

# Reading and Mapping the Worldviews of Island States through National Anthems: Celebrating Deity, Identity, Landscapes and Unity

## Abstract

National anthems, along with the national flag, stamps and monuments, are important features of a state's identity. The lyrics and music instill patriotism and nationalism on holidays, at sporting events, and in children at school. This study examines the lyrics of 42 Caribbean, Pacific, African, Asian and European island state anthems to identify patterns and themes. While word frequencies differ between the regions, dominant themes reflect unity, hope, a spiritual/divine heritage, home and homeland, and pleasant environmental settings. Themes reflecting times of strife, struggles and conflict are also evident.

## Keywords

National identity • independence and freedom • futures • togetherness and nation building • thematic analysis • island countries

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## Introduction

States express their place in the world in various ways including print and visual media, leadership in major global alliances, showcasing military hardware and clout in conflicts, speeches to regional organizations, or signing treaties. Less obvious expressions are made through words in their constitution, declarations of national holidays, construction of monuments, displaying a national flag, photos of heritage images in school texts, themes of postage stamps and words in national anthems. All of these expressions are important in generating feelings of heritage, solidarity and a place in the world.

The lyrics of anthems are political statements that reflect events leading up to independence or new statehood. These national songs often contain important words and phrases about strife, social unrest and military conflicts, but also expressions of hope, healing, harmony and finding a special place of honor and respect in a wider world. The lyrics may express feelings of those who live within the political borders, describe places and events that represent the state's history, or present something unique about the state, such as its physical and human landscapes and place in the world. Anthems are not just familiar words and phrases, but emotional statements that generate feelings of togetherness and nationalism when heard, played or sung at an important political or sporting event, a festive occasion, or the start of a school day. Performance of the anthem and display of the national flag are two strongly emotional expressions that generate national identity.

The purpose of this study is to examine the content of the national anthems of island states to reveal how the states see themselves—their worldview. Worldviews have three components: words, visuals and performances (Figure 1). Words found in a nation's constitution, school texts, on national monuments, and, in this case, national anthems, are carefully chosen to show how a state envisions itself. Just as a new state has committees or government branches that define the language used in constitutions, etc., committees pass

judgment on the lyrics and the music of national anthems. Visuals are also conveyed in state products, and include heritage features, such as holidays, flags, and stamps, all which can resonate emotions about a place, a landscape or event. Likewise, performances are integral to a state's *raison d'être*. Performances may include presentation of a political speech, re-enactment of a battle, or singing an anthem at a graduation ceremony (Gilboa & Bodner 2009; Jahoda 1964; McDonald 2020; Slater et al. 2018). Children grow up with the words and the music; it becomes part of their "national DNA" that they retain into adult years, whether they remain in their country of birth or move to other places to work and live.

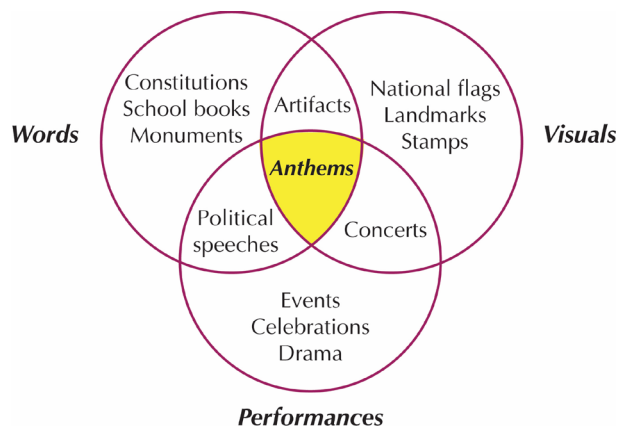


Figure 1. Elements of promoting worldviews

Source: own elaboration

### Relevant literature

Words, images, and performances are considered within the framework of branding, where a state seeks to promote itself or its products and environmental setting for tourists and investors through creative design, advertising and promotion (Brunn 2015; eds Ermann & Hermanik 2019; Pike 2009; ed Pike 2011, 2016). Studies of expressions of how a country sees itself have been performed using speeches before the United Nations and other organizations (Brunn 1999; Kentikelenis & Voeten 2021; Suedfeld et al. 1977; Waheed et al. 2013), a state's webpages (Brunn and Cottle 1997), and postage stamps (Brunn and Waterman 2006; Brunn 2011; Brunn et al. 2018; Covington & Brunn 2006).

Geographers have studied music in culture and cultural diffusion contexts (ed Carney 1987; Waterman 2006). Among the types studied were Cajun music (Comeaux 1978, 2000; Post & Joseph 1970), rock and roll (Ford 1971; Francaviglia 1978), country (Meyer 1976; White & Day 1997), popular music (Chye & Kong 1996), rap (French 2017), and Latin American music (Curtis & Rose 1983). Geographers have also looked at music themes in broader contexts including sense of place, sound, regions, identities, media and popular culture, and the producers and consumers of music (eds Burgess & Gold 2015; Canova 2013; Florida & Jackson 2009; Hudson 2006; eds Johansson & Bell 2009; Kearney 2010; Kong 1995b; Krims 2007; eds Leyshon et al. 1998; Nash & Carney 1996; Shobe & Banis 2010; Smith 1994).

The evolving music/geography intersections have had two major foci in the past couple decades: the role of politics/political culture and research specifically on national anthems. The contributors to these foci are cultural, social and political geographers, but also scholars in music sociology, politics and culture examining the anthem history in a specific country or in a broader regional context. Examples of music/geography studies in broad contexts include: heritage (Lowenthal 2006; Rice 1994; Waterman 2019); culture and popular culture (Buchanan 1995; ed Norris 1989; Smith 1997); peace education initiatives (Hummel 2017; Odunuga 2013; Rippen 2005); teaching (Risinger 2013), state iconographies (Cerulo 1989, 1993; Kyridis et al. 2009); nation building, identity and unity (Connell & Gibson 2004; de Souza 2008; Erden 2019; Frolova-Walker 1998; Kong 1995a, c, 2006; Mu 1994; Scruggs 1999; Thirumalai 2007; Zikmund II 1969); sports and anthems (Slater et al. 2018); and musical instruments (Neustadt 2007).

Authors have explored the history of national anthems in states and regions. Some specifically examine the lyrics, others the geopolitical context in which the anthem was written, approved and presented. Some researchers have a regional focus or compare several countries such as Europe (Clark 1997; Csepeli & Örkény 1997; Eyck 1995); Eastern Europe (Merjanova 2000); English West Africa (Amenorvi & Grumah 2019); Africa (Cusack 2005, 2008); Libya, France and Albania (Mirza 2019); and South Asia (Thirumalai 2007). Other researchers have focused on anthems of individual states, such as Australia (Barker 2009; Kelen 2003); Canada (Kennedy & Guerrini 2012; Lehr 1983); Germany (Feinstein 2000); Finland (De Gorog 1989); Taiwan (Guy 2002); China (Liao et al. 2012); South Africa (Byerly 1998); Russia (Daughtry 2003), and Romania (Chelaru 2018).

### Methodology

English translations of 42 island anthems were examined for key word and phrase frequencies and patterns to determine what their language reveals about the island's heritage, history, culture, place in its region, and in the world. The data for this thematic analysis are from X. Hang's (2013) *Encyclopaedia of National Anthems*.

### Results

The islands are in five regions across the globe (Figure 2). All countries are small in terms of land area or population; Australia, Indonesia, Japan and the United Kingdom are excluded. The

largest island states are Madagascar, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand and the Philippines, which together account for 71 percent of the total land area of the countries included. The smallest 17 states are less than 300 sq. mi. (777 sq. km.); their total land area is less than that of Cyprus and Jamaica.

The population of the 42 island states is approximately 256 million, which is slightly larger than Pakistan—the fourth largest country in the world. The island populations vary, with the Philippines being the largest (>110 million). The Philippines, Madagascar, Taiwan and Sri Lanka account for 72 percent of the total island population. Eight states have less than 100,000 people each; their combined population is 507,000, which is slightly smaller than the populations of Malta or Cape Verde. Of the least populated states, 26 are in the Caribbean and the Pacific.

The earliest anthems were by Tonga (1875), Philippines (1898), Cuba and Haiti (1902 and 1904). These were followed by six others from 1926 to 1958. In the 1960s, 9 state anthems were approved, as were 14 in the 1970s and 8 in the 1980s and 1990s. The only state anthem approved in this century was East Timor's in 2012.

The titles vary in length and content. Eighteen states included the name of the island in the title of the anthem. Many of the titles [or English translation] contain words of strength or perseverance ("Stand Kiribati," "March on Bahamaland," "Forever Marshall Islands"), religion ("Hymn of Malta," "God Save Our Solomon Islands," "Tuvalu for the Almighty"), unity ("Come Together Seychelles," "Sons and Daughters of St. Lucia," "Patriots of Micronesia"), or freedom (Cyprus' "Hymn to Liberty", Samoa's "The Banner of Freedom," and Cape Verde's "Chant of Freedom").

The anthems vary in length from a one to six verses. Eight have less than 50 words (Cyprus, Cuba, Grenada, Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Singapore, Solomon Islands and Tonga). The Caribbean and Pacific Islands have many of the shortest anthems. At the other extreme are the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Iceland with anthems exceeding 200 words [in the English translation]. For comparison, the US anthem has 80 words and Poland's has 143 words.

A list of 282 important terms was initially compiled from the lyrics, including popular names (e.g., Caribbean) or distinguishing features. Similar words were grouped (isle, island, insular; child, children; union and unity) and similar terms were combined (e.g., liberty and freedom) into 15 categories, each with a key word and associated words (Table 1). Often these words convey deep emotions of an island's heritage (Table 2).

Figure 3 illustrates the categories present in each island's anthem. The categories on the left occur in many anthems; the ones on the right in only a few anthems. "All/our/we/" reveals the holistic framework in which the lyricist sought to convey some depth to island residents. All anthems had one or more of these words. The category with the second most words was "Spiritual." All islands, except Cuba, had spiritual words. The word Spiritual includes references to God, Father, Almighty, Divine, Thou, Thine and Thy. "Conflict" has over 30 related terms (war, foes, struggle, independence, death, hate, battle, combat, revolution, enemies, weapons). "Environment" includes words related to physical features of islands, not only words like oceans, seas, coastlines, sun, sunshine and skies, but also sand, forests, hills, winds and nature. At the other end of the continuum were words that appear much less frequently, such as the word "Island" (island, islands and isles) and "Hope."

The content of anthems varied by geographical region in four notable ways. First, even a casual reading of small island state anthems in the English-speaking Caribbean and Pacific regions revealed similar words, especially to God/Lord and spiritual.

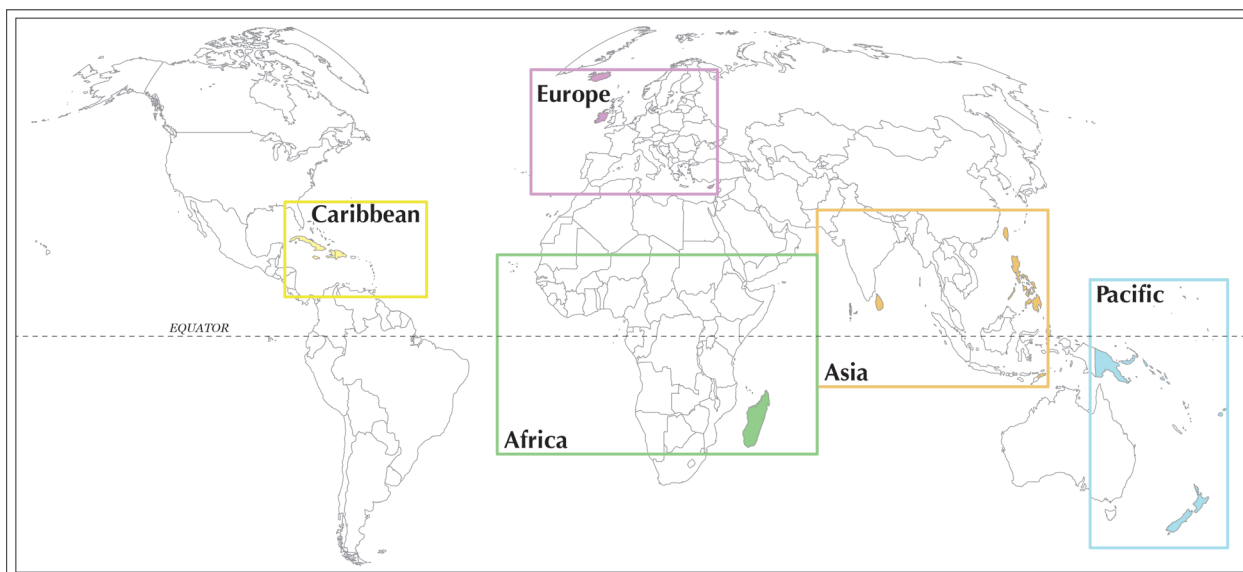


Figure 2. Island regions  
Source: own elaboration

Table 1. Word categories identified in national anthems

Rank	Key word	Examples of associated words
1	All/Our/We	ours, us, together
2	Spiritual	spirit, faith, divine, bless, glory, joy, soul, holy, prayer, wisdom, eternal, heaven
3	Future	eternity, onwards, forward, evermore, posterity
4	Land	home, homeland, motherland, fatherland
5	God/Lord	Almighty, Heavenly Father, Thou, Thee, Thy, He, His, Him
6	Family	children, he, she, sister, brother, mother, father
7	Conflict	battle, conflict, strife, heroes, war, imperialism, invasion, fear, hate, death
8	Love	loving, beloved, lovely
9	Freedom	free, independence, liberty
10	Nation	national, nationality, country
11	Unity	united, union, thanks
12	Environment	hills, valleys, mountains, rivers, seas, coast, sun
13	Peace/Justice	peaceful, just, injustice
14	Island	insular, isle
15	Hope	hopeful, hoping, aspire

Table 2. Inspiring lyrics from national anthems of selected island states

State	Inspiring Lyrics
Cape Verde	"Freedom is a hymn / Hope is as big as the sea"
East Timor	"Fatherland, fatherland, East Timor our nation / Glory to the people and the heroes of our liberation."
Fiji	"Blessing grant oh God of nations on the isles of Fojo / Shores of golden sand and sunshine, happiness and song
Madagascar	"Our love will never decay / But will last eternally"
Marshall Islands	"My island lies o'er the ocean / Like a wreath of flowers upon the sea."
New Zealand	"May our mountains ever be / Freedom and ramparts on the sea." / "Preaching love and peace to man / Working out they glorious plan."
Papua New Guinea	"Shout our name from the mountains to the sea."
Philippines	"O'er within thy skies and through thy clouds / And o'er tiny hills and seas, / Do we behold the radiance / Feel the throb of glorious liberty."
Singapore	"Let us progress toward happiness together/ May our noble aspirations bring / Singapore success."
Sri Lanka	"Mother Lanka we salute Thee? / Beauteous in prosperity Thou / Laden with corn and luscious fruit / And fragrant flowers of radiant hue."
Trinidad and Tobago	"Side by side we stand, islands of the blue Caribbean Sea" / "Here every creed and race find an equal place."

Source: Hang, X. (2013). *Encyclopedia of National Anthems*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.

Region and Country	All, Our, We	Spiritual	Future	Land	God, Lord	Family	Conflict	Love	Freedom	Nation	Unity	Environment	Peace, Justice	Island	Hope	TOTAL
<b>CARIBBEAN</b>																<b>116</b>
Antigua & Barbuda																14
Barbados																11
Jamaica																10
St. Kitts & Nevis																10
St. Vincent & Gren.																10
Bahamas																9
St. Lucia																9
Trinidad & Tobago																9
Haiti																9
Dominican Rep.																8
Grenada																8
Dominica																7
Cuba																2
<b>PACIFIC</b>																<b>99</b>
Fiji																12
New Zealand																10
Micronesia																9
Vanuatu																9
Tuvalu																8
Nauru																7
Solomon Is.																7
Palau																7
Papua New Guinea																7
Kiribati																6
Samoa																6
Marshall Is.																6
Tonga																5
<b>AFRICA</b>																<b>55</b>
Mauritius																11
Sao Tome & Principe																11
Comoros																10
Seychelles																10
Cape Verde																8
Madagascar																5
<b>ASIA</b>																<b>42</b>
Maldives																9
Singapore																9
East Timor																8
Philippines																8
Sri Lanka																5
Taiwan																3
<b>EUROPE</b>																<b>26</b>
Iceland																9
Malta																7
Cyprus																5
Ireland																5
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>338</b>

Figure 3. Categories of words in national anthems of small island states. Categories are listed from most frequent (“All/our/we” on the left) to least frequent (“Hope” on the right)  
Source: own elaboration

Table 3. Time lyrics from national anthems of selected states

Country	Time lyrics
Barbados	"In plenty and in time of need / The Lord has been the people's guide / For the past 300 years."
Comoros	"On these islands were we born / These islands brought us up."
Cyprus	"We knew thee of old"
Haiti	"For Haiti our Ancestors' country / We must walk hand in hand."
Iceland	"With thee each day is a thousand years / Eternity's flow'er with its homage of tears."
Ireland	"No more our ancient sireland." / "Some have come from the land beyond the wave."
Madagascar	"Our love will never decay / But will last eternally."
Palau	"Our sweet inheritance came from ancient days."
St. Lucia	"Dawns at last a brighter day / Gone the time when nations battled."

Source: Hang, X. (2013). *Encyclopedia of National Anthems*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.

This could be attributed to the many states that were former British colonies; most achieved independence in the 1960s and 1970s. Second, conflict was a salient feature of some former European colonies in Africa, Europe and Asia. Independence was characterized by a prolonged, bloody, and painful conflict; references are often included in the anthems such as East Timor, São Tomé and Príncipe, Cyprus and Sri Lanka. Third, the widespread use of certain words was noted in all five regions. Figure 3 shows that the themes Unity, Love and Freedom were fairly uniform independence resulted from a peaceful transition or the end of a bloody conflict. Fourth, is the evidence of peace, joy, happiness and independence as well a deep appreciation of the island's physical setting. This point is well illustrated in the verbiage that conveys deep emotional ties to their island, heritage. Future was another key word in many of the anthems as the island nation sought to move on from its previous setting as a colonial possession to autonomy.

"Time lyrics" were also identified (Table 3). They provide a deeper meaning than the categories shown in Figure 3. Many anthems contain deep emotional words about a country's heritage, whether the lyrics were written long ago, in the case of Tonga, Haiti and Cuba or more recently in the case of Micronesia and Seychelles.

Figure 3 does not reveal two important additional features about the lyrics of the 42 states. First are examples where a term appears multiple times. New Zealand's anthem has ten references to "God and Lord" and eight references to "God defend." The anthem has many references to hate, envy, dissention, war and foes and fewer to peace, free and love. São Tomé and Príncipe, a former Portuguese colony with a long and bloody war leading to independence, has numerous references to combat, struggle, war and peril alongside words about hope and independence and the south. East Timor is another example of a small island state with a long war for independence. The twelve-line anthem includes two references each to revolution, imperialism and liberation as well as the words struggle and exploitation.

Aside from the country's name in the anthems of states, a few other proper place names appeared. Trinidad and Tobago's anthem lyrics include, "Side by side we stand, islands of the Blue Caribbean." Cape Verde's anthem includes the phrase, "Between the stars and the Atlantic Ocean," and New Zealand's anthem includes, "Guard Pacific: Trip Star New Zealand." Specific mountains, coastlines, beaches and sunshine are also mentioned. "The Sixth of July" is Independence Day for the Comoros; also,

the anthem mentions four islands in the archipelago. Hairoun in the anthem of St. Vincent refers to a famous local beer.

Words that evoke emotion also appear. "Flag" appears in the anthems of the Comoros, Haiti, Maldives, São Tome and Principe, and Trinidad and Tobago; "voices" in Dominica, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, São Tome and Principe, and Singapore; "faith" in Comoros, Fiji, St. Vincent and Grenadines, Sri Lanka and Seychelles; "children" in Antigua and Barbuda, Haiti, St. Kitts and Nevis, and St. Lucia; "joyful" in Haiti, Papa New Guinea, Seychelles, Solomon Islands and Sri Lanka; and "happy and happiness" in Kiribati, Madagascar, São Tome and Principe, Singapore and Vanuatu. "Progress" is only in the anthems of São Tome and Principe, Singapore and Seychelles.

Many other powerful terms appeared in the anthems, especially words related to strife, conflict, death, and war. Examples were "canon's rise" (Ireland), "traitor" (Haiti and Philippines), "war" and "foes" (New Zealand), "exploitation" (East Timor), "blood" (Comoros), and "crusade" (São Tomé and Príncipe). "Poverty" was mentioned only in the anthem of Antigua and Barbuda, "tyrants" in the Philippines, "chains:" by Cuba, "valor" by Cyprus, "wisdom" by Malta, "righteous" by Taiwan, and "future" by Seychelles.

Dhivehi, the national language of the Maldives, was mentioned in its anthem. Colors of the flag were also mentioned in the Maldives' anthem with the lyrics, "We salute the colors of our flag; Green, red and white which symbolize Victory, blessing and success." The word "flag" itself appeared in the lyrics of Haiti and the Comoros. "Creed and race" appeared in the anthem of Trinidad and Tobago with the phrase, "Here ev'ry creed and race find an equal place" and in New Zealand with "Men of every creed and race; Gather here before Thy face."

A few references are made to women, men and children. "Children" appears in the anthems of Antigua and Barbuda; St. Kitts and Nevis; St. Lucia; and the Seychelles. "Her" appears in the anthems of Antigua and Barbuda (three times), Dominican Republic, Malta, New Zealand, Palau, St. Lucia and Solomon Islands; "women" in Haiti; "she" in "Madagascar." "Man" and "men" appear in the anthems of Cuba, Haiti, Malta and the Solomon Islands.

### Discussion

The maps, graphics and text identify some commonalities and differences in the words and content of island anthems. Five distinct themes have emerged, often with some specific regionality (Figure 4).

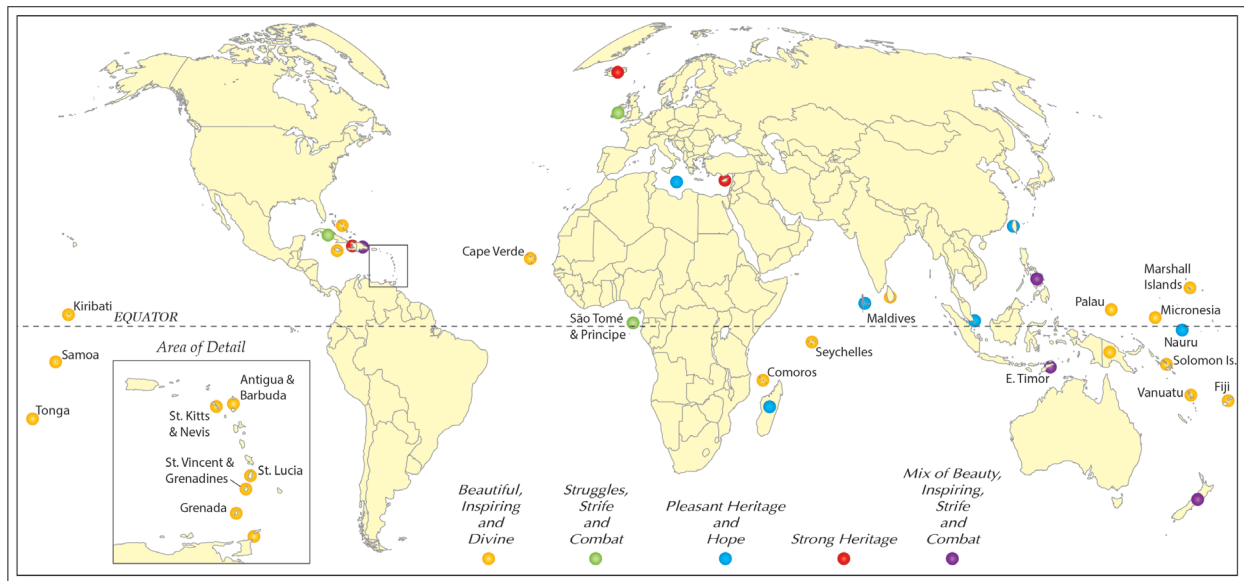


Figure 4. Themes apparent in national anthems  
Source: own elaboration

The first and major theme is *Beautiful, Joyful, Inspiring and Deity*. Twenty-six (62 percent) of the 42 island states are in this category; most are former British colonies in the Caribbean and Pacific. A second theme is about *struggles, conflicts, wars, imperialism and other negatives*. The states are Cuba, Ireland and São Tomé and Príncipe, all which had prolonged years of conflict. A third theme includes island anthems with a *mix of conflict and glory as well as pleasant and distressful messages*. States with this theme are Dominican Republic, East Timor, Philippines and New Zealand, which are not in the same region. A fourth category includes anthems from scattered locations; the themes are a *mix of heritage, hope and pleasant messages, but the messages are not nearly as emotional as those in the first group*. The fifth group includes only Cyprus, Haiti and Iceland; all express *pride in their heritage*. Iceland's and Haiti's anthems convey the importance in many verses. The lyrics convey prolonged conflict, loss of life, despair and hate, often juxtaposed alongside liberty, homeland, aspiration and independence.

Another perspective on the content of anthems is obtained by looking at states that use the same words multiple times in their anthem. As noted above, the length of anthems varies from a very few lines (less than eight) for Malta, Palau, Cuba and Nauru to more than twenty lines for Barbados, New Zealand, Iceland, Haiti, Dominican Republic, and São Tomé and Príncipe. The island's name appeared in the lyrics for 29 islands; this feature was especially applicable for islands in the Caribbean and Pacific. Aside from general descriptions about island heritage or words about independence, freedom and liberty, the most common other words were "we, our, us," or some combination in more than 40 anthems. Island states that had repeated uses of these words were New Zealand, Tuvalu, Sri Lanka, Tonga, Maldives, Kiribati, Madagascar, Barbados, Jamaica, Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago, Nauru, and St. Vincent. In each of these islands the words "we, our, us" appeared more than five times. Less common were words about God, Lord, Heavenly Father, the Almighty, Thy, Thee, Thou, Him and He; these were most common among Caribbean states. Two other examples of multiple use phrases were six references to "Ancestors" in Haiti's anthem and the word "love" appearing in 17 anthems,

most which were former British colonies also in the Caribbean and Pacific.

#### Summary and looking ahead

An island's national anthem is an important part of statecraft, established not only by words and lyrics, but by when and where it is performed. Each contains words and phrases that were familiar at the time it was constructed as well as by succeeding generations. Anthems are performed at the start of a new school day, at graduation ceremonies, at national holiday festivities, national sporting and other commemorative events. For many citizens the words and music not only generate deep emotions about the state's heritage, but familiar landscapes and what the words convey about places and events to longtime and new residents.

This examination into the lyrics of 42 island states reveals three distinct features. **First** is the high degree of agreement in the words themselves. Large and small islands, those in the Caribbean, Pacific, Africa, Asia and Europe, share many common lyrics. This is evident in the high frequencies of words about religious and spiritual worlds, unity, the importance of peace, an appreciation of an island's beauty and the happiness. A **second** feature is wording about the island's future, its people and its place in the world. Many words are about onward, forever, and becoming. The **third** feature is that more similarity than differences exist in the words. While some have more words about strife and conflict, many more have words about joy, happiness, love and hope; overall, "insular harmony" outweighs disharmony. Even states with words about conflict and foes contain references to children, faith, peace, unity and the soul.

This study exploring the content of national anthems raises a number of questions about anthems that are worth exploring. First concerns the author. Was the author a popular citizen or a professional artist in residence or someone in exile? What were the author's place and landscape experiences? Were they related to writing novels about island heritage or experiences in the military or as a colonial official? What places and events inspired the lyrics and the music? Second, when looking at island nations that were once colonies, how similar is the wording to that of the

mother country? What specific words are similar or different? An examination of this feature may reveal something about the affinity between the two government bodies or a new state's content that addresses a struggle for independence. Third, when and where is the national anthem sung or played today? This is important because it intersects the words with places and national and even secular settings. Perhaps someone could prepare a photo essay or develop a webpage with examples of youth or adults singing or a state orchestra performing the national anthem at special occasions or in multiple settings. A fourth study would delve further into the politics of the anthem itself, that is, who approved the words. Was the anthem approved by a government leader, a legislature or a group of citizens? What changes were made before the final wording was approved? Answers to these questions would likely reveal a variety of interesting surprises

in the history of a state's anthem. A fifth inquiry would compare the content of small island state anthems with those of small non-island ministates. Knowing the answer would stimulate this research and advance our understanding about the cultural and emotional meanings of national heritage in a globalized world.

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