo*. In any case, poor Hebel had his 250th birthday at the wrong time. Caught between opposing blocks, there is probably no other solution than that today's *Secondos* organize a dignified celebration for him [...] *on Basel's Pfalz, on the wide bridge* or anywhere else *in Basel on my Rhine*.

This blog entry was written by Gianni Rossi^{xii}, a member of the *Socialist Party* of Switzerland. He is of Italian descent and at the time of the campaign, he was president of the *Secondos association of Switzerland* representing the interests of second generation immigrants in Switzerland - *Secondo*, is a term used in Switzerland to designate the Swiss-born children of immigrants. The entry manifests tensions around the fact that the 250th birthday of Johann Peter Hebel, exemplary citizen of Basel, had not been commemorated in a way that would do justice to his fame and merit. Presented by the city officials as an issue of reasonable spending in an economically tense climate, Rossi announces that his association will fill the “gap” and organize a festivity to celebrate Hebel according to his status as an *archetypical citizen of Basel* and his merit as the composer of Basel's anthem.

This blog entry was part of the political campaign of the *Secondos* conducted in 2010 to promote the adoption of a law which would give foreigners the right to vote at a cantonal level. Since the law addressed mainly *Secondos* living in Basel, the local *Secondos* association was strongly involved in the campaigns preceding the vote. Instead of strengthening the “civic” argument based on the right to vote of every individual, the association strategically decided to adopt an identitarian discourse, constructing the *Secondos* as patriots and a legitimate part of Basel's identity and history.

In line with this strategy aiming to justify the demands of *Secondos* for political participation and the right to vote, Rossi draws on the historical figure of Hebel—the highly esteemed *archetypical citizen of Basel*—whom Rossi constructs discursively as a *Secondo* making him a member of the contemporary immigrant community his association represents.

Reinventing Hebel, he performs a communicative strategy of synchronization (Woolard 1998). Drawing a parallel with the life and work of Hebel, Rossi decontextualizes the life of the *Secondos* from their contemporary social reality of the 21st century, which he recontextualizes by relating it to the period and lifetime of the famous poet and original author of the anthem, Hebel (1760-1826).

It is in this context that Rossi explores Hebel's character and his migrational biography. In his blog he intergrates lexical terms such as *smart* und *diligent*, all of which are typical terms also indexing the contemporary local discourse on immigration. Indeed, such terms are chosen to fit the description of both the life of a contemporary child of immigrants in Basel and Hebel's own life as a hardworking and committed labourer in his field. A second semiotic transfer relates to the narration of Hebel's migrational trajectory and those of his parents. With the vocabulary that Rossi chooses, he evokes an immigration policy from the 20th century, referred to as seasonal migration by '*Saisonniers*' [seasonal workers]. This policy relates to the period between the 1950s and the 1980s when workers were given seasonal work permits which allowed them to accept labor in Switzerland between spring and autumn, but obliged them to return and spend the winter in their countries of origin. Again, Rossi references a contemporary social reality and applies it directly to the narrative of Hebel's life.

This same phenomenon of decontextualization and recontextualization can be observed in Rossi's use of the metaphor *living in two worlds*. This metaphor indexes another social reality experienced by today's immigrants, namely that of a split cultural identity, something Hebel never explicitly mentions in his writings. In this regard, we may wonder whether identity, in Hebel's time, was constructed differently and whether social categories of cultural and ethnic difference were drawn on in other ways to create, manifest, and perpetuate the social order. Indeed, while Hebel does not seem to take great issue with questions of cultural identity and cultural conflict, discourses about migrants' supposedly split cultural

identities form one of the major issues raised by the *Secondos* association. In short, Rossi openly appropriates Hebel's experience and transforms it discursively to meet his own ends and interests of his association.

It is interesting to note that a form of Bakhtinian dialogism emerges between Rossi's blog entry and other statements on Hebel's 250th birthday. Rossi refers to an article in the conservative Swiss newspaper *Weltwoche* which, in keeping with the general opinion of conservative circles, it argued that the lack of attention to Hebel's anniversary by Basel's left-wing government was due to their rejection of Alemannic values represented by Hebel. By constructing Hebel as the archetypal *Secondo*, even as the *archetypal citizen of Basel*, Rossi appropriates the discourse of the *Weltwoche* and instrumentalizes it to create an idealized image of a *Secondo*: hard-working, smart, persevering.

While the blog's discursive alliance with a political right-wing position represented by the newspaper *Weltwoche* has a humoristic undertone, Rossi's humor should not disguise the fact that the *Secondos'* capitalization on Hebel's quality and values is an integral part of their political campaign—a condition that is not neutral. While certain parts of the Swiss population, in Basel and elsewhere in Switzerland, tend to construct immigrants as lazy, ignorant, and careless, the text contributes to a hierarchization and stratification of *Secondos* and other immigrants. While *Secondos* are recognised by the text as good immigrants, other immigrant groups are implicitly constructed as excluded from any form of recognition. Attributing particular attributes and rights to *Secondos* hence also implies, at the same time, the marginalisation and deligitimation of others.

Finally, there is a third strategy of textual recomposition by which Rossi decontextualizes and recontextualizes passages of Basel's anthem. By integrating passages from the poem *In Basel on my Rhine; school at the Münsterplatz; Basel's Pfalz; on the wide bridge* into the account of Hebel's life narrative as a *Secondo*, Rossi aims to reinforce feelings of pride carried by the anthem and highlights the Baselness of the childhood experience of

both, Hebel and the children of all the *Secondos* he represents. Rossi uses these references to construct the *Secondos* as fundamentally bonded to the city of Basel. The recontextualized passages are not chosen randomly, but with an intent to index the places most significant for local identity and public memory. In doing so, Rossi not only erases the fact that Hebel did not write his *Erinnerung an Basel* to make a political tribute to his city of birth, but rather it is a romantic statement to an admired woman. He also reinterprets the anthem ascribing it to a new social group of patriots, different from the ones celebrated at the festival in the inter-war period. He thereby, reiterates the discourse of patriotism using symbols of banal nationalism (such as anthems), but he does this by shifting the established socio-cultural boundaries of the majority society, by including immigrants into the collectivity of legitimate patriotic citizens.

Yet, in the events studied previously, the anthem was enacted as part of a cultural practice to reanimate the public memory of an imagined community of Basel, governed by the imaginary of dominant groups. While *Secondos* as a marginalised group remain absent from the text of the anthem and its singing, inscribing fragments of the anthem's text into the blog, empowers *Secondos* and lets them be part of the traditions, myths, and feelings of pride and authenticity, that the anthem represents as an icon of public memory for mainstream Baselters. At the same time, including *Secondos* into the realm of people addressed by the anthem challenges the established social order and conventional public memory, because it integrates a stigmatized group as a legitimate part into the imagined community of the city of Basel. Rossi's entry, thereby, represents an ideological shift which is articulated in the socio-cultural categorization of "us" vs. the "other." However, by drawing a parallel between Hebel as the "model ancestor" and archetypical, "true" citizen of Basel and contemporary *Secondos* living in Basel as well as Swiss-born Basler, Rossi, thus constructs a virtual family link between Hebel and these other groups, thereby producing an image of pseudo-harmony that unifies the *Secondos* and the "authentic" native citizens of Basel.

To understand how and why Hebel, his poem and persona emerged as a terrain of ideological investment, recontextualised by the president of the *Secondos* association, we need to consider the political-economic conditions under which these discourses emerged. As mentioned above, Rossi's blog needs to be understood as part of a debate, that emerged in Basel in 2010 and centered on the issue whether to grant immigrant populations the right to the vote. The debate focused on whether or not immigrants were adequately integrated into the local culture and whether or not they had sufficient linguistic competence to follow a political debate in the local dialect to have the right to be considered as citizens of Basel.

This political debate occurred at an economically and politically salient moment, when Switzerland was affected by international financial and economic crises, which affected immigration. In particular, the extension of the *Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons* between Switzerland and the European Union resulted in an influx of immigration to Basel and other economic centers in Switzerland, such as Zurich and Geneva, characterized by both politics and the media as increasing (Piguet 2009). Furthermore, there was significant diversification in the composition of immigrant populations, with an increasing proportion of Germans and, to a lesser extent, immigrant groups from Bulgaria, Romania and/or other new EU member states.

As a hub of chemical and pharmaceutical industries at the French-German border Basel has historically been a center of immigration throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. While in the 1970s and 1980s immigrants to Basel mostly came from Italy and Spain, in the 1990s and 2000 they originated mainly from the former Yugoslavia and Turkey, and since 2010 they have predominantly come from Germany, Eastern Europe and Asia. Currently, 33.5% of the local population is "foreign," with roots in Germany (since 2010 the largest immigrant community), the former Yugoslavia, Italy, Turkey, Sri Lanka, France, Eastern Europe, and South America (Statistics Office Basel, 2011). The "traditional" immigrants from Southern Europe are generally understood to be individuals with lesser professional

qualifications who are working in poorly paid and less prestigious jobs, and whose children tend to experience marginalisation or exclusion through assimilative integration policies in schools. The new wave of German immigrants, however, have a different status: They speak the same language and are often highly skilled, qualified to work as university professors, medical doctors in hospitals, or school teachers. They are generally constructed as a threat to the established social order in Swiss society, by both the local Swiss population and the “traditional” immigrant population. The German immigrants are frequently accused of not integrating into the local society, and of persisting to use standard German, which is perceived as being “presumptuous” and “arrogant.” A different group within this “newly arrived” immigrant community are people from Eastern Europe, who come either as seasonal workers or to settle permanently and often work in lowpaid, precarious jobs in agriculture, gastronomy, and the construction sector. It is this group that is resented by the “traditional” immigrant community as competitors. Asylum seekers, who are not granted the right to work during the application procedure, are also regarded negatively by both the Swiss-born citizens of Basel and the “traditional” immigrants. They are seen as lazy, criminal, and noisy, and are believed to disturb and destabilize the social security of the city.

Such constructions and categorizations of newcomers based on stereotypes and prejudice result in a hierarchization and structuration of the immigrant population into “good” and “bad” immigrants. It is in this context that the Swiss German dialect and local values, such as the ones mentioned in Rossi’s blog entry, emerge as an object of social differentiation; not only between locals and immigrants (Watts 1999), but also increasingly between the different generations and groups of immigrants, e.g. between *Secondos* and the new waves of immigration.

How does Rossi’s text refer to this complexity? Since the *Secondos* association represents the interests of “traditional” immigrant communities, Rossi needed to differentiate the *Secondos* from the unpopular or “bad” (more recently arrived) immigrants in order to give

value and legitimacy to the particular community of immigrants his organisation represents. To legitimate his claim, a reference to Basel's anthem and the re-invention of the acclaimed author Hebel as a *Secondo* proved useful to integrate *Secondos* as legitimate members into the community of Basel. This creates a contrast to "other" immigrants who are thus supposed not to share the same places and experiences as the legitimate citizens of Basel evoked in Hebel's text. Since *Secondos* were born in Basel on the Rhine or had been living there for most of their lives, the *Minster*, the *wide bridge*, the *Pfalz* and other places constitute elements of their own personal trajectory, which in turn makes them legitimate members of a community, sharing its history and identity.

Drawing on the anthem as a key symbol of modernist nationalism, Rossi reproduces socio-cultural ideologies of citizenship and local patriotic identity, here in the form of "Baselness" which he re-interprets to the advantage of second generation migrants. Hence, he uses old modernist principles of identification to give voice and the power of political participation to a specific disadvantaged group of people. At the same time he accepts the exclusion of other immigrant groups from accessing these same resources, thereby reproducing and reinforcing old systems of inequality in the social order of Basel.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe it is important to recall one theoretical point about the nature of objects and their social meaning. The reconstruction of the social life of an object (Appadurai 1996) – the anthem of Basel in this case – has enabled me to analyze (in parts) the circulation of a text across time and space, from the moment of its conception as a poem in 1806, to the present day, showing how it has been re-appropriated and transformed continuously, throughout its social life, by new actors, in new contexts, and for new purposes. Over the course of its lifespan, Hebel's text was part of various communicative and social processes on which it had a specific effect. From its origin as a romantic ode for intimate private

consumption, it gradually emerged as an object of cultural consumption of a larger scale taking on the role of an instrument of pride and power, and becoming a tool to legitimize social structuration.

Nonetheless, if we agree with Appadurai's theory that objects have social lives, that these are produced, circulated, and consumed by different individuals for different purposes, and that their function in society changes according to the conditions under which the object in question is appropriate and instrumentalized, we must focus our analytical attention less on the objects themselves than on the practices of appropriation and how these practices shape the objects' social function.

This in no way implies that the nature of the semiotic object should be neglected. On the contrary, the data presented in this analysis have shown that the historical circulation and reappropriation of the text by different actors in various contexts are made possible by the very nature of the text. This means that the text is authorized by its semantic structure and content, which indexes a highly specific local reality (the *Minster*, the *Pfalz*, the *Meadow*, *St. Peter's Square*), and which, in the imagined collective memory of Basel's citizens, is not only intricately linked to the city and its history, but also inherently coupled with the individual trajectories of everyone growing up in this specific place. For this reason, the text – its content, orthography, title, length, and other aspects – must be made to conform to the contingent needs and interests of the individuals instrumentalizing it. This also means, however, that as analysts we should be sensitive to the ideologies and interests underlying the appropriation and instrumentalization of the anthems at specific moments and places; due attention must be paid to the ideological, structural, and material conditionalities that allow certain attributes of semiotic objects to be judged as more or less valuable by individuals and markets, and the focus must be placed on the logic and reasons behind the aspects in the social life of an object that render it more or less appealing and desirable.

Bionote

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ⁱ In line with the variety of *Baaseldytsch* spoken at this moment in time, in 1923 "mym" was spelled with "i", i.e. "mim".

ⁱⁱ English translation by the author.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Pfalz is the hill where the Minster is located.

^{iv} Scholer is probably a large-nosed bookbinder who worked near the bridge.

^v The Buebe Kamisol is a coat for boys.

^{vi} Sante Hans is the neighborhood in Bas,el where Hebel grew up.

^{vii} Alemannic is a German dialect spoken in the southwest part of Germany, in Alsace, and in parts of Switzerland and Austria

^{viii} Hebel spent his adult life in Karlsruhe in southwest Germany.

^{ix} <http://www.ordas.ch/blog/37.html>; accessed 19.10.2012

^x English translation by the author.

^{xi} “Green-red” is a term for the political coalition between the Green and the Socialist Parties.

^{xii} All personal names are pseudonyms.