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Themes of politics and southern patriotism in country music lyrics

Narrative analysis

“The South is no longer geography – it’s an attitude and philosophy toward government” (Applebome, 1996: 101). Patriotism is a vital part of the culture of the American province. Every country artist has in his or her repertoire songs about national symbols (like the flag, the Statue of Liberty or the World Trade Center towers) or songs praising the courage of American soldiers. Country artists are not ashamed of their love for the USA. They represent the voice of the “southern province”, the hometowns for the young soldiers who go to war, who then are seen as the local heroes, often sung about in country songs.

Songs about politics and religion provide the listener with an impression that he or she also represents a conservative worldview. They share a common stand on political and religious issues, and it is difficult to present an alternative opinion in the lyrics. These lyrical themes are expressed with the use of different narratives but they all support the same ideology.

Regardless of the diversity in country music styles, country lyrics share many common features. They reflect everyday life at work and home. Political issues are definitely not one of their most popular themes. Conservative social and cultural experiences influences the worldview and political opinions of the Southerners in a straightforward way:

As an expression of traditionalism, country music will embody a resentment of government and an affirmation of traditional family and social values consistent with political conservatism, but also a resentment of wealth and an affirmation of equality and a critique of unfair labor practices consistent with political liberalism (Fillingim, 2003: 66).

This system supports traditional values and views on life, family, religion, and human rights. The lyrics also emphasize sex roles, the value of the farm land and the importance of faith and of God. But songs also serve as means of discussing the political reality in times of war and peace. Hence, the morale-boosting and spirit-raising songs in country music play an important role in the rich repertoire of American war songs.

After 9/11 country music has expanded its purview on the political discourse in the shape of patriotic songs and political rhetoric in their lyrics. The political sphere has always been an effective embodiment of social bonding. The essential examples are questions connected with acts of terrorism, wars, fighting for freedom and independence from the state rule. There is a 3-album series called "Patriotic Country", featuring songs like: *Back Where I Come From* by Kenny Chesney, *Born Country* by Alabama, *A Country Boy Can Survive* by Hank Williams Jr., and many more.

A Toby Keith's *Courtesy of Red, White and Blue* is a showcase example of patriotism in lyrics:

*Hey, Uncle Sam put your name at the top of his list,
And the Statue of Liberty started shaking her fist
And the eagle will fly and it's gonna be hell,
When you hear Mother Freedom start ringing her bell.
And it'll feel like the whole wide world is raining down on you.
Ah, brought to you, courtesy of the red, white and blue.*

It is the reference to the colors of both the Yankee and Confederate flags that are important symbols which can be seen everywhere in the South, from front porches, to trucks, to t-shirts and bumper stickers. The *Southern Cross* flag, "the Confederate flag" "loomed as the symbol of an older, but affirmative past that (...) many white southerners could (and very much needed to) embrace with passion and pride" (Cobb, 2005: 295).

Other songs include the 9/11 theme, as for example in *Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)* by Alan Jackson, or *Have You Forgotten* by Darryl Worley which contains the lines:

*I'm just a singer of simple songs
I'm not a real political man
I watch CNN but I'm not sure I can tell
You the difference in Iraq and Iran
But I know Jesus and I talk to God*

Country music is also rich in protest and rebellion songs addressing injustice or human rights like *Okie from Musgokee* by Merle Haggard:

*We don't smoke marijuana in Muskogee;
We don't take our trips on LSD
We don't burn our draft cards down on Main Street;
We like livin' right, and bein' free*

Southern pride is another patriotic motif of country music, for example, *If Heaven Ain't a Lot Like Dixie* by Hank Williams Jr., where he sings: *I was one of the chosen few, to be born in Alabam'*. Another song is *I Believe The South Is Gonna Rise Again* by Tanya Tucker:

*Yes I believe the south is gonna rise again
Oh but not the way we thought it would back then
I mean everybody hand in hand
I believe the south is gonna rise again*

Or *The South's Gonna Do It Again* by The Charlie Daniels Band:

*Get loud, well you can be loud and be proud
Well you can be proud, hear now
Be proud you're a rebel
'Cause the South's gonna do it again and again.*

This category also includes cowboy songs, for example, the cowboys' anthem by Tim McGraw *The Cowboy In Me*.

Southern Politics

Some characteristics of the Southern politics still need to be mentioned to support important conclusions drawn from the analysis. We would like to provide some opinions of scholars who write about the South and compare their research with the content of country songs about politics. Peter Applebome gives the readers the following description of the South:

Think of a place that's bitterly antigovernment and fiercely individualistic, where race is a constant subtext to daily life, and God and guns run through public discourse like an electric current. Think of a place, where influential scholars market theories of white supremacy, where the world "liberal" is a negative epithet, where hang-'em-high law-and-order justice centered on the death penalty and throw-away-the-key sentencing are politically all but unstoppable. Think of a place obsessed with states' rights, as if it were the 1850s all over again and the Civil war had never been fought. Such characteristics have always described the South. Somehow, they now describe the nation. (Applebome, 1996: 8).

Is it also present in country songs? Do artists substantiate the image created by Applebome? Do they call their listeners violent and antigovernment savages? Peter La Chapelle, an American historian and scholar, writes in cultural studies that:

the notion that country music is, and has always been, politically conservative seems so ingrained in our culture that it passes not just for cliché, but as a truism beyond reproach. (...) some of the earliest promoters of country music were from the farthest reaches of the Right, the Ku Klux Klan and car maker Henry Ford who both sponsored old-time fiddling contests, which, for Ford, at least, became a way of counteracting what he believed to be the corrupting black and Jewish influences of jazz¹.

So is country music a left- or right-wing oriented musical phenomenon? La Chapelle concludes that “much of the genre’s history has been connected with politicians and political causes of a liberal or left-of-center nature or, perhaps even more often, with a woolly, anti-elitist, populist politics”².

The North – South polarity has always served as a tool to define the regions’ identity, to describe what they are not and also to fantasize on what they are. It means that some characteristics may not even exist if they are not opposed; that to become a conscious Southerner, one needs to understand the oppositions coming from the North. Southerners, by resisting “northernization”, or even Americanization, shaped the perception of their own individual culture and regional distinctness. “Southern whites had defined themselves not by their opposition to becoming more like the rest of America so much as by their refusal to accept the North as the emblem and arbiter of what that was supposed to mean” (Cobb, 2005: 219). Reed noted that “if their culture serves Southerners, for better or worse, in dealing with a hostile ‘outside’, it will probably continue to serve so long as the outside seems to be hostile” (1982: 88). The differences between the North and the South transformed into characteristics marking the soul of the Southern people. Tichi states that:

these negatives characterize the class-based antagonisms besetting country music from its beginnings. The music has consistently been disparaged in language setting class against class, and country music has fought back at the class-war front lines. Customs, material goods, and occupations that stratify us top-down and bottom-up become armaments in the lyrics (1994: 134).

During the 1970s country music began to become more and more popular because, among others, it emphasized human limitations and weaknesses. Economic progress, growing educational needs and mass media influence helped to erode the violence and the racism and other negative Southern traits. The modernized Southern regionalism and conscious identity brought up important values and traditions. It

¹ “Is Country Music Inherently Conservative?”, from www.historynetwork.org, DOA: 12th March 2015.

² Ibidem.

meant that all the newcomers from the North had to get southernized and accept the southern way of life.

The region's politics tend to blend with its dominant religion. Just like in the South: the confederation of Southern Baptists always summed up the feverish religiosity, righteous probity, and confining insularity of the South. (...) and the Republican road to oppose them was certain to run right through the heart of the South, its conservative values and the evangelical community of which the Baptists are a vital part. (Applebome, 1996: 5).

Despite its obvious injustice, racial segregation was another factor that created Southern distinctiveness. Racism was one of the key aspects of the life of the South that influenced the region's identity. It was the central theme of the history and politics of the South. The Southerners wanted the South to remain "a white man's land". Hence the regional and racial identity of white Southerners was difficult to separate from one another. "In reality, segregation had become synonymous with southern identity not only for those who defended the practice but for those who wanted to destroy it as well" (Cobb, 2005: 212–213).

After World War II it became necessary for the South to find its place within the American nation, which meant that the features that had made it so distinctive, like disfranchisement of Blacks and segregation, would have to disappear. "Why not plan and act on the principle that what is needed is not a New South but a South that is inextricably a part of the United States?" (Cobb, 2005: 9). The common picture associated with Southerners was the one of a hillbilly: "Hillbilly is virtually synonymous with everything that civility loathes and deplors. It is altogether repellent" (Tichi, 1994: 134). The attempt to change this association proved very difficult to implement without the white Southerner's consent because he would still keep in mind the 150 years of attempts to preserve white supremacy, a particular class order and economy, and opposition against the North. This was rooted in the memory of the South's defeat and for many years it was inconceivable that the South could become one with the North, become an equal part of the United States. The North identified with the USA while the South considered itself a separate culture. But it was soon to lose its regional distinctiveness.

From the 1950s the South started to grow urbanized, wealthy and industrialized. "(...) the military failure in Vietnam and the moral failure of the Watergate also revealed some disturbing cracks in the North-derived American mystique of triumph and virtue" (Cobb, 2005: 217). Once rich and dynamic, the "Manufacturing Belt" suddenly fell into decline and people started to flow toward the inviting "Sunbelt" also, because:

Having failed for the first time to win at war, having found poverty and racism alive and menacing in its own house, the North has lately shown itself more and more like the South in the political, racial, social and religious inclinations of its collective majority. (Egerton, 1974: xix).

Comer Vann Woodward observed that the South served the role of “a moral lightning rod, a deflector of a national guilt, a scapegoat for stricken conscience, much as the Negro has served the white supremacist – as a floor under national self-esteem (...)” and that in the 1970s “passions had cooled on the racial front in the South (...) northern morale was further lowered by Vietnam and Watergate, devastating blows at the widely held myths of invincibility, success and innocence... myths [that] were never shared by the South anyway” (Woodward, 1976: 98–99).

Jimmy Carter, a Southerner elected to be the president of the United States, helped Southerners reduce their inferiority complex. Carter, called the “Yankee from Georgia”, gave Americans hope for a reunification of North and South. Now the South asserted itself with a new role of the leader in fulfilling the nation’s destiny by concentrating on its cultural, political and economic development. The “Good South” was now ready to show the “humbled North” the new simple and peaceful way of life. “Amid such expressions of hope that the ascendant South might somehow help the dazed and confused North to recover its sense of direction and self-esteem, a larger, more-attractive-than-life vision of Dixie quickly took shape” (Cobb, 2005: 236–237). That was the time when the South became an equal member in the United States, respected and heard, and could parade its new image among Americans. “Now that the virtues and faults of the South are the virtues and faults of the nation, no more and no less the peculiar isolation and disabilities under which the South labored for so long and which served some southern writers so well... are... things of the past” (Percy, 1979: 83, [in:] Cobb, 2005). Urbanization changed the Southern economy but it didn’t change its values. The traditions and the demand for music in the region reflect continuity in the support of regional values. “The South demonstrated that nostalgia may reflect a need not to escape pain but to embrace it, to identify with it and through it” (Cobb, 2005: 243). Real, meaningful songs, that are true both for the performers and their audience, are often sentimental, moralistic songs that accommodate and standardize the style to sell to the most audience.

Politics in music

Songs connected with politics have always played an important role in societies around the world. Music helped to maintain rituals and practices shared by groups of people, enhanced their socialization and self-recognition. Music also helps to differentiate one group from another and unite them under a shared identity and common aims. Country music describes and discusses politics, but politics is definitely not the most popular theme of the genre. An in-depth analysis of the lyrical content is presented in the further parts of this paper. But firstly, we would like to concentrate on the musicological analysis of the songs chosen for the purpose of this study.

The table below presents information about songs from the musical perspective. The following components are analysed: scale, tempo, instrumentation, character and rhymes. Most information gathered in the table come from my analysis of the songs.

The descriptions of tonality have been taken from the internet website CowboyLyrics.com between December 2016 and January 2017.

An analysis of the components listed may help establish some characteristics of southern patriotic music in contrast to other country compositions. All the components, in my opinion, may reflect the character of lyrics, extend the sense of words and give the songs some additional meanings. Such a schematic characterization allows me to present a wider selection of songs and, in this way, to strengthen my claims about their character.

| Title of the song | Author, performer | Scale | Instrumentation | Rhymes | Tempo | Character |
|---|---|---------|--|---|----------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>If Heaven Ain't a Lot Like Dixie</i> | Hank Williams Jr. | F major | Guitars percussion | Rhymes regular (aabb - Alabam' - I am-hand-land) | Fast (2/2) | ludic |
| <i>Kiss My Country***</i> | Rhett Akins | D major | Guitars percussion | Rhymes irregular and inexact | Moderate (4/4) | 'bitterly' satirical |
| <i>I sang Dixie</i> | Dwight Yoakam | E major | Guitars percussion | Rhymes in chorus (aaaa - died-cried-pride-died) | Moderate (4/4) | nostalgic |
| <i>If The South Woulda Won</i> | Hank Williams Jr. | C major | Fiddle guitars percussion trumpet | Rhymes irregular and inexact Mostly: a/b/cc/a or b | fast | nostalgic/ partly satirical |
| <i>You Ain't Just Whistling Dixie</i> | Bellamy Brothers | A major | Guitars percussion | Irregular/exact (aabb - sunshine-line-riverbed-dead) or (abcb) With-back-Georgia-track) | slow | nostalgic |
| <i>Dixie On My Mind</i> | Hank Williams Jr. | D major | Fiddle, banjo, guitar, percussion | irregular | fast | ludic |
| <i>That's How They Do It In Dixie</i> | Hank Williams Jr, Big & Rich, Gretchen Wilson | E major | Percussion guitars | Irregular aabc boots, roots. me: Dixie. | Fast (2/2) | ludic |

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|----------------------------------|----------------------|---------|---------------------------|--|----------------|---|
| <i>Dixie Road</i> | Lee Greenwood | A major | Percussion guitars | | Moderate (2/2) | nostalgic |
| <i>A Country Boy Can Survive</i> | Hank Williams Jr | D major | Fiddle Guitars percussion | | moderate | nostalgic |
| <i>A Few More Rednecks</i> | Charlie Daniels Band | C major | Percussion guitars | Rhymes alternate Abcb Defe away fine first mine taxes itch goes rich | Moderate (4/4) | ludic/ partly nostalgic and satirical |

Table 1. Musicological analysis of country songs about patriotism and politics (source: own work)

Table 1. A short summary is as follows:

- Scale used: major
- Rhymes: mostly irregular or inexact
- Instruments: guitars and percussion; sometimes fiddle or banjo
- (some of the songs are played by Dixieland band)
- Tempo in 2 or 4 (slow, moderate or fast regarding the lyrics)
- Character: nostalgic, satirical, ludic (also in reference to the lyrics)

Rhythm has been studied in terms of bodily responses to music. In this case, the responses are the actual heard of the rhythm and the listener's physical response to it. O'Donnell in his article "Music and the Brain" explains the importance of rhythm, as it "organizes physical movements and is very much related to the human body. For example, the body contains rhythms in the heartbeat, while walking, during breathing, etc. (...) Music also affects breathing rate and electrical resistance of the skin" (O'Donnell: January, 2017). This has always been important during events connected with politics: marches, rallies, strikes, protests; and music has always played an important role during battles and wars (anthems, hymns, "war drums" etc.). The rhythm played a vital role in uniting people under a common aim and encouraged them to act.

Southern Patriotism and Nostalgia

In popular culture the American South has been portrayed as a place that hardly seems part of America at all, as a region longing for its antebellum past, times when it became the biggest supplier of cotton, tobacco and rice, which has led Southerners to

a belief in the region's superiority. The white South has preserved values of what Cash called the "central theme of Southern culture" – "The Savage Ideal":

By this phrase he means the determination of white society to preserve with much male truculence those traditions, customs and routines of mind that traditionally had been honored down through the course of American development [and] (...) the persistence in Southern life of certain general tendencies: conservative principles about the role of government; national defense; use of personal weaponry; family life; the relation of the sexes; and the preservation of personal independence against outside encroachments of every sort. (Wyatt-Brown [in:] Cash, 1991: xvii).

This also brought up the image of the white's man honor, pride and manliness. However, the disagreements between the North and the South, especially regarding the issue of slavery, exaggerated other institutional and cultural differences. "(...) white southerners not only developed a greater sense of distinctiveness, but they managed to (...) reshape this acknowledged difference into a claim of superiority" (Cobb, 2005: 42). This nostalgia for the Old South was manufactured by outsiders of the region, especially the musicians playing about the South as a region still dedicated to America's traditions. Southerners themselves invented the imaginary romance of the region's past, by emphasizing the popular perceptions of the Old South heritage. The romantic vision of Dixie seems to be a mindset and attitude that come with the people. "A tiny kernel of truth that quickly sprouted into a popular legend, the notion that white southerners were descended from the Norman barons through the English Cavaliers rather than the Puritan Roundheads (...) the Cavalier legend had become (...) the central myth of Southern ethnic nationalism" (McPherson, 1998: 45). These differences became a matter of class, religion, culture and race (used synonymously with 'nation'). An independent "Southern civilization" was envisioned and founded upon the superiority of the high-born, royal Cavaliers, fearless, gentle, intelligent and chivalric (Cobb, 2005: 44).

One of the means of promoting patriotic actions is to use a the symbol of the flag, either the federal one or the old Confederate flag. The latter is the symbol of ties with the past, "of an older but affirmative past that (...) many other white southerners could (and very much needed to) embrace with passion and pride" (Cobb, 2005: 295). The flag "stands for bravery and doomed hopes and battlefield triumphs and the shared past of our forefathers..." (Carter, 1996: 286). Other symbols are described in Table 2. As Fillingim writes; "country music embodies certain basic beliefs about reality (...) about matters of ultimate concern (and) articulates assumptions that shape the world-view of (...) 'the common people'" (Fillingim, 2003: 6).

The political connotations of country music stem from the genre idea to tell stories about the past, about the times of glory and the times of the Lost Cause. It sustains the memories and brings nostalgia which influences both culture and politics. The culture of country music supports politics in its lyrics and their meaning. In order to clarify the meaning of songs and their message the authors decided to present the lyrics of songs in a form of a table. It is a table of stories most often told in country songs pre-

senting the political connotations of their authors. It consists of several components: citation, meaning and others (the latter seems indispensable to present some circumstances which might influence the process of writing).

| Title of the song | Author/performer | Citation | Meaning |
|---|------------------|--|---|
| <i>If Heaven Ain't a Lot Like Dixie</i> | Hank Williams Jr | <i>I was one of the chosen few, to be born in Alabam', I'm just alike my daddy's son, I'm proud of who I am. If heaven ain't a lot like Dixie, I don't wanna go</i> | Proud to be Southerner The south is paradise |
| <i>Kiss My Country</i> *** | Rhett Akins | <i>My Grand-Daddy fought in World War Two, An' my Daddy went to Vietnam. An' I ain't scared to grab my gun, An' fight for my homeland. If you don't love the American flag, You can kiss my country ass.</i> | Being a Southerner means being a good American |
| <i>I sang Dixie</i> | Dwight Yoakam | <i>Please Lord take his soul back home to Dixie</i> | The south is paradise The song's narrator describes meeting a man from the southern United States dying on a street in Los Angeles. The narrator, while crying, holds the man and sings 'Dixie' to comfort him as he dies. He goes on to describe how others "walk on by" ignoring the man's suffering. The dying man warns the narrator with his final words to "run back home to that southern land" and escape "what life here has done to me". |
| <i>If The South Woulda Won</i> | Hank Williams Jr | <i>I'd have all the cars made in the Carolinas And I'd ban all the ones made in China I'd have every girl child sent to Georgia to learn to smile And talk with that southern accent that drives men wild</i> | If the South had won the Civil War, America would be a better place |
| <i>You Ain't Just Whistling Dixie</i> | Bellamy Brothers | <i>Now these are a few things I'm in love with A small part of the reason I go back To Carolina, Missississippi, Florida, gorgeous Georgia</i> | Proud to be the Southerner Home-sickness |

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| <i>Dixie On My Mind</i> | Hank Williams Jr | <i>Oh, the things you know that I miss most of all Is the freedom of the rivers and the pines</i> | Home-sickness (contrast between the south and north) |
| <i>That's How They Do It In Dixie</i> | Hank Williams Jr, Big & Rich, Gretchen Wilson | <i>Whoo I love them girls man. In Dixie. That's how they do it in Dixie. That's right, class, that's how we do it in Dixie.</i> | Southern girls are the most beautiful |
| <i>Dixie Road</i> | Lee Greenwood | <i>L.A. lights burn like hell once you know You left heaven waitin' down the dixie road.</i> | The South is paradise |
| <i>A Country Boy Can Survive</i> | Hank Williams Jr | <i>I can plow a field all day long, I can catch catfish from dusk 'til dawn Make our own whiskey and our own smoke too Ain't too many things these boys can't do We grow good old tomatoes and homemade wine And countryboy can survive, country folk can survive</i> | The Southerners never give up |
| <i>A Few More Rednecks</i> | Charlie Daniels Band | <i>What most people call a redneck Ain't nothin' but a workin' man And he makes his livin' By the sweat of his brow And the calluses on his hands</i> | Redneck is a working man Do not feel offended when some-body calls you a redneck |
| <i>Texas Women</i> | Hank Williams Jr. | <i>I'm a country plow-boy, not an urban cowboy And I don't ride bulls but I have fought some men Drive a pickup truck, trust in God and luck And I live to love Texas women</i> | Contrast between country plow-boy and an urban cowboy |
| <i>Redneck Girl</i> | Bellamy Brothers | <i>And I pray that someday I will find me a redneck girl Gimme a, gimme a, gimme a redneck girl</i> | For the Southern man it is the best to find the Southern girl |
| <i>Good Ol' Boy</i> | Gretchen Wilson | <i>Some girls are lookin for a Wall Street Man With lots of green in the bank (...) I'd rather have a good ole boy One who ain't afraid to make some noise Do what you want to do but if I had the Choice I'd rather have a good ole boy</i> | The Southern girl wants to find the Southern boy |
| <i>The South's Gonna Do It (Again)</i> | Charlie Daniels Band | <i>So gather 'round, gather 'round chillun' Get down, well just get down chillun' Get loud, well you can be loud and be proud Well you can be proud, hear now Be proud you're a rebel 'Cause the South's gonna do it again and again</i> | Proud to be a Southerner |

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|---|------------------|--|--|
| <i>It's Alright To Be Redneck</i> | Alan Jackson | <i>It's alright to be a redneck It's alright to ride around in a dirty ol' truck Catch a bunch of fish and shoot a bunch of duck It's alright to be a redneck</i> | Do not feel offended when somebody calls you a redneck |
| <i>Good Ol Boys</i> | Waylon Jennings | <i>Just'a good ol' boys Never meanin' no harm. Beats all you never saw Been in trouble with the law Since the day they was born</i> | Proud to be a Southerner |
| <i>If That Ain't Country</i> | David Allan Coe | <i>If that ain't country, It'll hair lip the pope If that ain't country, it's a damn good joke I've seen the grand ole opry, And I've met johnny cash If that ain't country, I'll kiss your ass</i> | Feeling proud of being country |
| <i>I was Country When Country Wasn't Cool</i> | Barbara Mandrell | <i>They call us "country bumpkins", for stickin' to our roots I'm just glad we're in a country, where we're all free to choose I was Country, when Country wasn't cool</i> | Being proud of being country |
| <i>Red Neckin' Love Makin' Night</i> | Conway Twitty | <i>Well it's a red neckin', love makin' night You ain't had much 'til you been touched in the moonlight You feel it the most when you get real close and you hold on tight It's a red neckin', love makin' night</i> | There is a lot of pleasure in being a redneck |
| <i>Backwoods</i> | Justin Moore | <i>Backwoods down in the holler Out in the backwoods, workin' hard for a dollar in the Backwoods yeah we get it done right Work hard, play hard, hold my baby tight Lordy have mercy it's a real good life In the backwoods, yes sir</i> | Proud to live in the backwoods |
| <i>Small Town USA</i> | Justin Moore | <i>These are my roots and this is what I love Cause everybody knows me and i know them And I believe that's the way we were supposed to live</i> | Proud of being the Southerner |
| <i>Guys like me How Bout You</i> | Eric Church | <i>I know where I come from: How 'bout you? I don't need baggy clothes, Or rings in my nose to be cool.</i> | Contrast between a Southerner and non-Southerner |
| <i>She's Country</i> | Jason Aldean | <i>Country, (shoot) from her cowboy boots to her down home roots She's country, from the songs she plays to the prayers she prays, That's the way she was born and raised, she ain't afraid to stay, country Brother she's country</i> | Proud girl from the South |

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| <i>Crazy Town</i> | Jason Aldean, Johnny Cash; | <i>We love it, we hate it, we all came here to make it In this crazy town, it's a crazy town</i> | Nashville music scene is a crazy town |
| <i>Rough and Ready</i> | Trace Adkins | <i>Well you are who you are And that's all right with me Well I am who I am And that's all I can be</i> | I'm a Southerner |
| <i>Hillbilly Bone</i> | Blake Shelton | <i>We all got a hillbilly bone down deep inside No matter where you from you just can't hide it And when the band starts banging and the fiddle saws You can't help but hollering, yee haw!</i> | You will never hide that you are from the South |
| <i>Redneck Woman</i> | Gretchen Wilson | <i>Some people look down on me, but I don't give a rip I'll stand barefooted in my own front yard with a baby on my hip 'Cause I'm a redneck woman</i> | Proud to be a Southerner |
| <i>We rode in trucks</i> | Luke Bryan | <i>Down where I was born was heaven on earth</i> | The South is paradise |
| <i>Backwoods Boy</i> | Josh Turner | <i>Cause I'm a backwoods boy Grew up on a dirt road I'm a backwoods boy With no better place to go Waitin' on a deer, wishin' on a star I'll always be true to my heart</i> | I am a backwoods boy and I'm proud of it |
| <i>South Carolina Low Country</i> | Josh Turner | <i>South Carolina low country Oh, the sound in my heart will always be South Carolina low country That's the music that comes outta me It's the music coming outta me</i> | South Carolina music is in my heart |
| <i>Lord Have Mercy On A Country Boy</i> | Josh Turner | <i>Well, I live in the city but don't fit in You know it's a pity the shape I'm in Well, I got no home and I got no choice Oh, Lord, have mercy on a country boy</i> <i>Well, they damned the river, they damned the stream They cut down the Cyprus and the Sweetgum trees There's a laundromat and a barbershop And now the whole meadow is a parking lot</i> | I miss the past times The South has changed |
| <i>Where I'm from</i> | Jason Michael Carroll | <i>I said I'm from the front pew of a wooden white church The courthouse clock it still dont work Where a man's word means everything Where moms and dads were high school flings Gave their children grandmothers maiden name</i> | Proud to be Southerner |

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| <i>(Back) That's where I come from</i> | Kenny Chesney | <i>Back where I come from Where I'll be when it's said and done I'm proud as anyone That's where I come from Yes it may not sound like much But its where I'm from</i> | Proud of being the Southerner |
| <i>Redneck Side of Me</i> | Jamey Johnson | <i>Give me a six-string flat-top guitar, Put all you hillbillies in a honky tonk bar. Show me to the stage an' set me free. An' I'll sing all night, till the mornin' light, When your shades are on an' your heads on ice, You'll know you've seen the redneck side of me.</i> | I am not a country boy but give me a guitar and I'll show you redneck side of me (Southerners love country music) |
| <i>Country boy</i> | Alan Jackson | <i>I'm a country boy, I've got a 4-wheel drive Climb in my bed, I'll take you for a ride Up city streets, down country roads I can get you where you need to go 'cause I'm a country boy</i> | Proud to be a country boy |
| <i>The Cowboy In Me</i> | Tim McGraw | <i>I don't know why I act the way I do Like I ain't got a single thing to lose Sometimes I'm my own worst enemy I guess that's just the cowboy in me</i> | I am proud to be a cowboy, however, the cowboy in me is sometimes destructive and selfish |
| <i>Whistlin' Dixie</i> | Randy Houser | <i>I'm a son of the son of the south Daddy redneck, Momma half hippie Taught how to talk straight not back Or my little white butt get a whippin' I like catfish, cookin' on a creek bank Kind ya can't find in the city, y'all I ain't just whistlin' Dixie</i> | Proud of being the Southerner |
| <i>This Is Country Music</i> | Brad Paisley | <i>So turn it on, turn it up and sing along This is real, this is your life in a song Yeah this is country music</i> | Country music shows real life |
| <i>Country State Of Mind"</i> | Hank William Jr. | <i>Me, I'm laid up here in a country state of mind Catchin these fish like they're goin out of style And drinkin this homemade wine, all the time If the sun don't shine tomorrow People, I have had a good time</i> | Country state of mind – relaxed |
| <i>I Believe The South's Gonna Rise Again</i> | Tanya Tucker | <i>But more important I see human kindness As we forget the bad and keep the good A brand new breeze is blowing cross the southland And I see a brand new kind of brotherhood</i> | Brotherhood and human kindness |
| <i>Southern Voice</i> | Tim McGraw | <i>Jesus is my friend America is my home Sweet iced tea and Jerry Lee Daytona Beach That's what gets to me I can feel it in my bones</i> | American values in the country and country lifestyle |

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| <i>A Little More Country Than That</i> | Easton Corbin | <i>I just want to make sure you know just who you're getting under, this old hat Cause girl I'm not the kind of two time or play games behind your back I'm a little more country than that</i> | Country means more than things we can see |
| <i>A country boy</i> | Justin Moore | <i>I haven't been back to the farm I got a tattoo on my arm I break some laws but I do no harm Don't worry mamma you can rest your heart Cause I'm still a country boy</i> | Proud to be a country boy |
| <i>What Country Is</i> | Luke Bryan | <i>There's a house fly swimmin' in my sweet tea Hey darlin' pass another Kerr jar to me Butter drippin' off a biscuit, baby better take a bite Cantaloupe thumps like it's finally ripe Box fan on a lawn chair suckin' in swamp air Two hundred mile marker signs from nowhere That's what country is</i> | Proud to be "country" |
| <i>Sweet Southern Comfort</i> | Buddy Jewell | <i>In Carolina or in Georgia, Open arms are waitin for ya,</i> | Southern hospitality |
| <i>Blackhawk</i> | Brothers of the Southland | <i>We are brothers of the Southland Singers in the same band Spirits on the wind Standing on this stage together Our song goes on forever We're part of Heaven's plan We're brothers of the Southland Brothers of the Southland</i> | We are united, we are brothers under a God's plan |
| <i>Coal Miner's Daughter</i> | Loretta Lynn | <i>Yeah, I'm proud to be a coal miner's daughter I remember well the well where I drew water The work we done was hard, at night we'd sleep 'cause we were tired I never thought of ever leaving Butcher Holler</i> | |
| <i>The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down</i> | The Band | <i>'Till so much cavalry came and tore up the tracks again In the winter of '65, we were hungry, just barely alive</i> | The last days of the American Civil War and the suffering of Southerners |
| <i>Sweet Home Alabama</i> | Lynyrd Skynyrd | <i>Sweet home Alabama Where the skies are so blue Sweet Home Alabama Lord, I'm coming home to you</i> | Happy to go back home |
| <i>Song of the Patriot</i> | Johnny Cash | <i>I don't believe in violence, I'm a God fearing man But I'll stand up for my country just as long as I can stand 'Cause I'm a flag waving, patriotic nephew of my Uncle Sam A rough riding fighting Yankee man</i> | Southerners are patriots |

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| God Bless the USA | Lee Greenwood | <p><i>And I'm proud to be an American Where at least I know I'm free And I won't forget the men who died Who gave that right to me</i></p> | <p>If you were to lose everything he had and had to start again from scratch, you would do it in the USA because you are guaranteed your freedom here.</p> |
| Only in America | Brooks & Dunn | <p><i>Only in America Dreamin' in red white and blue Only in America Where we dream as big as we want to We all get a chance Everybody gets to dance Only in America</i></p> | Proud to be American |
| American Soldier | Toby Keith | <p><i>Yeah, an American Soldier, an American. Beside my brothers and my sisters I will proudly take a stand, When liberty's in jeopardy I will always do what's right, I'm out here on the front lines, so sleep in peace tonight. American soldier, I'm an American, an American, an American soldier!</i></p> | American soldier is just, loyal, fearless and brave |
| If You Are Reading This | Tim McGraw | <p><i>If you're reading this My mama's sitting there Looks like I only got a one-way ticket over here I sure wish I could give you one more kiss And war was just a game we played when we were kids Well, I'm laying down my gun I'm hanging up my boots I'm up here with God And we're both watching over you</i></p> | Tribute to the families of soldiers who have died |
| Arlington | Trace Adkins | <p><i>And I'm proud to be on this peaceful piece of property, I'm on sacred ground and I'm in the best of company, I'm thankful for those thankful for the things I've done, I can rest in peace, I'm one of the chosen ones, I made it to Arlington</i></p> | Proud to be a Southerner |
| Courtesy of Red, White and Blue | Toby Keith | <p><i>American Girls and American Guys We'll always stand up and salute We'll always recognize When we see Old Glory Flying There's a lot of men dead So we can sleep in peace at night When we lay down our head</i></p> | Regional Southern Patriotism and faith in America |

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| <i>Have You Forgotten</i> | Darryl Worley | <p><i>Have you forgotten how it felt that day? To see your homeland under fire And her people blown away Have you forgotten when those towers fell? We had neighbors still inside going thru a living hell And you say we shouldn't worry 'bout bin Laden Have you forgotten?</i></p> | Song inspired by 9/11 and the early days of the war in Afghanistan |
| <i>Okie from Muskogee</i> | Merle Haggard | <p><i>I'm proud to be an Okie from Muskogee, A place where even squares can have a ball We still wave Old Glory down at the courthouse, And white lightnin's still the biggest thrill of all</i></p> | Proud to be the Southerner |
| <i>Keep the Change</i> | Hank Williams Jr | <p><i>I'll keep my freedom I'll keep my guns Try to keep my money And my religion too Try to keep on workin' Try to keep on smilin' I will keep my Christian name And y'all can keep the change</i></p> | Proud to be the Southerner |

Table 2. Meaning in country songs about politics and patriotism, the South and Southern symbols (source: own work)

Table 2. A short summary is as follows:

- Dominant patriotism and politics themes of country songs can be identified as:
- Pride in being a Southerner
- The South is a paradise
- Being a Southerner means being a good American
- If the South had won the Civil War, America would be a better place
- Feeling homesick
- Southern girls are the most beautiful
- The Southerners never give up
- Redneck is a hardworking man; and one should not feel offended when somebody calls you a redneck
- There is a contrast between a country plow-boy and an urban cowboy
- For a Southern man it is best to find a Southern girl
- Being proud of being country
- Missing the past times/ the South has changed
- Country music shows real life
- The country state of mind – feeling relaxed
- Brotherhood and human kindness
- The Southern hospitality

The narratives of country songs about patriotism and politics present an attitude in which Americans are loyal to their country and try to preserve their ideals, their pride and show their deep love and devotion to America. They use the most vivid Ameri-

can symbols of flag, the Statue of Liberty, 9/11 attacks, to show the unqualified and unquestioning affection and attachment to their beloved country and how natural the feeling is. The name “Dixie” refers to the “region of the southern and eastern United States, usually comprising the states that joined the Confederacy during the Civil War. The term was popularized in the minstrel song *Dixie’s Land*, written by Daniel D. Emmett (1815–1904) in 1859” and also to “a song adopted as a marching tune by the Confederate states during the American Civil War”, or to “characteristics of the southern states (...). It came from the song ‘Dixie’ but has never been fully explained. It may refer to the imaginary Mason-Dixon line that separates the North from the South” (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 1980: 126).

The lyrics of country songs about patriotism support the romantic American myth of freedom and liberty, the conservative system of beliefs and values and glorifies any manifestation of patriotic behavior. Defending freedom, protecting the land, fighting back, respecting the country and supporting the government are the core examples of actions each American should engage in. This call for patriotism stems from America’s and the South’s basic values of simple life, love, family and God, which help survive even the hardest times. Examples of personal military experience serve as means of making the songs authentic to the listener and making the simple ideology they represent appeal to a wide audience. Even though the songs lack direct political involvement they still represent the world of conservative political and religious ideology. Country music comments on state and social issues that its audience shares. The experience of “defeat, military occupation, poverty, frustration, and moral guilt” which are not typically American, are pointedly Southern. “They [Southerners] are seen, and see themselves, as less energetic, less materialistic, more traditional and conventional, more religious and patriotic, more mannerly and hospitable” (Reed, 1993: 32).

The narrator of a song is usually an authoritative voice who shows his own experience, and provides evidence that one must behave in a particular way to be a true patriot. Most of the songs are sung by male singers, especially when they sing about their military service or other men in the army and fighting in wars. They all fight their real or personal battles for the sake of the USA, the country that must endure.

The lyrics, by sharing common and traditional views, provide a particular worldview and ideology that serves as a guide and equipment for how to behave and what to believe in.

Summary

While analyzing a song we can concentrate on its three main aspects: how we look at the song, how we respond to the song and how we think about the story in the lyrics. A song is lyrics and music that illuminate a particular reality. We focus on places and people it mentions, on the sounds we hear, on the personal reactions to the lyrics, the music and the imagery it evokes. We often think about the artist and why he/she wrote a particular song and what it tells us about life in general. It refers to what

David Fillingim says, that “music should not only entertain; it should make the world a better place” (2003: 93). Country music typically represents the epic – lyric opposition which is emphasized in cyclical songs and the “timelessness of (its) themes” (Fox, 2004: 236–237). The timeless themes analyzed in this paper were of Southern patriotism and politics.

The imaginary moments of utopia, shared values and ideals, bring people together and keep them together, as well as the culture they grew up in does. Music creates community relationships, it works as a process of social bonding “for integration of individual selves, for imagining the possible, for explaining the actual and for flow” (Turino, 2008: 181, 227).

Through the lyrics of their songs, country musicians show how they perceive the world around them “to invoke an ironic, nostalgic, patriotic, sacred, polemical, frightening, and unstable image” (Fox, 2004: 76). They interpret and comment on the political reality they live in and share their opinions and personal experience with the listeners. Musical techniques specific to country are used to pass the spiritual message to the recipients. Country fans like it because the songs explain complicated issues in simple words. Using colloquialisms, they stress out ordinary emotions and use simple narratives to tell stories their listeners can refer to.

Country music is part of the Southern identity because of its bonding power. Songs about politics and Southern patriotism invite one to participate in the national discussion where everyone has the same right to comment on the issues. Country artists speak about difficult matters in a simple language. That is why their voice is so recognizable. This paper synthesizes my research of the influence of the “voice” of country music in the construction of the Southern Identity through the ideals of the Imaginary South.

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Themes of politics and southern patriotism in country music lyrics

Abstract: While analyzing a song we can concentrate on its three main aspects: how we look at the song, how we respond to the song and how we think about the story in the lyrics. A song is lyrics and music that illuminate a particular reality. We focus on places and people it mentions, on the sounds we hear, on the personal reactions to the lyrics, the music and the imagery it evokes. We often think about the artist and why he/she wrote a particular song and what it tells us about life in general. It refers to what David Fillingim says, that "music should not only entertain; it should make the world a better place" (2003: 93). Country music typically represents the epic – lyric opposition which is emphasized in cyclical songs and the "timelessness of (its) themes." (Fox, 2004: 236–237). The timeless themes analyzed in this chapter were Southern patriotism, politics and religion.

The imaginary moments of utopia, shared values and ideals, bring people together and keep them together, as well as the culture they grew up in does. Music creates community relationships, it works as a process of social bonding "for integration of individual selves, for imagining the possible, for explaining the actual and for flow." (Turino, 2008: 181, 227).

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Keywords: politics, patriotism, south, southerners, country music, country lyrics