

Norwegian national day oratory: constructing and reconstructing a national we

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ABSTRACT. National day speeches play an explicit part in defining national identities. In this article, we examine how mayors in Norwegian municipalities reflect on Norway's increased diversity in their 17 May speeches. National day speeches in Norway are supposed to focus on unity, not conflict. Yet, what have they become in the context of diversity? In applying theoretical perspectives on nations, rituals and language to data consisting of a selection of speeches, our analysis identifies themes that structure a typical 17 May speech. We explore the use of plural pronouns in the speeches and how they make Norwegian national identity more or less accessible for people with minority backgrounds. By including ethnic minorities in national day rhetoric, the speakers negotiate who belongs in the Norwegian community in a less directly political way than in everyday life. Yet, whilst the genre is celebratory, the national day speeches also echo different political attitudes towards diversity and integration.

KEYWORDS: ethnic minorities, mayors, national day, Norway, speeches

Introduction

All nation-states have occasions when ordinary routines are suspended, as the state celebrates itself. Then, sentiments of patriotic emotion, which the rest of the year have to be kept far from the business of ordinary life, can surge forth (Billig 1995: 44–45).

This argument by Billig definitely holds true for the Norwegian context. In Norway, public celebrations are rare, and emotions in public are mostly modest. The national day, however, is an exception to this general rule, when a majority of the population, including immigrants, take part in a public celebration, dominated by children's parades (Aagedal and Botvar 2014). The Norwegian national day celebration is unique in a European, and even Nordic, context. In contrast to its neighbour country, Sweden, which started its national day celebration in 2005 (Rodell 2010), Norwegian national day celebrations started almost 200 years ago, and a large proportion of the population participates.

This paper analyses how national identity is (re)constructed in speeches held by Norwegian mayors in various municipalities on Norway's national day, 17 May. Our research question is as follows: Do mayoral speeches in which ethnic diversity is mentioned create an inclusive and heterogeneous national *we* or do they reinforce a distinction between ethnic minorities and the majority population?

Whilst what we may call a 'state-centred' definition of 'Norwegian' encompasses all individuals who hold Norwegian citizenship, a culture-centred definition of national belonging is far more complex and ambiguous (Zimmer 2003). This is not least because nearly 15 per cent of Norway's population has additional ties to a total of 222 countries (Statistics Norway 2016a). Thus, debates concerning issues of integration, immigration, multiculturalism and the 'stuff' of Norwegian national identity have naturally become a key part of public discourse.

Knowing that Norway's population is culturally more complex than it was some decades ago, the question is how mayors in Norwegian municipalities handle population diversity rhetorically. We will explore the national themes that speakers draw on when ethnic minorities are constructed as part of the national *we*. Furthermore, we will analyse the mayors' use of word clusters that govern ownership of Norwegian history, culture and identity – namely plural pronouns.

A national day speech could be seen as belonging to both the categories of public and private deictic. The function of the latter is not to 'alter reality by modifying beliefs or directing actions, as one expects of rhetoric, but to express who we are and who we can be' (Sheard 1996: 775). The 17 May speech is not a political speech in the conventional sense. It usually has a strong thematic angle and is filled with clear genre expectations. It is characterised by its emphasis on unity, not conflict. It should celebrate, not question. It is more about what the audience has in common than what they disagree on. Nevertheless, one could argue that the 17 May speech also contains political elements. As pointed out by Gillis (1994: 5), 'commemorative action is by definition social and political, for it involves the coordination of individual and group memories, whose results appear consensual when they are in fact the product of processes of intense contest, struggle, and in some cases annihilation'.

We now proceed to introduce the context of the Norwegian Constitution day before shedding light on why mayor's national day speeches are of particular analytical interest as regard questions of changing national identity in diverse societies and presenting our methods and data. Our analytical framework sets out the theoretical underpinnings of our three-pronged analysis, honing in on the national day themes: Norwegian history, values and self-understanding.

Norwegian constitution day

The national day celebrates the finalisation of the constitution on 17 May 1814, when Norway's sovereignty was transferred from the Danish to the

Swedish king at a peace conference in Kiel (Østerud 2005: 706). Norway's transfer from one neighbouring country to another was not unproblematic; it caused outrage and awakened strong feelings of nationalism within the Norwegian population who rejected the prospect of remaining unrecognised between two rival kingdoms (Elgenius 2011: 107). This 'awakened Norwegian national consciousness' was inspired by French political thought (Elviken 1931: 370). As the most significant event of the independence movement that followed, a national assembly was constituted, which culminated in the establishment of Norway's constitution (Elgenius 2011), and what Østerud and Helle (2006: 27) argues became one of the most democratic systems in Europe. Ever since the 1820s, Kolstø (2006: 690-1) underlines, the 17 of May has been celebrated as 'one of the most potent expressions of Norwegian national identity'. In all local communities, there are children's parades, where 'children and their parents dress in their very best suit or dress, often a national costume, and sing the national anthem and other patriotic songs while they cheerfully wave the national flag which is organized in all local communities'.

Several authors state that the children's parade is unique in an international setting; they even draw a contrast between the children's parade and other countries celebrating their national day through military parades and tanks (Blehr 1999: 175, Gullestad 2006, Elgenius 2011: 407). The latter component is, for example, prevalent in the national day celebration in Singapore (Kong and Yeoh 1997: 224), and also in France and USA, there are military parades on the national day (Ben-Aaron 2005: 693). Nevertheless, there are examples of national day celebrations not containing military elements. One of these is St Patrick's day in Ireland, with 'marchers parading in specific regalia, displays of Irish dancing and performances of Irish music' (Cronin and Adair 2004: 1).

The popularity of 17 May is related to the joy of having a free constitutional government after centuries of being under foreign rule (Mykland 2004). The celebration brings citizens together and aims at creating cohesion (Elgenius 2011: 396, 408). However, there has historically also been strife around certain issues (Mykland 2004). During the 1920s, conflicts arised when socialists organised their own marches for children waving red flags instead of the national flag (Kolstø 2006: 691). Later, there have been controversies related to whether or not other flags than the national one should be accepted, such as European flags (in the 1970s), Sami flags (at beginning of this millennium) and immigrants' flags in 2008. Elgenius (2011) narrates, by this time, that it was agreed that UN flags and Sami flags were allowed alongside the Norwegian national flags, but other nations' flags were not allowed as part of the celebration.

Despite examples of controversies, the Norwegian national day has broad popular support. Based on survey data from 2013, Agedal and Botvar 2014 found that the day is celebrated by non-immigrants (89 per cent) and (non-Western) immigrants (88 per cent) alike and more than 50 per cent of the population attended a public event during the day. The audience of most 17 May

speeches are generally quite broad, taking into account that it is a day celebrated by almost everyone in the local community. The speaker is typically a mayor, a rector of schools or school pupils. Therefore, this day forges an arena for intercultural encounters and national identity management. The reason why a day that celebrates a historical past has strong support even among immigrants might have to do with the way the day is celebrated, according to Aagedal and Botvar 2014. They maintain that there is something atypically Norwegian about this day, involving a public celebration where Norwegians appear more cheerful than during other days of the year.

Why speeches held by mayors?

Amidst the various tangible components that coalesce to tell a story of national identity on this day, we find 17 May speeches held by Norwegian mayors to be particularly interesting for our research purposes. First, this has to do with the position of mayors in Norwegian democracy. Mayors are political representatives. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that their speeches are shaped by political themes on immigration, integration and diversity. In that respect, mayors' attitudes towards minority groups are a result of not only their individual political constitution and value-related views but also the subject positions that are available to them in political discourses. Despite belonging to a political party, which entails an affinity that includes a party stance on immigration and integration, Norwegian mayors are elected and most local councils are coalitions. This means that mayors often have a consensual and corporatist leadership style (Goldsmith and Larsen 2004). Mayors are expected to represent the entire community (Gravdahl 1998: 312), and their role means representing the community both legally and ceremonially (Caulfield and Larsen 2013).

Sample

Via email communication with Norwegian municipalities, we were able to accumulate a sample of 67 mayoral national day speeches. There are 429 mayors in Norway altogether, and they come from all of the parties represented in parliament (Statistics Norway 2016b). The national day often means embracing historical events that are not shared by the majority and minorities alike. Thus, there is no clear solution as to how a mayor should talk about this day without appearing exclusionary. One obvious solution is of course not to talk about ethnic minorities at all, which 2/3 of the mayors chose. In this part of the total sample, there were for example speeches by mayors from the so-called Centre Party, which is a party with a strong district policy. According to a study by Valen and Narud (2007), the Centre Party is the third most restrictive towards immigration of all the Norwegian parties represented in the parliament. The

Conservative Party is the second most restrictive, and the Progress Party is the most restrictive. We do not have any speeches held by Progress Party politicians in our sample, but this reflects the fact that only 2.6 per cent (11) of Norwegian mayors belong to this party.

If our article were about analysing the content of national day speeches in general, we could have included the speeches that do not mention minorities or diversity. However, the main objective here is to explore *how* (rather than to what extent) mayors talk about ethnic minorities in delineations of national identity on 17 May. Interestingly, a survey undertaken among mayors and the general population shows that mayors in general are more positive towards the settlement of refugees than the general population of Norwegian municipalities (Steen 2010). One reason is related to both the economic incentives of refugee settlement (because of state benefits) and to the fact that the mayor serves as a link between the community and national leadership and there is moral pressure from national authorities on these local leaders to take on their share of refugee settlements (Steen 2010).

The speeches in our sample have been held by mayors from both the right and the left side of the political axis. The parties represented are the Conservative Party (H) (which is currently in government), the Labour Party (AP) (which ruled the previous government), the Centre Party (SP) and the Christian Democratic Party (KrF). The 25 speeches that represent the empirical foundation of our research stem from municipalities throughout the country – from north to south and east to west. There is a slight over-representation of municipalities in eastern Norway. With the exception of Oslo, this does not imply that these municipalities have more ethnic minorities or are more urban than the municipalities elsewhere in Norway.

Moreover, because some municipalities forwarded several speeches held by the same mayor, we chose, in some cases, to include speeches from the same municipality that were held in different years. The time span covered is from 2008 until 2014. Critical events that affected the discourses on migration during these years are the Arabic uprising and subsequent civil wars, the ongoing migration crisis since 2011 and the terror attack committed by Breivik on 22 July 2011. According to Kolås (2017), who has studied a broad data set of opinion pieces in Norwegian media, the immigration debate did not change significantly after 22 July. As for 17 May speeches, Tønneson and Sivesind (2016: 211) find even more emphasis on the constitution and on national unity in students' 17 May speeches in the aftermath of the 22 July terrorist attack.

Analytical framework

Discourses constitute a collection of narratives that a speaker must adhere to such that audiences from relevant geographical and cultural contexts may perceive their statements as acceptable and meaningful. In their analysis of *inter alia* political memory speeches, Wodak et al. (2009) first categorised speeches

according to which national discourses they draw on. Instead of starting with some predefined discourses, we focus on themes that emerged from an inductive analysis of our sample material, namely, (i) Norwegian history, (ii) Norwegian values and (iii) Norwegian self-understanding or characteristics. These three themes provide a framework for how to express what it means to be Norwegian on 17 May and thus who is covered by the category 'Norwegian'. Different discourses will compete in defining the content of these themes. Because we did not include the speeches that omitted ethnic minorities or the multicultural society, we have not included the entire range of discourses. Thus, we do not use the discourse concept in our further analysis, although the focus on linguistic aspects of the speeches in many ways resembles a discourse analysis carried out by, for example, Ruth Wodak or Michael Billig.

A feeling of inclusion in national identity – what Anderson (1983) refers to as an 'imagined community' – can be strengthened or weakened among individuals listening to a national day speech, depending on whether or not they are able to identify with the evoked themes and thereby imagine themselves as part of a national *we*. However, different groups (and indeed mayors) have different perceptions about the challenges and value of immigration, integration and multiculturalism. Thus, in the speeches analysed in this research, there will be disparities in the themes the mayors emphasise and downplay. On a symbolic level, there is considerable power of definition in giving linguistic expression to categories and relationships when these will house a diverse population.

For the first theme, 'Norwegianness' is closely tied to a *national history*. According to Smith (1998), nations are modern inventions, but the linkage between a historical people and the country they live in is older. The rediscovery and (re)interpretation of historical events that both apply to Norwegian nationals and occurred on national soil are central on 17 May. Not surprisingly, then, 17 May speeches often retell what happened in the past and during the constitution's founding in 1814, and also refer to Norway's secession from its union with Sweden in 1905, and the German occupation of Norway. Eriksen (2004: 54) points out that 'in Norway, the memory of German occupation during the Second World War did much to consolidate the sense of national identity, and [...] it plays a significant part in contemporary Norwegian identity'.

Additionally, as part of the institutionalisation of the national day, many speeches mention the so-called founding fathers (authors Henrik Wergeland and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson), as well as some of the symbols that are important to the celebration: the children's parade and singing national anthems. Specific historical circumstances and key persons are permanent fixtures in the speeches to the extent that they have come to stand as metaphors for the Norwegian urge for liberty and resistance to domination.

The second theme that plays a central role in the speeches is concerned with Norwegian values. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) explain how public practices or displays of traditional ritual or symbolic character can connect the past, present and future together to inculcate certain *values and beliefs* in a

nation's citizens. Similarly, Sheard (1996) argues that a national day speech has the potential to spread a certain emotion or mood among the audiences and listeners, often by reminding the audience of common values and ideas. The Norwegian national day is officially a celebration of Enlightenment era humanistic ideals and values on which the Norwegian constitution was founded, and these constitute what we may call the 17 May speech's *value component*. On this day, most people who can legally call themselves Norwegian, including ethnic minorities, report feeling included (Aagedal and Botvar 2014). Perhaps, as suggested by Aagedal and Botvar (2014), they experience this as being a celebration of universal values of empowerment, freedom, democracy and human rights.

The third theme focuses on Norwegian characteristics or self-understanding. The 17 May is in many ways a celebration of what it means to be 'Norwegian'. The perception that Norwegians possess certain collective characteristics appears when there is talk of community spirit and solidarity, the country's reconstruction after World War II, the social democratic welfare system and volunteering at a local level. Self-understandings also reference Norway's fortunate circumstances, that is, the country's privileged position as a rich and safe country in a world where many other people are living in distress, insecurity and poverty.

With data material consisting of speeches, it is sensible to choose a linguistic method of analysis. We have chosen to intensively read the texts and map their grammatical and semantic elements to ascertain how different people are placed and classified (Wodak et al. 2009). In addition, we define the nodal points in the text, that is, the key concepts, by which other concepts are defined. In our sample of speeches, words like *Norway* and *Norwegian* work as nodal points. Additionally, we focus on the use of plural pronouns: The subject pronoun forms can be linguistically and symbolically open for inclusion, whilst the object forms of the same pronouns might exclude or define the boundaries between insiders and outsiders (O'Donnell 1994: 362). When minorities are discussed as *they*, *them* and *others*, they are placed outside the national community and positioned as less than full-fledged Norwegians. The 17 May is a day for plural pronouns, and speeches are characterised by an extensive use of a national 'we'. A central question is how such a 'we' is used when it is meant to include the present and the future, where ethnic minorities also belong in Norway. Are the pronouns used in ways that establish differences, or do they imply spacious categories? Does the *we* in the speeches embrace both minorities and the majority population?

National theme I: Norwegian history

It is said that 17 May speeches tend to resemble each other. It's about 1814 and 1905, about the constitution, about Wergeland and Bjørnson, about World War II, and the significance of freedom. (Female, Rømskog, AP, 2004).

Wergeland and Bjørnson are important figures of the Norwegian narrative of being a nation of humanitarianism and goodness, struggling for independence and social reform (Witoszek 2011: 39, 191). This image is erected against the Nazis who occupied Norway during World War II. Together, these images remind people that peace and freedom are rights we cannot take for granted. Even though narratives of national history may exclude the experiences of those who come from other countries, some experiences, like the German occupation, can also serve to draw a link to present-day refugees' experiences of war and terror:

The battle at Haglebu is a war memorial that should be remembered [...]. We have our freedom and we have our prosperity, but this is not the case everywhere in the world. Let us take care of the freedom that our forefathers fought so hard to secure. Let's take care of each other and of those who come to our country and to our village from areas where life is far more difficult than here. (Female, SP, Sigdal, 2010).

By putting the community's own freedom struggle in the context of current wars fought in other parts of the world, the speaker opens the categories Norway and Norwegians to take part in a common destiny with today's refugees. The battle referred to here happened so long ago that most listeners did not experience it personally, but it 'should be remembered' to remind us that 'we' once were those who suffered.

According to Smith (1998), historically significant events help to thematise national concepts and provide meaning for a nation's citizens. However, Smith may be critiqued for failing to discuss how certain stories are chosen over other possible national narratives. The stories we tell ourselves to remember who we are are not selected randomly and certainly not on national day. The 17 May celebrates the Norwegian constitution, but as we have seen, there are also a number of particular historical events that regularly stipulate Norway's national story. The story of suffering and struggle is traditionally one of ancestors as heroes, but the story in the speech in the preceding texts is used to create a connection with people who are suffering today. The mayor appeals to the audience to show solidarity by 'taking care of those who come to our country and our village'. To 'take care of freedom' appears as an invitation to share our liberty with people who are suffering more than 'us'. The juxtaposition arouses emotions because it points to differences about which it is difficult to remain unmoved – 'our' prosperity and security set against the people of war and deprivation. At the same time, this juxtaposition of differences also puts more emphasis on *other differences* that in this speech remain unspoken, namely, a *we* who live here in '*our* country and *our* village', and *them*, or 'those who come'. Such dichotomies recur in 17 May speeches that examine the relationship between the majority and minority. The mayor of Bergen similarly draws on the historical theme (and the 'us'/'them' dichotomy) in a speech from 2014, but in this case, with an emphasis on Wergeland and the ideals he stood for:

[Henrik Wergeland] was not particularly happy with all aspects of the constitution, for example that Jews and Jesuits were not allowed to enter the realm. Wergeland's view was not followed up during his lifetime, but the paragraph was eventually deleted after his death. This may be a detail to draw attention to on a day like this. Isn't there still something left in our mind-set that has not been ironed out even though these paragraphs have been removed? Wergeland wanted the constitution to be a humanistic constitution. He assumed that a Jew is not only a Jew; he or she is also a human being. How far have we come to think that way today? Is a beggar a beggar or is she also a human being? (Female, H, Bergen, 2014).

By drawing a line from Wergeland's struggle to remove the so-called Jews clause from the Norwegian constitution to the present-day exclusion of beggars, the speaker argues that this kind of exclusionary thinking has not disappeared. Not everyone is welcomed; for example, gaining access to and being welcomed in Norway may be related to ethnicity and religion. As with Wergeland, who is a particularly important person in the 17 May context, we must above all look at each other as people and look beyond the immediate, external signs that distinguish us from each other. Do we look at beggars primarily as beggars – or as human beings? This sentence is formulated as a rhetorical question, implying that the speaker thinks we have come far, but not far enough. Not everything is as good as it should be, and we are working to ensure that conditions improve:

When we celebrate our own nation, it is precisely young people who are at the centre of celebration and attention. This gives hope that we, in the spirit of Wergeland and the Eidsvoll men, will build the country together and that we can continue to sing 'We are a nation', whether we are big or small, yellow or blue, or born in Drangedal or Senegal. (Female, H, Bergen, 2014).

Here, the mayor uses the historical backdrop to see a bright future. In the 'spirit' of national heroes, we will 'build the country together' and work both locally and nationally to ensure good living conditions for everyone. She states that the land we 'are going to build together' shall consist of all types of Norwegians – producing a sense of Norwegian identity that embraces all regardless of skin colour. By using the word 'hope', she draws a more normative than descriptive picture of an undefined future.

With this rhetorical move, the mayor manages to construct a new *we* and defines the community in the same inclusive way as Wergeland did. Whereas Wergeland referred to Jews, the mayor of Bergen refers to inhabitants with backgrounds from other countries and makes minorities and the majority equal subjects in the conceptualisation of national identity. It is interesting that the speaker chooses the metaphor 'to build the country together', which belongs to the historical national theme. *Those who built the country* is historically a powerful tale of hard work and political value choices during the years after the war (Gullestad 2006). The metaphor 'building the country' is recurrent in the speeches, encompassing not only history and kinship but also institutions and cultural practices associated with specific values. The mayor from Bergen uses the metaphor 'building land' to convey that it is now our turn to build the country *together, regardless of what separates us*. Yet, because the

phrase is linked to an era in which Norway was more ethnically and culturally homogeneous, one can argue that the metaphor is associated with the majority population. Gullestad (2006) claims that this metaphor is related to a number of implicit references, where culture is regarded as 'finished and completed'. Understood in this way, Norwegian culture is an already negotiated entity, with little room for new ways to interpret Norwegianness. However, this mayor uses it to suggest national identity as a process in which all ethnic and cultural groups participate. Similarly, a mayor from Alta in northern Norway used her speech to emphasise that transparency and inclusion of ethnic minorities derived from Eidsvoll:

We celebrate the day in the traditional way! The children's parade, band music, banners, and flags! We sing national anthems and we know the feeling of unity and identity. [...] Our challenge going forward is to be open to the new, while also taking care of the old. The love of our country is not to be prejudiced against what is foreign and different. Pride in our culture and tradition must not turn into contempt for others' traditions and backgrounds. We owe this to our Eidsvoll men and we owe this to our young people so they can continue their legacy. (Female, H, Alta, 2014).

In this case, the mayor 'validates' or 'disarms' the perceptual threat of cultural strangers by implying that our founding fathers – who Norwegians generally respect and trust – would have supported a convivial multicultural society. The element of new and foreign peoples is anchored in history and stabilised. The speech uses the term 'Eidsvoll men' in a way that indicates that their ideals should be well known to those who have knowledge of this part of Norwegian history. Thus, it reinforces a tendency where the intended audience is the majority rather than minority population.

Furthermore, we know the feeling of unity and identity, as the mayor says, but it may seem alienating to those who do not feel part of the collective identity or have a more complex relationship to the symbols referred to in the initial sentence of the above quote. In addition, she states that 'the national feeling is very strong on this day'. The speaker is tentatively unifying, yet she seems unaware that the speech variously creates a *we* that cannot accommodate everyone. For example, 'our challenge' suggests a violation. Whose challenge is she referring to – those who represent the 'old' who are encouraged to be 'open to the new'? This is reinforced by the fact that the next line starts with 'The love of our country...'. Here, a distinction is clearly visible in the text. 'Our country' implies that the country above all belongs to those who represent this 'old'. What is new is 'strange and odd' and lacks the same affiliation or ownership of land. The words are in themselves interesting; foreign and different are not unambiguously positive words and instead connote something unknown, something that is not like 'us', something that does not belong with us. These are words that create distance and exclude, denoting what makes *us* different from them.

The next sentence reinforces this impression further: 'Pride in *our* culture and tradition must not turn into contempt for *others'* traditions and backgrounds'. Here, plural pronouns are used in a way that creates divisions. It is

interesting to see how the speech encourages inclusive attitudes, whilst it also contains dichotomies that create the opposite effect. It is at best a form of inclusion based on respect for differences, whilst differences are emphasised in a way that creates clear ingroup and outgroup. It is not the values we have in common that are emphasised, but what distinguishes us – culture and background. The same challenge is seen in a speech from the mayor of Eigersund:

After Norway seceded from Sweden and King Haakon came to Norway in 1905, we have celebrated 17 May as we do today: the children's parade, Norwegian flags, cries of hurra, national anthems, and freedom. The war years of 1940 to 1945 forced a temporary halt on this freedom and celebration, but we indeed resumed again after that. And this is how it should be! We will be open, happy, and generous in inviting others living here to celebrate this day with us. [...]. Many of our new countrymen completely surrender when they see how we celebrate our national day. Where some of them come from, their national day is celebrated in a completely different way. (Male, H, Eigersund, 2012).

In this speech, the 17 May acts as a ritual in the Durkheim (1915) sense, a kind of social 'battery' that recharges individuals. For Durkheim, rituals were characterised by some key traits: As the members come together physically, they have a common theme and a common emotional mood, and they use 'sacred' objects – symbols confirming group affiliation. Together, this creates a 'battery effect' in that individuals who participate in the group and who respect its symbols will be filled with emotional energy and confidence. Similarly, 17 May speeches create occasions where people gather. The speeches appeal to emotions and are often given in a high-flown style. They refer to conditions held as 'sacred' in Norwegian society – values such as independence and freedom and symbols like flags and the children's parade. In this section, everyone has a space in the ritual and everyone is included in the discursive we. The historical background is the backdrop that the ritual has evolved in dialogue with, without being invoked in any exclusionary manner.

The Norwegian symbols mentioned are also open and accessible to minorities: the flag, children's parade and joy for everyone, and the desire for freedom includes all. It is only when *we* invite *others* to celebrate with *us* that the dichotomy between minority and majority reveals itself. It is quite obvious that *we* refers to the majority population. *We* should be open, happy and generous 'when *we* invite others with *us* to celebrate'. The section suggests a distinct shift in mode, especially in the last two sentences. The speech argues both that 'our new countrymen completely surrender when they see how *we* celebrate *our* national day', and 'their national day is celebrated in an entirely different way'. The phrase *where they come from* creates the impression that even someone who was born and raised in Norway still 'comes from' somewhere else. The extent to which people participate in Norwegian cultural practices or how much they emphasise constitutional values makes little difference; for the majority, 'their' history, origin and skin colour determine their relative position.

By praising the majority for being so generous and inclusive, the speaker excludes 'our new countrymen' from being equal participants in the celebration.

They receive a position in the national narrative not as full-fledged Norwegians, but as guests attending through the majority's grace. The impression one is left with is that the national day celebration, no matter how open, happy and generous *we* are, is *ours* – understood as belonging to those with a Norwegian background. This impression is further enhanced when the speaker makes a qualitative degradation of the national day celebrations in the countries from which 'our new countrymen' come.

The speech given by the mayor of Gjøvik in 2012 is an example of emphasising the contemporary, or, in this case, future society rather than the past, to develop a more inclusive 'we':

I know a traditional 17 May speech should mention the 1814 Constitution, the children's parade, and the war, give thanks to those who participated in the resistance movement, and talk about democracy. Well, now these traditional ingredients are mentioned. Instead of dwelling on the past, I wish to talk about the future. (Male, AP, Gjøvik, 2012).

This way of mentioning the past as being exactly that is also a way of being inclusive, by putting more emphasis on the future, includes the new citizens in the story of who we are.

National theme II: Norwegian values

The constitution is naturally a key point of reference in the 17 May speeches. In this section, we will look at how the constitution and the values and rights it represents are used to include ethnic minorities. In the following two quotes, the mayor of Bærum talks about the constitution and 'our shared values':

The ideas and thoughts that created the constitution have become part of us and the country we live in, and our important shared foundation of values. There are norms enshrined in our constitution that give us freedom: a freedom not to be confused with a nation of people without borders, without etiquette, without the ability to also mind their duties. Rights and obligations must therefore go hand in hand. [...].

Today, we say that the democracy's state of health is in many ways a mirror of our attitudes and our behaviour towards each other. Our democracy must seem inviting to people of all ages across different backgrounds and ethnicities. We cannot afford some of them defining themselves without our shared values. Participation in all of life's arenas – political, labour, civic through volunteering – is crucial in a full-fledged, vibrant democracy. That's the big, generous community that constitute the large Norwegian 'we'. (Female, H, Bærum, 2014).

In this speech, the constitution is more than an ideal and a guideline; it 'has become part of us and the country we live in, and our important shared foundation of values'. The word democracy in this context can be understood as a nodal point, an anchor that the tale is organised around. In the speaker's estimation, democracy represents values shared by all community members, regardless of religious and cultural background. This creates the impression

that democracy sits atop of a hierarchy of values, where religion and tradition, for example, rank lower.

In the same breath, however, the mayor proceeds to allude to contemporary lines of conflicts within this supposedly organic and stabilised national 'we'. Taking on the subtle role of an educator, the speaker reminds ethnic minority and majority groups of their active duties to maintain a healthy democracy. For the majority population, there is a message about 'our attitudes and our behaviours towards each other' – perhaps referring to the problem of discrimination and racism among those who want to protect what is traditionally Norwegian against new global influences. In relation to this, the mayor asserts that our democracy's health *depends* on vibrant participation from all inhabitants. As such, ethnic discrimination is framed as a threat to our democracy's health, albeit implicitly. The truth about the extent to which we comply with democratic ideals is revealed by how we relate to our fellow citizen.

Similarly, in parts of the speech, the mayor seems to have ethnic minority groups in mind – sending a message that enjoying Norwegian freedom goes hand in hand with loyalty to Norwegian norms, values and civic participation and that opting out is not an option. On the one hand, one may question whether it may be difficult for ethnic minorities to develop a sense of belonging as they listen to this mayor's demand for a homogeneous value system as a kind of admission ticket to Norwegianness. Still, rhetorically building a national identity based on shared democratic values may be one of the most functional approaches to establishing an inclusive national identity. Hovland and Aagedal (2001) find that the values associated with Norwegian citizenship commonly referred to in 17 May speeches are likely to resonate with minority groups who have experienced oppression, repression and independence struggles. Likewise, there is a certain wiggle room to interpret these values differently: 'Ambiguity makes the ritual open to inclusion and community experience even though it has a different resonance to the participants' (Hovland and Aagedal 2001). Meanwhile, the suggested requirement to participate in 'all of life's arenas' – an ideal which compresses a number of complex issues related to integration – is more problematic. It leaves the impression that participation in areas like employment – many of which are not as readily available to immigrants – is a prerequisite for belonging to the Norwegian community. With this exception, the Bærum speech is interesting because the plural *we* is largely open to everyone, regardless of background and culture.

Even so, the mayor of Oppegård defined Norwegian values more universally by drawing a parallel between 1814 and the UN Declaration of Human Rights:

Regardless of cultural or religious background, there are certain basic values that I'm sure we share. These are also enshrined in the UN Declaration of Human Rights: everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right includes freedom to change one's religion or beliefs, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest one's religion or beliefs in teaching, practice, worship, and observance. (Female, H, Oppegård, 2010).

Cultural and religious backgrounds are two categories often used to refer to differences between 'new' and 'old' Norwegians and thus what define ingroup and outgroup, majority and minority. In this case, however, they are instead used to suggest the right to be different, and how this right is not an obstacle for building a community, as we share certain foundational values that we agree upon independent of our religious and cultural backgrounds. Beyond the fact that she believes we agree on 'certain fundamental values', she does not refer to conflicts caused by differences. She cites a clause that deals with freedom of religion, although freedom of speech in this context has been widely discussed in the years after the so-called cartoon controversy. The fact that some religious minority members have reacted so strongly in this debate is evidence that not everyone agrees on the 'fundamental values', thereby reinforcing a point made by Gullestad (2006) when she argues that the phrase 'we who built the country' gives the impression that there is a greater consensus on values than is actually the case. Presented in this way, the values appear as already negotiated, with no room for disagreement.

The 2008 speech from Nannestad is in many ways a special case in the sample because it contains the clearest emphasis on issues related to integration, diversity and the conflicts of national identity. References are made to the changing concept of 'Norwegianness', which is becoming more heterogeneous, and a question is posed as to how we should 'meet these changes: with concern and measures to limit diversity, or openness and willingness to use vast development to facilitate greater diversity'. This mayor suggested that many of the assumed 'Norwegian' cultural expressions, like fairy tales, national costumes and rose paintings, are imported rather than strictly Norwegian. Thereby, she simultaneously states that the content of what may be considered 'Norwegian' is constantly changing and that 'without this dynamic between tradition and new ideas, any culture stagnates and becomes stale'. It is perhaps no surprise that the mayor who held this speech belongs to the left side of party politics. Clearly, the speech aims to suggest that Norway has historically valued heterogeneity. The mayor devotes attention to valuing diversity, which can be traced all the way back to Wergeland, as something we must protect to be a 'rich community':

He would have gone straight into the debate, here and now, about democracy, freedom of speech, and religious tolerance, and rejoiced in the diversity of new citizens who have fought themselves to get a residence permit and a safe life here in Norway. [...].

Here there is room for everyone, regardless of culture, religion, political views, or sexual orientation. But the freedom and diversity we see around us are not created by themselves. We must not take these benefits for granted, but defend them and stand against any attempt to eliminate or reduce them. A diverse society is a rich community! (Female, AP, Nannestad, 2008).

The mayor links the traditional 'fighting for freedom' metaphor to population diversity. Freedom creates space for everyone, regardless of differences. What is interesting is how the mayor determines that freedom is not the only thing

worth safeguarding; we also must ‘resist any attempt to remove or reduce’ the value of diversity. The 17 May speeches often focus on Norwegian freedom as something that historically needed protection from external enemies, such as the Germans. In this speech, there is an idea that the fight for diversity is also a struggle with something in us – to see what we have in common rather than what separates us.

National theme III: Norwegian self-understanding

The 17 May speeches traditionally emphasise characteristics and practices that are central to Norwegians’ understanding of themselves as Norwegian. Rather than referencing specific historical and economic value foundations for national identity, this theme examines how Norwegianness is acted out and experienced. In particular, it is a self-understanding that emphasises the country’s fortunate circumstances. In the speech from Gjøvik in 2009, like many others, the notion of ‘luck’ is apparent:

We are in the process of establishing a new reception centre for unaccompanied minor asylum-seekers in Øverby, where 30–40 children under 15 years should be given care and assistance. On ‘Children’s Day’ we should grant them a thought. They have escaped from countries without peace and democratic rights, from countries that have not been so lucky as to have their 1814 [establishment of their own constitution] or the development of a welfare society like ours. Let us in Gjøvik show that warm-heartedness and tolerance involves more than just one’s own family, one’s own neighbours, and those who are the same as oneself. (Male, AP, Gjøvik, 2009).

The mayor here contrasts the difficult situation asylum seekers have escaped from with Norway’s peaceful democracy. In doing so, the mayor refers to a phenomenon that is essential to a modern Norwegian self-understanding, namely, luck (Witoszek 2011: 9). It is grounded in a generalised collective self-understanding that says that we are, for geographical and historical reasons, lucky to live in Norway. Being lucky also connotes the arbitrariness of human life and circumstances. The mayor is perhaps arguing that luck demands a commitment from the lucky ones: Because we are so fortunate to be born in a prosperous society, it is incumbent upon us to include those who have been less fortunate.

This speech focuses on asylum seekers, who are initially mentioned in a bureaucratic language. There is a distance in this categorisation that forms a stark contrast to ‘children under 15 years’ in the same sentence. To decrease the distance between ‘self’ and ‘other’, the mayor uses the universal category ‘children’, which we can all identify with regardless of colour or creed. It is a category associated with a certain innocence and that speaks to our universal human emotions. The child is someone who needs and deserves care – which again is a universal belief. At the same time, there is something in the paragraph’s last sentence that indicates that becoming and being Norwegian

requires more than just paperwork. The 'others' are those who are not the same as us. Such an interpretation allows for the possibility that the notion of 'others' also includes a broader category of immigrants, even including Norwegian born to immigrant parents.

The notion of luck and the topic of asylum seekers were merged in several national day speeches in our sample, albeit framed somewhat differently. In the following two quotes from the mayor or Ringsaker, she essentially suggests that for local residents, treating asylum seekers with kindness is a pre-requisite to being fully accepted into the national 'we':

Many people around the world live in fear of war, violence, hunger, and lack of basic necessities. We see this every day on the TV screen. And these images show us a completely different world than the one we are used to. We who live here have drawn the winning ticket! [...] On a day like this, many prefer to focus on the positive, but I must say that I worry about the signals I get from our community. There's a lot of negative and at times racist statements about the asylum centre and those who live there. You who live here must do something about this. We must also give these people an opportunity for a decent life. Norwegian People's Aid, the municipality, and the police are doing what we can to ensure that things run smoothly and that they are getting a good deal while they're here. But you also need to assist. Be good neighbours, fellows, and friends. (Female, AP, Ringsaker, 2009).

Similar to Gjøvik's mayor, this mayor contrasts the horrors that are an everyday reality for many people to the fortunes of Norwegian life. The reality that the speaker introduces as a basis of comparison is underlined by the term 'TV screen'; the atrocities are fortunately so far away that most of us are only familiar with them in mediated form. Against this backdrop, the term 'different world' creates an almost inverted version of Norwegian daily life, a world where security and abundance is replaced by fear and distress. This leads to the metaphor that the section is structured around: The phrase *winning ticket* suggests that Norway is the best country to live in. Rather than retelling the story of how 'we' created this nation, the speaker wants to remind the audience that 'we' have simply been lucky. After first establishing our luck and thus our implicit duty to help others, she proceeds to talk about asylum seekers in the local community who indeed need help.

This municipality brought up the topic of asylum seekers in two separate national day speeches. Pointing out and devaluing racist attitudes among parts of the local population on 17 May sends a particularly powerful message because this day celebrates national identity. Topics brought to the public's attention on this day become elevated as central to the negotiations of who *we* are. In this case, the 'we' is implicitly split in two groups: In addition to the 'us' and 'them' of Norwegians and asylum seekers, there is the *us* with the right attitudes versus *those* with the wrong attitudes within the majority population. Within the arena of negotiation presented, the different groupings assume different roles than they normally would. The asylum seekers are not under scrutiny but become reinvented as a sort of mirror that enables self-reflection and identity construction within the majority population.

The speech that was held in the same municipality 4 years later echoes the 2009 speech. Here, Norway's fortunate circumstances are also the implicit background, whilst another factor is also emphasised: the country's need for new citizens.

Integration is one of the hottest topics today. Yes, integration is not easy and there is also no uniform answer on how to conduct good integration. [...] We have to assume our responsibility by making room for those who are displaced and need our protection, and we also need more people, more hearts and hands to maintain the service level we want. [...] Personally, I must say that I do not feel threatened by people from other countries, strictly speaking. At least in the job I have now, I have felt more threatened by Norwegians from Moelv, Brumunddal, and Furnes. [...] We must all be allowed to discuss integration without being labelled as one or the other, either as a racist or as gullible and naïve. This debate is so important to our future that we should not let those with extreme views in either direction control the debate. (Female, Ap, Ringsaker, 2013).

Although only a few of the speeches address specific policy issues directly, several thematise diversity and integration in a way that can hardly be described as anything other than attempts to change certain racist attitudes. In this speech, two levels collide and create a certain dissonance. Both idealistic and practical arguments are used at the same time. 'We must assume our responsibility' and 'we also need more people'. It may seem as if the speaker has a desire to please several groups with conflicting interests. It is not an ethnically and culturally complex people the mayor has in mind, but rather majority Norwegians who are encouraged to have certain attitudes towards minority groups. There is disagreement about what constitutes 'correct' attitudes towards such groups, and for this reason, she wants to appear soft and hard at the same time; for some, the important point is our responsibility to provide. For others, it is what we need and can get, and the mayor seems to almost remind people that generosity can also generate returns. The business-like concept of 'service level' contributes to this by creating a feeling that the country is a kind of business where we all have an interest in working as effectively as possible.

The quote above not only elicits an obvious we/they dichotomy between 'old Norwegians' and 'new Norwegians' but also shows that the speech is a contribution to an ongoing heated debate about 'the new, more diverse Norway'. By asserting that she feels more threatened by *their own* than *the other*, Ringsaker's mayor places herself on one side of the debate.

Conclusion

In this article, we have shown how ethnic minorities are made a subject in Norwegian national day speeches. The mayors' speeches combine strong genre expectations of a 17 May speech with the inclusive role of a municipal mayor. By including ethnic minorities in national day rhetoric, the speakers negotiate

who belongs in the Norwegian community in a less directly political way than in everyday life. During other times of year, immigration, integration and diversity are heated topics in Norwegian political debate. Nevertheless, the national day speeches do not problematise these themes. It is perhaps no surprise that contested issues like radical Islam, forced marriage, female circumcision and religious headwear do not show up in celebration speeches, but it is striking how unproblematic diversity is seen from a mayoral rostrum on 17 May. In most speeches, national difference and us/them dichotomies are assumed but never explicitly called into question. This is a way of (re)producing consensus rather than opening up space for true debate (Ezzati and Erdal 2017). However, they also reproduce diversity by opening up the viewpoint that, even though there are religious differences (e.g. Christians vs. Muslims), we must stick together.

Inclusion of minority Norwegians is a symbolic act. Speeches that include ethnic minorities are examples of how past meets present, how the old community meets the new and how the framework for what it means to be Norwegian is expanded via language to gradually becoming more inclusive in using terms like 'Norway' and 'Norwegian'. Just as recent historical events have become part of the speeches' thematic inventory over the years, the population structure now expands the rite's thematic repertoire. Mayors who address this topic are kept in a type of rhetorical negotiation with respect to whom the Norwegian community consists of today.

A 17 May speech is a ritual in which the Norwegian community is represented through the use of symbols, and by including groups that are new to this community, the speeches serve as venues for negotiating national identity because important parameters for Norwegian identity are not only defined but also challenged from the pulpit. The speeches may thus be regarded as part of an ongoing process in Norwegian society, where the criteria for belonging to Norway and Norwegian culture are discussed jointly.

17 May speeches have traditionally looked towards the past. They resemble what Smith (1998) calls a national memory community, where the nation emphasises certain historical events. The constitution, liberation from Sweden, German occupation or reconstruction after the war does not imply any direct connection with matters relating to integration and diversity. References to cultural diversity often lead to discussions or conflicts, and this has not historically been emphasised on 17 May. By including diversity and integration as themes on 17 May, the speeches in our sample represent the national community as more complex.

The 17 May representation of Norwegian history is not a closed chapter, but rather a story to be constantly rewritten. Elgenius (2011) argues that one of the reasons why the Norwegian national day celebrations have broad support by the people is the rite's ability to absorb changes in society. She points out that both the Second World War and German occupation gave the celebration a new direction, and she believes that Pakistanis in costume today do not dilute what 17 May stands for, but instead represent vigorous renewal.

Although the mayors obviously try to appear inclusive, no matter their intentions and efforts, many end up confirming us/them distinctions (cf. Billig 1995: 171–2). Furthermore, the degree to which the mayors open up for a more inclusive language, or reproduce exclusion, seems to some degree to be related to differences in their political affiliations. However, the sample is not representative enough to generalise. Further research will be needed to support our preliminary conclusion that, although the genre is celebratory, the national day speeches also echo different political attitudes towards diversity and integration.

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