

Representing Europe in a Children's Book

Values between Commonalities and Demarcation

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1. Why children's media?

What do we want to pass on to the next generation and how do we hand ideas down? Where do the images come from that arise in our heads when we think of something? One of the places where worldviews are discussed and passed down in cultural memory is children's media. Studying children's media inevitably leads us to questions of representations of the world, issues that are considered important, and associated ideals, values and norms. Children's media formulate ideas about society, who we are, want and should be. Questions of identity are central in children's literature, audio dramas and films, as these media deal with current issues in society, with politics, the environment, and questions of living together. Thus, when considering European values and identities, children's media provide an important resource.

This article investigates imaginations of Europe in media that are intentionally produced for children. My choice of sources is motivated by three insights: first, children's media communicate ideas of the world in which we live. Through texts and images, they mirror current discourses on the one hand, and on the other, they contribute to the construction of comprehensive worldviews. Accordingly, children's media operate as models of and for reality. Second, children's media participate in socialisation processes. They convey, reflect and transform collective knowledge and images of society and thus contribute to the identity processes through which individuals situate themselves in a group and develop a sense of belonging. Identity thus

appears to be a useful basic concept for studying constructions of imagined groups and their boundaries. And third, children's media condense content and reduce complexity. Due to their brevity and the goal to be understood by very young children, they reduce content to what is considered essential and present it in a way that is easy to grasp.

In this contribution I focus on the German language children's book *Europe in 80 Sounds. A Multicultural Journey through Europe with Songs, Dances, Plays and Customs* and the companion audio book *Europe in 80 Sounds. Nursery Rhymes and Dances from all over Europe – Sung in German and Original Languages*,¹ both published in 2002. In my analysis of textual and visual representations, I focus on the following questions: how do the sources imagine Europe? Which identities do they construct, and what are important identity markers? Do the sources emphasise similarities or differences? What role does religion play in their representations of Europe and Europeans? And, are normative ideas of coexistence in Europe conveyed? The article explores ideas of Europe that are handed down to the youngest members of society in order to reconstruct representations of people, nations, and an imagined European community. I will argue that Europe is understood as a very complex concept that is characterised by multiple cultural, geographical and political ruptures, which, at the same time, the books seek to overcome in the representation of Europe as united in a common canon of values.

In the next section, I will present my sources, provide some basic information about the structure of the book and CD, and introduce the authors and publishing house. Concepts of collective identity and processes of othering provide the theoretical framework for my analysis, for which I focus on the first edition of the book (with only occasional references to the CD). In the following sections, I will discuss these with regard to their imaginations of Europe, questions of identity, the role of religion, and the normative and epistemological premises of processes of othering. In my conclusion, I will correlate the book's representations with general discourses of Europe distributed in the media in order to identify widespread imaginations of Europe as a common ground.

1 German original titles: *Europa in 80 Tönen. Eine multikulturelle Europareise mit Liedern, Tänzen, Spielen und Bräuchen*; *Europa in 80 Tönen. Kinderlieder und Tänze aus ganz Europa – in Deutsch und Originalsprachen gesungen*. All translations from the German are by the author.

2. *Europe in 80 Sounds*

The children's book and CD *Europe in 80 Sounds* is intended for children between eight and ten years and was first published in 2002, with a second edition published in 2006. The book (144 pages) and CD (37 tracks) are structured as a musical tour through Europe and aim at conveying the diversity of European music culture. Thus, music is considered as a medium of intercultural communication.² The authors argue that music functions as a »universal language that becomes important for building the cultural Europe.«³ Given that European borders are disappearing, and today's young people grow up quite naturally in a multicultural society, getting to know »the neighbours« should be a matter of course, the authors state: »If we know a lot about one another, we can understand each other better!«⁴

The book (and CD) contains songs, poems and legends considered typical of the cultures of a range of European countries. The book's structure conveys the idea of a homogeneous national (or ethnic) culture, including chapters covering 35 countries and the »travelling people« Romanies and Sinti. However, not every country is presented in its own chapter; some states are grouped together, such as Serbia, Slovenia and Croatia representing together the culture of Southern Slavs, and the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic are combined into the region of Bohemia and Moravia.⁵ The book's introduction briefly outlines the history of Europe.

The presentation of songs, dances and customs is geared towards nation-states which are represented as culturally homogeneous. Most countries are introduced with information about history, geographic location, places of interest, music and literary traditions, and cultural idiosyncrasies, such as typical dress or character traits, for instance being fiery in Spain or equanimous in Luxembourg. The chapters also introduce musical instruments and information about languages. They include the numbers from one to ten in one of the national languages, songs with notations, finger and music

2 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 5.

3 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 5: »Als verbindendes Element, das sich einer universellen Sprache bedient, spielt Musik eine wichtige Rolle für den Aufbau des kulturellen Europas.«

4 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 5: »Wenn wir viel übereinander wissen, können wir einander besser verstehen!«

5 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 77, 87.

plays, or dance steps. However, the specific content differs from chapter to chapter, and the countries are not always treated with the same amount of detail. For example, the chapter on France is four times as long as the chapter covering both Bulgaria and Romania. In addition to text and musical notations, all chapters also contain black-and-white illustrations depicting children, sights and musical instruments, well-known personalities and fictional characters, such as Hans Christian Andersen or Pippi Longstocking.

The audio version consists of 37 tracks with musical settings of the songs presented in the book and short explanations. The texts are spoken by a man – the author Hartmut Höfele – and various children. They also sing the songs together, which are accompanied by musical instruments. The *Anthem of Europe*, which is based on the final movement of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, can be heard in the background of the first and last track.

The book and CD appear as a mixture between a pedagogical medium with explanatory notes concerning the effects of making music together or learning from each other, and a children's book with child-like illustrations and simple songs. In the style of a non-fiction book readers learn about people, countries, music, dances, and customs.

The book and CD were published by Ökotopia, a publisher of pedagogical media, located in Muenster (Germany). The authors are Susanne Steffe and Hartmut E. Höfele. The latter grew up in Karlsruhe in south-western Germany, Susanne Steffe was raised in Brussels and Luxembourg. Höfele and Steffe live in Baden-Württemberg, both of them work as authors. Additionally, Höfele is an audio drama producer, singer and songwriter. Kerstin Heinlein contributed the cover picture and the 73 black-and-white illustrations of the book. Steffe, Höfele and Heinlein also produced similar books, such as *Around the World in 80 Sounds*, *Around the World with 80 Children* or *Children's Dances from all over the World*.⁶ Some passages of *Europe in 80 Sounds* reveal the authors' role as narrator: they use the pronoun »we« and talk about their travels to several European countries. We may assume that the author and narrator are identical, since, for example, in the chapter

6 German original titles: *In 80 Tönen um die Welt. Eine musikalisch-multikulturelle Erlebnisreise für Kinder mit Liedern, Tänzern, Spielen, Basteleien und Geschichten; Mit 80 Kindern um die Welt. So leben Kinder anderswo: Bunte Geschichten, Lieder und Spielaktionen; Kindertänze aus aller Welt. Lebendige Tänze, Kreis-, Bewegungs- und Singspiele rund um den Globus.*

on Italy they reference their own experience when they recommend using the method of solmisation (using syllables to denote the tones of the musical scale) as a listening and singing exercise for children's choirs.⁷

3. Representations of Europe

Opening the journey with a historical overview, *Europe in 80 Sounds* imagines Europe in the introduction as a geographical and historical entity with a long tradition of settlement, starting 1.5 million years ago, when first settlers migrated from Africa to southern Europe.⁸ Over the course of time, Celts, Huns, Avars, Vikings and other peoples populated the area known as Europe today. The usage of verbs is striking: the introduction describes the history of Europe through words like »immigrate«, »enter«, »conquer«, or »invade«, for example: »The fact is that every intruder, immigrant or displaced person, wherever they came from, brought their culture with them.«⁹ Accordingly, the search for an origin results in the assumption that there must have been someone who lived there *rightly* and was threatened by invading peoples. Thus the book offers an ambivalent perspective on Europe's history: on the one hand, it shows that Europe is an area that developed historically and did not always exist in the way we know it today; on the other hand, the cultural diversity brought about through the migration of different peoples to Europe is emphasised.

It is noticeable that countries such as Albania, Belarus, Georgia or Moldova are missing, whereas the authors dedicate a chapter to Russia and Turkey. The selection is therefore not based on a geographical understanding of Europe or the political structure of the European Union. Nevertheless, the EU seems to play a formative role in the image of Europe conveyed in the book, since the Benelux states are presented as founding members of the European Economic Community, and the *Anthem of Europe* on the first and last tracks on the CD also refers to Europe as a political entity.¹⁰

7 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 70.

8 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 6.

9 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 6: »Tatsache ist, dass jeder Eindringling, Einwanderer oder Vertriebene, wo immer er auch her kam, seine Kultur mit im Gepäck hatte.«

10 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 31.

Besides the geographical and political dimension as well as the different peoples that settled in European areas, the book makes a cultural point about Europe: Greece is represented as the cradle of European culture.¹¹ What European culture precisely means or consists of, is left unclear. The introduction simply references the narrative of Europa and Zeus, which is part of Greek mythology and traces back to the poets Moschus and Ovid.¹² The story is told to explain the name of Europe and gives the impression that Europe is not just a space settled by different peoples with their diverse cultural traditions, but that there is some cultural coherence. »Culture« primarily appears to refer to language, food, music, clothing, and religion.¹³ Comparing different national cultures according to these categories, the book emphasises the similarities among peoples. For example, the book notes that there are pancakes in England, France, Austria and Germany, they are just named differently in each country.¹⁴

In an attempt to think culture and nation-state together, borders are established, only to be torn down at the same time. Both through the structure of the chapters and the designation of inhabitants as Spanish, German or Irish, each with their specific language and cultural peculiarities, culture and nation-state are associated with each other. But at the same time the book breaks up this construction of culturally homogeneous nation-states, emphasising, for example, that there are different dialects in some nations, that in Belgium, Flemings speak Dutch and Walloons French.¹⁵ In some respects, then, national unity is further differentiated and broken down into different »ethnic groups«. ¹⁶ Language thus becomes the intersection between culture, ethnic groups and nation. In addition, the idea of culturally distinct nation-states is deconstructed through the book's emphasis that culture transcends national states:

They call themselves French, Germans, Italians, Russians, Finns, Sami, Danes, British, Irish, Bulgarians, [...] Hungarians etc. But between the

11 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 71.

12 Hard 2020, 11, 288.

13 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 9.

14 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 9.

15 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 31.

16 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 10.

inhabitants of the individual states there are not only differences, but also many, many similarities, because culture and music have by no means been delimited by the constantly changing national borders.¹⁷

The confluence of peoples of various origins with their respective cultural traditions is seen as the cause of cultural diversity in Europe, which is something from which Europeans benefit today without having to give up their distinctiveness.¹⁸ Similarities and differences refer to language, nation, food, belief, and styles of music that are considered as identity markers. Interestingly, these markers function differently: whereas languages, nations and religions create difference, the authors suggest that music, food, and customs are similar in many parts of Europe.¹⁹

In addition to inconsistent concepts concerning geography, culture and politics developed in the book's imagination of Europe, music operates ambiguously, as an expression of cultural particularity on the one hand, and as a connecting element between different cultures on the other hand, as mentioned above.²⁰ The chapter on Poland is particularly interesting in this regard. It argues that Polish young people are orienting themselves towards the »west« regarding their musical choices. Steffe and Höfele explain the challenge this poses: »It is difficult to reach the real Polish [music] culture.«²¹ This shows the book's understanding of culture as relatively monolithic, a closed container, with the »real« or authentic culture of a group or nation derived from its folk traditions. With cultural theorist Raymond Williams it can be argued that this understanding of culture represents the long impact of the romantic self-understanding of nations and their cultures of the 19th cen-

17 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 9: »Sie nennen sich Franzosen, Deutsche, Italiener, Russen, Finnen, Sami, Dänen, Briten, Iren, Bulgaren [...] Ungarn usw. Zwischen den BewohnerInnen der einzelnen Staaten gibt es aber nicht nur Unterschiede, sondern auch viele viele Gemeinsamkeiten, denn Kultur und Musik haben sich keineswegs an den sich ständig verändernden Staatsgrenzen orientiert.«

18 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 6: »Aber gerade diese Mischung von Menschen und die sich gegenseitig befruchtenden Kulturen haben Europa schließlich die ungeheure Vielfalt auf relativ engem Raum beschert, von der heute alle Europäer gemeinsam profitieren können, ohne deshalb ihre ganz spezifischen Eigenarten aufgeben zu müssen.«

19 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 9.

20 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 5.

21 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 108: »Es ist schwer, an die eigentliche polnische Kultur heranzukommen.«

ture.²² Given this focus on folk traditions, pop music and international influences with their global connections are elided in the book except for the chapter on England as the European centre of contemporary pop music.²³ Children's music, instead, appears to be a part of folk music.²⁴ This raises more fundamental questions about which cultures and values are considered important for children's socialisation, to which the book contributes: a country's past, perhaps experienced primarily through museums or books such as the one discussed here, or a country's present, in which the past is certainly relevant but not at the exclusion of contemporary developments?

In sum, the book constructs an ambiguous imagination of Europe. Europe is represented as a historical, cultural, political, and geographical concept at the same time, each with its own inconsistencies. The outline of Europe as a geographical entity remains vague. While the Mediterranean is understood as a *natural* border in the south, Iceland in the north-west belongs to Europe as a matter of course. In the East, Turkey and Russia mark the extreme points, while countries like Albania or Belarus are not mentioned as part of Europe. The book refers to the economic and political system of the European Union, but Norway, Switzerland and several Eastern countries, which are not members of the EU, also belong to the Europe imagined in the book. Additional ambivalences emerge from the separation into nation-states and the claim to be able to grasp them as homogeneous cultural units, while at the same time outlining similarities cutting across national borders.

Both the similarities and differences across borders, between people, cultures and countries, are repeatedly emphasised. This plays a significant role for the formation of identities. Thus, in the next section I will take a closer look at these boundaries, similarities and differences, and ascertain their role in imaginations of Europe and European identity.

4. Identity

How we understand ourselves and perceive others, how groups are shaped, and differences characterised – these are questions of identity. In cultural stud-

22 Williams 1985, 63–64.

23 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 18.

24 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 10.

ies, identity is understood as a cultural phenomenon, and hence it possesses symbolic and social implications.²⁵ Many different components influence a person's identity processes. These include, for example, ancestry, race, ethnicity, gender, language, or religion. These dimensions of identity are interwoven with one another and interdependent.²⁶ Stuart Hall conceptualises identities as »never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. [...] [I]dentities are constructed through, not outside, difference.«²⁷ The concept of identity raises fundamental questions about how individuals and groups fit, are co-opted into or excluded from communities and the social world.²⁸ Media representations contribute to identities and shape images of people and groups. Since the analysed book *Europe in 80 Sounds* represents people, cultures and a broad idea of Europe, identity can be a useful concept to reconstruct imagined groups, their peculiarities and significance for the imagination of Europe: Which communities are represented, who is considered as belonging to them, and who is excluded in *Europe in 80 Sounds*? How are differences constructed, and through them, a sense of »us« and »them«?

The perspective from which the book is written is an important aspect to consider. At first glance it appears to be the neutral perspective of an outsider's view since all countries are described in a similar way. Nevertheless, it becomes manifest that the content reflects a *German position*, both in terms of who tells the stories about other people, and to whom these stories are addressed: German authors, and a German readership. Some chapters relate to Germany directly, for example, the chapter on Turkey argues that many Turkish children sing German songs in their mother tongue, since many guest workers came to Germany from Turkey.

Many stories about European countries and cultures in the book are fed by clichés; what appears unknown to the authors and thus presumably also to the child, the implied reader, is represented by stereotypes. Stereotypes are »associations and beliefs about the characteristics and attributes of a group and its members that shape how people think about and respond to

25 Reisenleitner 2001, 8.

26 Crenshaw 1991, 1244.

27 Hall 2009 (1996), 4.

28 Reisenleitner 2001, 8.

the group«. ²⁹ The meanings that people ascribe to objects, other people or relationships arise from the interactions between perception, visibility and mental images. In order to be able to create meaning at all, it is necessary to distinguish impressions from each other. The brain tries to reduce the variety of stimuli which our environment produces, and stereotypes are one tool of creating order among our multiple experiences. ³⁰ However, stereotyping is more than the ordering and classifying of impressions. Stereotypes are not just descriptive observations but reduce diversity and are connected to normative ideas about people and groups. They

represent a set of qualities perceived to reflect the essence of a group. Stereotypes systematically affect how people perceive, process information about, and respond to, group members. They are transmitted through socialization, the media, and language and discourse. ³¹

Literary scholar Suchismita Banerjee notes that in children's literature, »[t]he simultaneous perpetuation and dismantling of cultural stereotypes has particular shaping effects on the construction of identity in children of multicultural societies.« ³² In *Europe in 80 Sounds*, stereotypes are used to clearly distinguish groups from one another and to assign a specific, unmistakable characteristics to each. As mentioned, Spanish people are called »fiery Spaniards«, the chapter on Luxembourg introduces the »equanimous Luxembourger«, »and the Tyroleans are known to be funny.« ³³

The chapter on Germany shows very clearly how self-perceptions and perceptions of others differ. While at least one song was selected for most of the countries, the chapters on Germany and Luxembourg, where the authors come from and Steffe was raised, are surprisingly short. No piece of music was selected for Germany, but instead the legend *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*. According to the authors, this is because German culture cannot be reduced to one or two representative pieces: »There are Swabian, Bavarian, Frisian [...]

29 Dovidio/Hewstone/Glick/Esses 2010, 8.

30 Tajfel 1969, 81–82.

31 Dovidio/Hewstone/Glick/Esses 2010, 8.

32 Banerjee 2018, 192.

33 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 55, 44, 133: »feurige SpanierInnen«, »die gelassenen Luxembourger«, »und die Tiroler sind ja bekanntlich lustig.«

children's songs, plays and dances in abundance, which can be selected for a ›Journey through Europe‹ according to the occasion.«³⁴ Thus, what is perceived as one's own, German culture, is understood as diverse, with different regions and dialects and their respective traditions and particularities, whereas people, countries and cultures that are perceived as foreign, are reduced to unidimensional stereotypes. The internal diversity recognised in one's own group but not acknowledged in others can also be observed in discourses on culture and religion and shows that speaking and writing about ›others‹ is never neutral but shaped by mental concepts and stereotypes.

Despite stereotypical representations, all countries are described positively and appreciatively. Nevertheless, some inappropriate statements also appear, especially in the section on Romanies and Sinti, which are named with the term ›Zigeuner‹ (gypsies) not used by the communities for themselves. The authors are aware that this term is perceived as an insult by Romanies and Sinti themselves. However, they use the term arguing that etymologically, it derives from the Byzantine *Atiganoi*, which means ›untouchable‹, or Persian *Ciganch*, meaning ›musician‹ or ›dancer‹.³⁵ The authors' awareness that this term is no longer used and their attempt to explain its origins makes it clear that identities are always a political issue, since they not only determine how we perceive ourselves and others, but in the worst case also mean different rights, duties and living conditions.

Identities are not only constructed through verbal descriptions and the differences of musical styles that can be heard on the CD, but also in the illustrations of the book. The illustrations show numerous figures, partially wearing what is – again, stereotypically – perceived as traditional dress, making clothing thus a crucial identity marker.

The chapter about Turkey includes an illustration of two men sitting cross-legged on pillows on the floor (fig. 1). Whereas one figure holds a glass of tea in his hand, the other man raises his finger that is decorated with three opulent rings. Both men have a moustache. The figure on the right wears a vest with a loose shirt and a hat that is known as a *fez*, the man on the left is dressed in an embroidered blouse and copped shoes similar to *Khussa*,

34 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 142: ›Es gibt schwäbische, bayrische, friesische [...] Kinderlieder, Spiele und Tänze in Hülle und Fülle, die für eine ›Reise durch Europa‹ dem Anlass entsprechend selbst ausgewählt werden können.‹

35 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 94.



Fig. 1: Visual representation of Turkish men. Steffe/Höfele 2006, 74.

tracing back to Pakistani and Indian styles of footwear. He also wears a turban, whose shape, however, does not reflect any Turkish customs but rather is wrapped in the way men wear it in India. Conflating styles of clothes from diverse cultural contexts, this figure, thus, associates the Turkish population with a generalised idea of the *oriental man*.³⁶ By contrast, the dress of the man on the right corresponds to the time of the Ottoman Empire. The *fez* was the national headgear and men »from various ethnic and religious backgrounds were identified as Ottomans« by their *fez*.³⁷ Since Mustafa Kemal Atatürk outlawed the *fez* as a symbol of Ottoman decadence in 1925, it disappeared from the public sphere and has since become a symbol of *traditional Turkey* sold to tourists as a souvenir.³⁸ Taking up this traditional notion of Turkish people, the illustration consolidates the stereotypical representation of Turkish men. Different ideas of culture are mixed up: cul-

36 The term Orientalism deals with the perception of oneself and others regarding to a concept of Orient. Texts, images, and stories shaped an idea of the Orient, which is reflected in the representation of the Turkish men in fig. 1; see Said 1978.

37 Aktürk 2017, 160.

38 Deringil 1993, 9.

ture is historicised and understood as a way of expressing a romantic idea of the past. The Turkish present with its cultural diversity plays no role in the book; Turkey is fixed into the past, which is also expressed in the pictures. The oriental dimension is explicitly emphasised by clothing that combines India and Turkey in the same illustration. The two men appear foreign, and with a teapot and oil lamp as accessories, they seem to have come out of the fairy tales of *Thousand and One Nights*. The illustration thus refers to, and reinforces, a widespread image of the Orient that can be found again and again in children's media.

Just as the *fez* has become a souvenir, the wooden shoes in the chapter about the Netherlands are no longer worn today but have become a visual stereotype (fig. 2). This image is particularly interesting because it also illustrates the processes through which stereotypes emerge and are circulated through media. The illustrated girl represents not just any Dutch girl but is modelled on *Frau Antje*, an advertising character invented in the 1960s by the Dutch dairy association Nederlandse Zuivel Organisatie to promote dairy products in Germany. Explaining how to prepare dishes with cheese, *Frau Antje* became famous in German commercials. She wears a fantasy costume, consisting of a striped blouse with a neckerchief, an apron, wooden shoes and a white hat (fig. 3).³⁹ The character was developed for a German audience and heavily criticised by the Dutch as a stereotypical and outmoded image of the Netherlands,⁴⁰ not corresponding to the self-perception of Dutch people but geared towards the German audience of the ads. The figure of *Frau Antje* dates from the 1960s, and her presence in a German children's book published more than 40 years later, is probably due to the fact that the authors of *Europe in 80 sounds* grew up with this image. Through the transmission through various media, such as advertising, packaging of groceries and children's books, *Frau Antje* became and continues to be a symbol of the Dutch woman in the collective memory of many Germans. The fact that she was chosen to represent the Dutch is also further evidence for the German perspective the book implicitly takes, as discussed above.

³⁹ Elpers 2009, 7.

⁴⁰ Elpers 2009, 51.



Fig. 2: Figures dressed in traditional Dutch clothing. The girl's appearance is based on Frau Antje. Steffe/Höfele 2006, 43.



Fig. 3: Wheel of cheese labelled with advertising character Frau Antje. Nederlandse Zuivelstichting.⁴¹

41 Source: <https://www.frauantje.de/kaesewelt.html> (accessed August 16, 2021).

In texts, music and visuals, the book and CD draw on and reinforce stereotypical representations of the population of several countries. People and their identities appear as fixed, and their characteristics are either *real* or *inauthentic*, as shown in the example of Polish folk traditions and contemporary music.

Most of the visual, audible, and textual elements refer to reductive popular stereotypes in order to designate different groups and their peculiarities. Thus, the book and its audio version contribute to imaginations of fixed cultures in which fixed identities are grounded. So far, I have mainly focused on cultural and national groups of Europe and their visual and textual representation. In the next section I will discuss the role of religion in the conception of Europe.

5. Religion

As mentioned earlier, the book comprehends music, plays, and dances as mediators of knowledge about »culture«, understood in terms of eating habits, customs, languages – and also religions. A look at religion is interesting because on the one hand, it is a supranational phenomenon, and on the other hand, it highlights different regional characteristics. Since religions offer different worldviews and myths of origin, they can provide interesting perspectives on imaginations of Europe.

In general, representations of religion in *Europe in 80 Sounds* relate to mythological tales and popular or folk beliefs. The myth of Zeus and Europa is traced back to ancient Greece and does not appear as a religious narrative, but in the sense of a common European cultural heritage. The chapter on Hungary asserts that Hungarian music has its origins in shamanic rituals.⁴² The chapter on Ireland describes popular beliefs, such as fairies, elves, and dwarfs, and explains that the Celts worshipped personified natural powers.⁴³ It is noticeable that contemporary religious life does not play a role in the book. Rather, the concept of religion melts into a general idea of culture and customs. Since culture is understood throughout the book primarily as tradition, it can be assumed that religion as part of culture also belongs

42 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 82.

43 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 24.

to the past. The book does not make an explicit argument about secularisation, but it is clear that religion does not play a significant role in contemporary European life.

In their study of traditional stories and metanarratives in children's literature, John Stephens and Robyn McCallum identify important cultural functions of folk tales which also emerge in the treatment of popular religion in *Europe in 80 Sounds*:

[R]etold stories have important cultural functions. Under the guise of offering children access to strange and exciting worlds removed from everyday experiences, they serve to initiate children into aspects of a social heritage, transmitting many of a culture's central values and assumptions and a body of shared allusions and experiences. The existential concerns of a society find concrete images and symbolic forms in traditional stories of many kinds, offering a cultural inheritance subject to social conditioning and modification through the interaction of various retellings.⁴⁴

The chapter on Poland and Jewish traditions tries to fulfil exactly this function of transmitting central European values by narrating the folk tale *Moishe with the Fiddle* introducing the Yiddish song *Amol is gewen*.⁴⁵ The section alludes to the Shoah and past Jewish contributions to artistic, intellectual, and economic life.⁴⁶ The illustration of the corresponding story *Moishe with the Fiddle* pictures two figures with a violin and a flute in a stereotypical manner; their *kippot* suggests that both are Jews (fig. 4).

In this chapter, the authors return to their initial argument about music as promoting intercultural communication and are explicit about their intention to convey particular values through the included song: »Singing Yiddish folk and children's songs stands for tolerance and understanding. A sign of peace and the willingness to stand up against hatred and racism.«⁴⁷

44 Stephens/McCallum 1998, 3.

45 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 110–111.

46 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 108.

47 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 112: »Das Singen von jiddischen Volks- und Kinderliedern steht für Toleranz und Verständigung. Ein Zeichen für Frieden und die Bereitschaft gegen Hass und Rassismus einzutreten.«



Fig. 4: Visual representation of Jewish musicians. Steffe/Höfele 2006, 111.

In summary, religion appears in the book in two different dimensions. On the one hand, religion is understood as popular beliefs that belong to the past and are specific to a particular people. On the other hand, religious affiliation and resulting conflicts serve – again in an orientation towards the past – as an occasion to convey values that promote tolerance, peace and resistance to racism, which may be understood to be values that characterise European societies. With their emphasis on learning from each other in order to respect one another and to strive towards comprehension in order to live together equitably and peacefully, the authors assume that knowledge about »the others« results in greater understanding, tolerance and peace.⁴⁸ This approach is common to many children's books on culture and religion and in the next section, I will discuss in more detail the relationships between epistemology, values and ethics implied in it.

48 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 5.

6. Getting to know others: Values and their epistemological premises

What does it mean to impart knowledge about people and cultures? What are the effects of such knowledge? As will become clear, knowledge is not a value-free category, but is shaped by internal and external perspectives and preceding mental concepts. But what does this mean for the representation of people and for the book's imagination of Europe?

The analysis of *Europe in 80 Sounds* shows that diversity in Europe is represented as something requiring explanation that is given particular value, instead of being normal and commonplace. In the demarcation of cultures perceived as different – sometimes also strange and foreign – the book constructs and consolidates clearly distinct identities. The representation via text, image, and music constructs communities primarily as identical with nation-states, which together are perceived as Europe.⁴⁹ The differences between cultures are appreciated and valued, yet at the same time diversity appears as a problem. At the beginning of the book, the authors state: »If people of different ethnic and cultural origins are willing to learn from one another, to respect each other and to strive for understanding, an equitable and peaceful coexistence is possible.«⁵⁰ This statement presupposes that life in Europe is or was not peaceful and equitable, but accompanied by inequalities and conflicts. We do not learn anything about the cause of conflicts in the book but encounter a moral imperative of living peacefully together. The book implies that peaceful coexistence in a plural society requires effort. The authors explicitly appeal to the reader to make this effort: we have to know a lot about each other in order to understand each other better.

Europe in 80 Sounds suggests that such knowledge implies basic information about language, geography, and history, yet common stereotypes are used to convey this knowledge. Stuart Hall calls the process of emphasising

49 Political scientist Benedict Anderson 2006, 24–25, identified media such as the novel and the newspaper as important tools for representing nations as imagined communities in the 18th century. *Europe in 80 Sounds* fits into this discourse as the book tries to represent an imagined European community.

50 Steffe/Höfele 2002, 5: »Sind Menschen verschiedener ethnischer und kultureller Herkunft bereit voneinander zu lernen, sich zu respektieren und sich um Verständigung zu bemühen, ist ein gleichberechtigtes und friedliches Zusammenleben möglich.«

the differences between people »othering«.⁵¹ Constructions of the self, the other, and the stranger produce and reproduce cultural patterns and classification systems, lead to inclusion and exclusion, and evoke images of identity and normality.⁵² Even if *Europe in 80 Sounds* attempts to teach readers about foreign cultures and through this knowledge, convey values that promote diversity as positive, this approach must fail simply because people are not captured as individuals, but rather depicted through stereotypes. Text and pictures create a media reality that is largely shaped by a superficial view of the other and thus does not promote the knowledge the authors consider essential for peaceful coexistence. *Europe in 80 Sounds* as well as other children's media represent the epistemological paradox that they argue that we should get to know the other in order to understand and respect them but they draw on stereotypes that reduce the other and inhibit precisely the knowledge they seek to convey.

Most children's media suggest an understanding of knowledge as a neutral category that claims to be objective. But knowledge is not only cognitive and related to facts, but also emotional, tied to our perception and shaped by normative structures and power relationships. The way in which a country, culture, community, or the relationship between communities is represented, influences our imagination of ourselves and the other. Images and illustrations contribute significantly to creating impressions, to consolidating, supplementing, or transforming already existing ideas.

7. In conclusion: Children's media as a mirror of European ideas

My analysis has shown that *Europe in 80 Sounds* represents Europe as a heterogeneous, to some extent contradictory concept. Since brevity and condensation are necessary elements of children's literature, it is all the more interesting to consider, in this conclusion, which aspects of Europe are included and emphasised, especially in comparison with theoretical discourses of Europe and European identity.

51 Hall 2004.

52 Ricken/Balzer 2007, 57.

In public discourses there is no consensus of what exactly Europe is or should be. This indeterminacy manifests itself in a plurality of images and views. Nevertheless, there is a drive to look for a common European core and to find a collective identity.⁵³ These controversies are also reflected in this children's book which represents Europe as a multifaceted, sometimes contradictory concept. It tries to highlight differences and similarities and thus helps to shape identities. At the same time as it reflects controversies surrounding Europe as a concept, *Europe in 80 Sounds* can be seen as a part of a positive European discourse that strives for a common cultural idea of Europe. This discourse developed after the Second World War and describes visions of what Europe is or could be.⁵⁴ The book represents diversity as a positive phenomenon and perceives it as enriching, reflecting the motto of the EU »United in diversity«. In particular, music is represented as a means to create coherence at the same time as the book notes the diversity of musical styles. Finally, theoretical discourses of Europe focus on developing a common memory and shared myths uniting the Europeans who, at the same time, are represented primarily as citizens of individual nation-states.⁵⁵ These tensions between a common European idea and sovereign nation-states are also reproduced in this children's book. Myths and popular beliefs, folk tales and customs reinforce the 19th-century image of nation-state traditions. Since similar customs and songs exist across nation-states, Europe appears simultaneously as a unity with a significant cultural heritage and shared values, and as a multilingual continent that thrives on exchange and diversity. But while in many pictorial discourses, Europe is constructed in contrast to others, for example Africa, the USA or Islam,⁵⁶ these tendencies cannot be found at all in *Europe in 80 Sounds*. The demarcation processes only affect the countries, cultures and languages understood as part of Europe. Thus, the book and CD follow the idea of understanding Europe as a unified, stable entity with room for diversity and exchange.

My analysis shows that *Europe in 80 Sounds* promotes an idea of Europe in a permanent contradiction emerging from the search for similarities and disparities, trying to find a common ground but not giving up on differenc-

53 Drechsel/Jeager/König/Lang/Leggewie 2010, 12.

54 Paul 2010, 261.

55 Bondebjerg 2012, 650.

56 Paul 2010, 256–260.

es. The common idea of what Europe is relates to geographic, cultural, political and historical similarities that are emphasised in the book. But above all, with the claim to share common values and to live peacefully with one another, the book asks us to understand Europe as a place of diversity.

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