

Using the *Aeneid* to Negotiate Difference: Identity, Difference and Narratives of Belonging

Usando a *Eneida* para negociar a diferença: identidade, diferença e narrativas de pertença

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to point out the importance of Virgil's *Aeneid* in understanding the conceptualization and emergence of both national and postnational identity. Virgil's attempt to create a cohesive narrative which will represent the foundation of Roman national identity will be compared to the European Commission's attempt to create a cohesive narrative that will represent the basis of Pan-European identity. Unfortunately, both the *Aeneid* and the idea of a European foundation narrative have been misinterpreted by extreme right-wing and anti-immigrant groups.

Keywords: *Aeneid*; identity; narrative; difference; national; postnational.

Introduction

According to T. S. Eliot, “the classic of all Europe, is Virgil.”² T. S. Eliot states:

If there is one word on which we can fix, which will suggest the maximum of what I mean by the term ‘a classic’, it is the word maturity. I shall distinguish between the universal classic, like Virgil³, and classic which is only such in relation to the other literature in its own language. (...) No modern language can hope to produce a classic, in the sense in which I have called Virgil a classic⁴.

Vergil's *Aeneid* represents one of the first definitions of cultural identity (in particular, Roman identity) and aims at glorifying values on which this identity is based. These values include: wisdom, justice, temperance and courage and stem from Stoic philosophy⁵. On the other hand, narratives on

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² ELIOT (1957) 70.

³ Publius Vergilius Maro is called *Vergil* or *Virgil* in English.

⁴ ELIOT (1957) 55, 70.

⁵ BOWRA (1933) 11.

European identity⁶ represent one of the first definitions of postnational form of identity⁷. These narratives advocate the fundamental values on which European identity is based. These values embrace: “human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail⁸”.

The aim of this paper is not to analyze the meaning of the *Aeneid* and its pro- or anti-Augustan tendencies. This paper aims to demonstrate the significance of Virgil’s *Aeneid* for thinking about the role of identity narratives based on cultural memory in constructing both a national and a postnational concept of identity. Unfortunately, the *Aeneid* in particular and the idea of a European foundation narrative have been misinterpreted by extreme right-wing and anti-immigrant groups. The *Aeneid* is significant because it gives us a new perspective on the contemporary problem.

In the first seven verses of his *Aeneid*, Vergil announced the theme of his epic poem, which he would then develop in 9, 896 lines:

*Arms, and the man I sing, who forc’d by fate,
And haughty Juno’s unrelenting hate,
Expell’d and exil’d, left the Trojan shore.
Long labours, both by sea and land, he bore,
And in the doubtful war, before he won
The Latian realm, and built the destin’d town;
His banish’d gods restor’d to rites divine,*

⁶ European identity is still a contested concept (STRATH [2002]). It is not yet clearly defined, so it assumes different interpretations. If European identity is understood as a post-modern and supranational, multilayered form of identity that does not imply modernist uniformity, then it does not constitute a demand for renunciation of national identity. There are different conceptions of European identity: the communitarian notion of European identity, the idea of European identity determined by common civic practice, the idea of European identity based on Christianity and poststructural definitions of European identity. The issue of European identity is the most important for determining further European integration processes and resolving the issue of accession of new member states to the Union.

⁷ JACOBS & MAIER (1998); BEE (2008); RISSE & GRABOWSKY (2008).

⁸ EUROPEAN UNION (2007) Article 2.

*And settled sure succession in his line,
from whence the race of Alban fathers come,
And the long glories of majestic Rome (1.1-7)*

*Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris
Italiam fato profugus Laviniae venit
litora — multum ille et terris iactatus et alto
vi superum, saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram,
multa quoque et bello passus, dum conderet urbem
inferretque deos Latio; genus unde Latinum
Albanique patres atque altae moenia Romae.*

One of the main goals of the *Aeneid* is to develop cohesive national identity. Vergil

*thought the evolution of his people's national identity was going through a particularly crucial formative phase, in which he aspired to make his poem participate. Thus he designed the Aeneid strategically to help the Romans meditate on the duties, problems, dangers, and possibilities of a new national identity*⁹.

Vergil's poetry has been analyzed by a number of scholars dealing with questions of national identity, ethnicity, race and gender.

*The complexities of identity reflected in his corpus have afforded rich insights into the poems themselves and the era's political milieu; beyond their Roman context, across the centuries his poetry has been co-opted in both racist and nationalist rhetoric, and, at the same time, inspired dynamic multicultural receptions among its many audiences*¹¹.

This paper will investigate the relevance of Vergil's shifting notion of Roman identity¹² for understanding postnational, multilayered concept of

⁹ As it was also emphasized in the work of Katharine Toll, the concepts of “nation” and “national identity” will be used with awareness “that the Roman entities differ from modern ones both in the mechanics of their formation and in the nature of their coherence and without meaning to assimilate the two” (TOLL [1994] 34-35). However, it will be argued that both ancient and contemporary notions of national (and postnational) identity should be perceived as polyphonic categories, which are socially, historically, culturally and politically constructed.

¹⁰ TOLL (1997) 34.

¹¹ VERGILIAN SOCIETY (2020).

¹² “Perhaps not himself born Roman and certainly not technically Italian, Vergil was the more likely to have considered things from the point of view of the populace of new citizens now officially Roman but not yet so in earnest, and to have understood that the

European identity¹³. In this article, both national and postnational forms of identity are perceived as polyphonic and historically, culturally, socially and politically constructed. Thus, they are not fixed and essentialist categories. It is assumed

that the various discursive constructs of national identity are given different shapes according to the context and to the public in which they emerge, all of which can be identified with reference to content, strategies and argumentation patterns, as well as according to how they are expressed in language (linguistic realisation)¹⁴.

Postnational forms of identity can also be perceived as discursive constructs.

According to Sangco-Jackson,

Aeneas' own story will serve as a touchstone for the Romans to consolidate their own identity. In the first century BCE, a time of civil wars and imperial expansion, Rome was forced to manage the integration of many different cultures under a single identity¹⁵.

Some authors argue that the *Aeneid* "seeks to shape the (male, Roman) reader's sense of a national identity by opposition to an 'other' figured as foreign, passionate and (mainly) feminine"¹⁶.

On the other hand, the notion of European identity is still in its formative phase. From April 2013 to March 2014, the European Commission and the former President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso invited artists, scientists and intellectuals to create "a new narrative for Europe"¹⁷. Barroso emphasized the significance of culture for development of a new narrative for Europe. According to Barroso, it is necessary to develop a new narrative which develops and emphasizes "a sense of belonging to Europe"

newly enfranchised still needed reasons and motives to conjoin themselves heartily to Rome and identify themselves as Romans (...) Roman-ness was a family of varied ideas rather than a conception shared by all citizens, but the occasion for the formation of a new, unifying conception had now arisen from the recent Roman enfranchisement of all Italians" (TOLL [1997] 40).

¹³ REDING (2012).

¹⁴ WODAK *et alii* (2009) 7.

¹⁵ SANGCO-JACKSON (2006) 2.

¹⁶ GALE (2006) 106.

¹⁷ BARROSO (2014).

that includes common culture, values and interests¹⁸. Vergil also aimed at creating a cohesive narrative which would represent the foundation of Roman identity. This narrative embraced mythology, philosophy, odes to Augustus and many ideas which were already part of Roman culture¹⁹. European identity, which represents postnational form of political identity²⁰ is also based on a cohesive narrative about common European heritage and values.

However, there is a substantive difference between national and post-national forms of political identity. Since concepts of nation and national identity represent contingent categories, many authors believe that the most appropriate minimalist definition of a nation as a community of people living in one territory, sharing a subjective sense of group identity as well as specific cultural characteristics and practices²¹. On the other hand, postnational forms of identity emerge as a consequence of the evolution of political communities towards supranational and postmodern forms of communities. These forms of community are created by increased migration and the development of information and communication technologies. Although the fact that citizenship of the European Union implies multi-layered and flexible identities is recognized in anthropological, philosophical, historical and political studies, it is not sufficiently emphasized or is ignored in the framework of treaties, charters and other legal documents of the European Union²².

Although there is a huge difference between (ancient) national and postnational conceptions of identity, this paper will show that both “Vergil’s characters” and the European Commission’s “New Narrative for Europe” project “appeal to shared identity and values to mobilize collective action, reinforce group solidarity, and legitimize political decisions or leadership”²³.

¹⁸ BARROSO (2014).

¹⁹ WILLIAMSON (2019) 161.

²⁰ IVIC & LAKICEVIC (2011).

²¹ ANDERSON (1983).

²² IVIC (2016).

²³ WIMPERIS (2017) iii.

1. Vergil's Attempt to Create a Cohesive National Identity

The *Aeneid* is designed as a national epic²⁴. According to Wimperis,

*more than other narratives from Roman memory, the Aeneas myth encompassed the ancestry, the cultural symbols, and the virtues with which Augustus could assert the claim to legitimate authority. In this connection, it is vital to acknowledge the unparalleled contribution of the Aeneid in tailoring the Trojan foundation myth to the ideology of the Augustan Age. One way in which Vergil joined the Trojan past with the Augustan present was by incorporating the emperor, in propria persona, directly into his poetic narrative*²⁵.

The *Aeneid* is based on Homer's epics the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, in that the first six books (1-6), which include descriptions of Aeneas' wanderings after the fall of Troy, are inspired by the *Odyssey*, while the other six books (7-12), which include descriptions of Trojan battles on the Italian peninsula are inspired by the *Iliad*²⁶. Vergil named his heroic epic, after the main character, Aeneas, whose connections with Rome are already mentioned by one of the earliest Latin poets, Naevius, who relied on an old Latin tradition and the Greek literary tradition²⁷.

The main character, Aeneas, is the personification of Roman virtues, and in many places the symbolism connected with the future and mission of the Roman state stands out, which is politically harmonized with the ideal of Emperor Augustus about great Rome as an empire that will bring peace to the whole world²⁸. "The concept of divine origin plays a critical role in Roman self-esteem. By having Aeneas born to Venus, the Roman goddess of love, Vergil used the *Aeneid* to inject 'into the mythical past the origin of certain

²⁴ "Though the *Aeneid* portrayed Rome's history, it also served as a representation of the Augustan era. Vergil wrote it as an Augustan, that is, an epic about Augustus intended to glorify him. The Augustan Age served as the catalyst and the watermark that made the *Aeneid* successful. Augustus requested that Vergil write something to honor him, and Vergil combined strands of mythology with praise of Augustus in the epic" (WILLIAMSON [2019] 168).

²⁵ WIMPERIS (2017) 45.

²⁶ BUDIMIR & FLASAR (1991).

²⁷ BUDIMIR & FLASAR (1991).

²⁸ KORFMACHER (1956); SOLAR (2015).

historical institutions of his own day' and give the Romans a heritage they could be proud of²⁹.

Vergil created a cohesive narrative which represents the foundation of Roman identity³⁰. This narrative embraced mythology, philosophy, odes to Augustus and many ideas which were already part of Roman culture³¹. According to Wimperis:

*Vergil's Aeneid recounts the birth of a civilization, narrating through the deeds of 'father Aeneas' and the Trojan settlers of Lavinium the earliest origins of the Roman people. The story of the Trojan migration to Italy was one of many cultural narratives about the past that underpinned the Roman sense of self, situating the origin of the community in mythic time, identifying its genealogy through a line of communal ancestors, and defining its core values through the deeds of its early heroes.*³²

According to Wimperis, the Aeneas myth reflects "cultural memory", which is defined by modern scholarship as the repository of traditions, myths, symbols and memories through which the collective identity is constructed³³. The field of cultural memory represents a set of mentioned beliefs in the common origin of members of a certain social group, common myths and historical memories, as well as orientation towards the past. In that sense, the

²⁹ WILLIAMSON (2019) 166.

³⁰ According to Toll, "Romans had a more or less established identity but had held themselves aloof from the Italians, and no single Italian identity was yet constructed, so that the common national identity of Romans and Italians together, if there was to be such a thing, would have to be created new. Common ground and fellow feeling between Italians and Romans would have to be extended and solidified, and equally, common ground and fellow feeling among Italians. If Vergil thought about these things—and what I am urging here is that the way he wrote the *Aeneid* suggests that he did—it is easy to see that he could have come to reflect that he, a man to whom his own identities as Roman and Italian had arrived separately and who thus had conducted his own reconsideration and scrutiny of them, was peculiarly suited to contribute to his people's already on-going processes of review and adjustment, helping Romans and Italians to think about who they had become, in their new conjunction. Vergil seized on the occasion to conceive of Roman Italians as a new entity, to frame for this new citizenry a new myth of nationhood, and, by means of his myth, to endow posterity with power to sponsor and guide and ameliorate yet further new conjunctions" (TOLL [1997] 40).

³¹ WILLIAMSON (2019) 161.

³² WIMPERIS (2017) 1.

³³ WIMPERIS (2017) 1.

cultural memory consists of the mechanisms of social transmission of knowledge about the past, inventing, processing, suppressing, forgetting and changing the past³⁴.

*Vergil's decision to set the Aeneid in the deep past and to make it about ancestry and inheritance. It is because the past —or, more accurately, the stories that we shape for ourselves about our pasts, both personal and national - is so important a factor in the forming of identity.*³⁵

The mythological themes in the *Aeneid* originate not only from the Latin and Roman tradition and from the Homeric epics, but also from the Greek epic cycle about the destruction of Troy and the return of Greek heroes, as well as from Greek dramatic poetry³⁶. Vergil also relied on Greek works on mythology and history, as well as on the works of the Roman poets Cato and Varro³⁷. Vergil's *Aeneid* aimed at "making Roman-ness" as well as "a new foundation story for Rome."³⁸ In order to understand Vergil's *Aeneid* and the way Romanness is built, it is necessary to take into account the elements of ancient, Pythagorean, Orphic, Platonic and Stoic teachings³⁹.

According to Sangco-Jackson, Aeneas employs a novel method in constructing national identity by affiliating himself with Dardanus and relying on imagined genealogies which connected Trojans, Greeks and Italians⁴⁰.

*These imagined genealogies, which are created from traditions and stories about the mythic past, are propagated and revitalized by foundation stories. By sharing in the same foundation stories, disparate communities can consolidate themselves and reevaluate their own self-identities.*⁴¹

³⁴ RADENOVIC (2006).

³⁵ TOLL (1997) 41.

³⁶ BUDIMIR & FLASAR (1991).

³⁷ BUDIMIR & FLASAR (1991).

³⁸ TOLL (1997) 34.

³⁹ BUDIMIR & FLASAR (1991).

⁴⁰ SANGCO-JACKSON (2006) 2.

⁴¹ SANGCO-JACKSON (2006) 2.

Thus, Vergil creates Roman identity relying on narratives of common heritage and common destiny⁴².

*Narratives and narrativity as concepts of social epistemology and social ontology (...) posit that it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identity.*⁴³

Paul Ricoeur argues about the power of narratives both to create and transform human experience⁴⁴. Narratives bring into language new experience and that for this reason they have the power to transform the reader's or auditor's experience and perception of the world. This transformation occurs by the intersection of the world of the narrative and the world of the reader (or auditor)⁴⁵.

Benedict Anderson argues that national identity and nation are socially and historically constructed categories. He defines nation as “an imagined community”, which consists of individuals who consider themselves as a part of this community⁴⁶. According to Sangco-Jackson:

*This idea of a shared point of reference which connects a community is based on B. Anderson's development of the 'imagined community' or a community that was reinvented only in the imaginations of many cultures which shared in the same idea of nation. For Aeneas, Dardanus represents the 'immemorial past,' a point of reference that he, the Trojans, and the Italians can all share in. If disparate groups can define themselves in relationship to Dardanus, they then have a precedent for developing their relationships with one another*⁴⁷.

Vergil's idea of Romanness is not fixed —it is polyphonic. According to Toll,

the common national identity of Romans and Italians together, if there was to be such a thing, would have to be created new (...) Vergil seized on the occasion to conceive of Roman Italians as a new entity, to frame for this new citizenry a new myth

⁴² TOLL (1997).

⁴³ SOMERS (1994) 605.

⁴⁴ RICOEUR (1984).

⁴⁵ RICOEUR (1984).

⁴⁶ ANDERSON (1983).

⁴⁷ SANGCO-JACKSON (2006) 9.

*of nationhood, and, by means of his myth, to endow posterity with power to sponsor and guide and ameliorate yet further new conjunctions*⁴⁸.

Reed argues, that Roman identity introduced in the *Aeneid* represents unstable category. According to Reed,

*Roman identity—always reducible to some other nationality, depending on where the poem draws the boundary between nations—emerges as a synthesis...of other national identities; (...) there is no essence, no absolute center, no origin that exclusively authorizes Romanness*⁴⁹.

According to Syed,

*Roman national identity is projected through his interactions with various ethnic others. This is possible because Aeneas leaves behind him his Trojan identity when he decides to follow the commands of fate that direct him to found a new city elsewhere*⁵⁰.

It was not easy for the peaceful Virgil to represent and defend the conquering history of the Roman people. He justified that history by relying on the Stoic principles of predestination and necessity, as well as the ultimate goal, which, according to Virgil, was Roman peace (*Pax Romana*), which should bring prosperity to all humanity, not just the Roman people⁵¹. The bearers of that principle of order and peace in the *Aeneid* are Jupiter, Aeneas and Augustus. In this way, the *Aeneid* not only connects the Trojan East and the Latin West, but also announces the news of a general revival.

In his speech in the Underworld, Aeneas' father, Anchises reminds Aeneas of Roman values and unfolds for him the destiny of Rome:

*Others, I have no doubt,
will forge the bronze to breathe with suppler lines,
draw from the block of marble features quick with life,
plead their cases better, chart with their rods the stars
that climb the sky and foretell the times they rise.
But you, Roman, remember, rule with all your power the peoples
of the earth- this will be your arts:
to put your stamp on the works and ways of peace,
to spare the defeated, break the proud in war (6.976-84)*

⁴⁸ TOLL (1997) 41.

⁴⁹ REED (2007) 2.

⁵⁰ SYED (2005) 175.

⁵¹ BUDIMIR & FLASAR (1991).

*excudent alii spirantia mollius aera
(credo equidem), vivos ducent de marmore vultus,
orabunt causas melius, caelique meatus
describent radio et surgentia sidera dicent:
tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento
(hae tibi erunt artes), pacique imponere morem,
parcere subiectis et debellare superbos.*

Anchises's speech reflects Vergil's political ideals. According to Vergil, Roman nation should strive towards mercifulness, not violence. This is one of the main values on which Roman identity should be founded. On the other hand, through Anchises's rhetoric, he justifies the invasion by arguing that it will bring peace, order and justice. However,

in modern times, critics and readers have taken passages such as this one and labeled them propaganda for the Augustan regime. This criticism is valid, but when the values of a regime are expressed by a poet who shares those values, the line between art and propaganda becomes blurry⁵².

Aeneas is not characterized by human vanity and sensitivity of Achilles, Aias and Odysseus⁵³. Aeneas symbolizes Stoic and civic virtues. He is not characterized by the raw individualism of Homer's heroes. Aeneas is part of the destined Roman history and part of the community that builds that history. Aeneas' destiny is not personal —he carries the destiny of the community with dignity. Vergil's Aeneas is not always faithful to his task (whose nature is collective), so sometimes he seeks happiness for himself as well. One example of this is Aeneas' love for Dido. However, Aeneas returns to his path, and after visiting the Underworld, Aeneas transforms and becomes a servant of the fate of the Roman people and makes the ideal Vergil's Roman capable of defeating Turnus and conquering his country⁵⁴.

Aeneas, built in accordance with the Stoic ideal, stoically performs the duties that fate imposes on him. According to Toll,

Vergil's choice fell upon Aeneas to be the focus and vehicle of his meditations about national identity for three main reasons. The first and most literary was that Aeneas was Homeric. Aeneas afforded Vergil the occasion to provide for his own

⁵² *The Aeneid* (2020).

⁵³ BUDIMIR & FLASAR (1991).

⁵⁴ BUDIMIR & FLASAR (1991).

nation a poetic prehistory as antique and deep-rooted as the one Homer provided for Greece and Greeks, and to match his own epic to Homer's not only in genre and in detail, but in historical stratum as well. Selecting Aeneas was one more way of setting the Aeneid beside the Homeric poems. As a protagonist he served to figure Vergil's aim of matching Homer, perhaps of equaling the Iliad and the Odyssey, certainly of being compared with them continuously⁵⁵.

2. The European Commission's "New Narrative for Europe" Project

The former President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, launched the cultural project "New Narrative for Europe" in 2013⁵⁶. Barroso stated that the European Union lacks a powerful narrative that will strengthen European identity. He invited artists, intellectuals and scientists to participate in the creation of the new narrative for Europe. In his speech "A New Narrative for Europe" José Manuel Barroso states:

I think we need, in the beginning of the XXI century, namely for the new generation that is not so much identified with this narrative of Europe, to continue to tell the story of Europe. Like a book: it cannot only stay in the first pages, even if the first pages were extremely beautiful. We have to continue our narrative, continue to write the book of the present and of the future. This is why we need a new narrative for Europe⁵⁷.

The significance of narratives for developing pan-European identity was also emphasized within philosophy. In the interview given to Goncalo Marcelo, Richard Kearny argues from the perspective of Paul Ricoeur's⁵⁸ and Jürgen Habermas'⁵⁹ philosophy "that a new ethos for Europe requires an exchange of narratives"⁶⁰. According to Kearney:

Europe today needs a pedagogy of narrative exchange. That is the future of Europe at the level of heart, narrative, affect, phronesis. At another level of course you need

⁵⁵ TOLL (1997) 42.

⁵⁶ "The New Narrative for Europe is a project proposed by the European Parliament and implemented by the European Commission following the call issued by President Barroso in his 2012 State of the Union Address. After the launch event in Brussels (23 April 2013) and two general assemblies held in Warsaw (11 July 2013) and Milan (8-9 December 2013), the 3rd and final general assembly taking place in Berlin marked the completion of the first stage of the New Narrative project" (EUROPA NOSTRA [2014]).

⁵⁷ BARROSO (2012).

⁵⁸ RICOEUR (1992).

⁵⁹ HABERMAS (1992).

⁶⁰ MARCELO (2017) 789.

*constitutional and legal reform. You need what Habermas aptly calls 'Constitutional Patriotism'. I'm all for that: transnationalism as an overcoming of absolute national sovereignty, a kind of post-national constellation*⁶¹.

Paul Ricoeur emphasizes the role of narrativity and imagination in creating European identity⁶². In his work *Oneself and Another*, Ricoeur points to the limits of Eurocentric approach and universalist understanding of values⁶³. Ricoeur emphasizes that Europe represents a spiritual and cultural reality⁶⁴.

The goal of the project "New Narrative for Europe" was to outline narratives about shared cultural heritage, history, values and future. This was perceived as "an important practice of creating transnational memory in Europe⁶⁵." According to Kaiser, "framing narratives about shared history, norms and the future can be an important practice of creating transnational memory in Europe"⁶⁶. This was the task of the European Union's "A New Narrative for Europe" project initiated by the European Parliament and implemented by the European Commission during 2013-14. "Debates on the New Narrative were held across Europe, in Milan, Warsaw, and Berlin as well as Brussels. Members of the European Commission (each member state has one) held 'citizens' dialogues' across the continent too. A New Narrative website was created so that young Europeans could 'have their say'⁶⁷".

According to Shore, the concept of European identity defined by the European Commission denies plurality of definitions of Europe and perceptions of Europeaness⁶⁸. Various policy initiatives define it as a fixed, monolithic category, which denies African, Asian and American contributions to current definitions of European identity and values⁶⁹.

The European Commission's attempt to create a cohesive narrative about European identity can be compared to Vergil's attempt to create

⁶¹ MARCELO (2017) 790.

⁶² RICOEUR (1992).

⁶³ RICOEUR (1992).

⁶⁴ RICOEUR (1992).

⁶⁵ KAISER (2015) 1.

⁶⁶ KAISER (2015) 1.

⁶⁷ APPLEBAUM (2017).

⁶⁸ SHORE (2009) 791.

⁶⁹ SHORE (2009) 791.

Roman national identity. One of the goals of Vergil's *Aeneid* was to develop Romanness by emphasizing Roman values. Aeneas is a representative of Roman virtues and piety. In the first lines of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas is introduced as "famous for his *pietas*." Latin word *pietas* refers to religious convictions and respect for the gods, however, its meaning is much wider than English word *piety*. "A characteristic epithet for Aeneas is *pious* ('pious', 'duty-bound', 'dutiful')⁷⁰." He aims at unraveling the secrets of destiny, and after that properly act upon them. He focuses on the greater good, often sacrificing his personal desires. For instance, he deserts Dido (in Book 4) since Jupiter reminds him through the god Mercury that Italy is implied to be his destined home, not Carthage⁷¹. Vergil has created Aeneas in accordance with the Stoic ideals — Aeneas represents "the ideal Roman"⁷². He represents Stoic values such as wisdom, courage, justice, moderation and goodness⁷³. According to Bowra:

[The] orthodox Romans believed in Aeneas as an ideal man. Virgil's contemporaries and successors reiterated with wearisome devotion praises of Aeneas. Even to Horace he is 'pius Aeneas', and the long series of poets, on whom the magic of Virgil's style laid its paralysing influence, from Tibullus and Ovid to Statius and Juvenal and even to Sidonius Apollinaris, regarded Aeneas as the pattern of piety and courage. Seneca singles him out as an example of filial devotion,' and emperors like Pertinax found pride in claiming descent from him⁷⁴.

Both the *Aeneid* and the European Commission's initiative are based on the idea of creating a cohesive narrative about collective identity by emphasizing common heritage and values. The European Union is established on shared narratives that define European heritage and European values. These narratives are significant for creating the concept of European identity whose main role is to unify the peoples of Europe⁷⁵. On 1 March 2014, scientists, artists and intellectuals introduced the Declaration on the "New Narrative

⁷⁰ MACKIE (2017).

⁷¹ MACKIE (2017).

⁷² BOWRA (1933) 8.

⁷³ BOWRA (1933) 11.

⁷⁴ BOWRA (1933) 9.

⁷⁵ IVIC (2019).

for Europe” at The Akademie der Künste in Berlin⁷⁶. This declaration states: “Europe needs a societal paradigm shift —in fact, nothing short of a ‘New Renaissance’. Without disregarding the significance of economic and financial legislation, an urgent re-alignment of emphasis within the European political body is needed and Europe must acknowledge that culture is a major source of nourishment and supply for Europe’s social and political body”⁷⁷.

This project aimed at reviving European identity and bringing the European Union closer to its citizens⁷⁸. The project also aimed at “stimulating critical discussion on European values among young people”⁷⁹. It emphasized the importance of culture for a new narrative for Europe⁸⁰. Former President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, emphasized:

*It is not enough to say that we, Europeans, share a common destiny! A sense of belonging to Europe, to a community of values, culture and interests, is essential to forge that common destiny*⁸¹.

Vergil also aimed at building his cohesive narrative (which will represent the foundation of Roman identity) on the idea of (common) Roman culture. Vergil accomplished his goal relying on odes to Augustus, mythology and comments about Greek culture⁸².

*Growing to special prominence in the Age of Augustus, the Aeneas myth was widely celebrated in civic monuments, literature, and public displays. Its protagonist, the alleged ancestor of Augustus himself, was regarded as the progenitor of the Roman people and a model of the Roman character, and the story of his foundation became enshrined as a premier myth of the empire*⁸³.

One of the goals of “New Narrative for Europe” project was to define the soul of Europe, which is a metaphysical term and is not helpful to achieving goals stressed by the project “New Narrative for Europe”. Former

⁷⁶ EUROPA NOSTRA (2014).

⁷⁷ EUROPA NOSTRA (2014).

⁷⁸ BARROSO (2012).

⁷⁹ EUROPEAN YOUTH PORTAL (2016).

⁸⁰ BARROSO (2014).

⁸¹ BARROSO (2014).

⁸² WILLIAMSON (2019) 161.

⁸³ WIMPERIS (2017) 1.

President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso states: “Europe I believe has a soul. This soul can give us the strength and determination to do what we must do⁸⁴.” However, the European Union should be perceived as a political idea, not metaphysical. Otherwise, new binary oppositions, and new forms of exclusion will emerge.

A narrative that emphasizes common culture and the significance of destiny was also employed by Vergil in his attempt to create a cohesive Roman identity.

According to Vester,

Jupiter, the most powerful of the gods, likewise declares that Aeneas will found a new settlement that will develop over time into Rome, a nation that will have “empire without end” (imperium sine fine, 1.279)⁸⁵.

On the other hand, the nature of main characters of the *Aeneid* show that the foundation of Roman nation was predestined.

For example each is of both divine and mortal descent: Aeneas is the son of Venus and Anchises, Romulus the son of Mars and Ilia the priestess queen and Augustus too, according to Jupiter’s prophecy, can trace his lineage to both these legendary figures, and a ‘Caesar’, Rome’s first imperial figure. This not only gives Augustus further gravitas and legitimacy as a ruler, but also suggests that he is re-establishing the Rome as it was prophesised, and the Roman identity as it should be. Also it suggests that Rome’s foundations are equally legendary, born from the combination of myth and reality, and equally endorsed by the gods⁸⁶.

In the psychological characterization of Aeneas there is the relation of the human and the divine, he is the personification and bearer of the Roman notion of virtue and piety, constantly aware of the mission intended for him by the gods. Aeneas himself does not oppose Destiny, but is wise enough to follow it⁸⁷. Aeneas’ task is primarily ethical, he was chosen to found Rome who will rule well and justly, as fate has commanded him.

⁸⁴ BARROSO (2012).

⁸⁵ VESTER (2005).

⁸⁶ UKESSAYS (2018).

⁸⁷ VRATOVIC (2008) 126.

Aeneas' identity is developed through various binary oppositions such as self/other, Roman/Carthaginian, Greek/Trojan, Trojan/Italian, male/female and so forth⁸⁸. According to Syed,

*Roman national identity is projected through his interactions with various ethnic others. This is possible because Aeneas leaves behind him his Trojan identity when he decides to follow the commands of fate that direct him to found a new city elsewhere*⁸⁹.

The same can be argued about postnational forms of political identity, particularly European identity⁹⁰. Binary hierarchies signify unequal power relations within the EU. Unlike “external” binary oppositions which disentangle the *European* and *non-European* (for instance, Europe/Turkey, Christianity/Islam, and so forth), “internal” binary oppositions produced by the economic crisis in the Eurozone create divisions within the European Union itself (for instance, center/periphery, North/South, responsible member states/irresponsible member states, and so forth)⁹¹. These binary oppositions reflect the fragility of European identity. The question of Europeanness still remains vague as the European public political discourse still contains various binary oppositions and points to the rhetoric of othering⁹².

*Policies of identity founded on an essentialist notion of identity give priority to the one dominant, stable form of identity and isolate it from all other possible forms of identity. In this way, various binary oppositions are created, such as: wel/they, European/non-European, internal/external, citizen/foreigner and so forth*⁹³.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to show the significance of Vergil's *Aeneid* for thinking about national and postnational concepts of identity.

*The cultivation of the Aeneas myth among Romans and its pragmatic functions in their political activity exemplify the use of cultural memory in constructing communal identity,*⁹⁴

⁸⁸ SANGCO-JACKSON (2006).

⁸⁹ SYED (2005) 175.

⁹⁰ STRATH (2002); MEYER (2004).

⁹¹ TEKIN (2014).

⁹² TEKIN (2014).

⁹³ IVIC (2016) 239.

⁹⁴ WIMPERIS (2017) 2.

that is why the *Aeneid* is relevant for exploring the emergence of both national and postnational forms of identity. Vergil's *Aeneid* aimed at creating Romanness, while narratives on European identity and values aim at creating Europeanness. Vergil's *Aeneid* offers insights into one of the first definitions of cultural identity (in particular, Roman national identity), while European identity represents one of the first legal forms of postnational identity. The goal of this paper was not to assimilate ancient and contemporary notions of political identity and belonging. This paper aimed at demonstrating that ancient and contemporary notions of political identities and belonging are discursively constructed. Vergil's multilayered and shifting conception of Roman identity (which is defined through opposition to other ethnic identities —Greek, Trojan, Carthaginian and Italian) is relevant for understanding polyphonic European identity, which includes binary oppositions: self/other, identity/difference, European/non-European and so forth.

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Resumo: O objetivo deste texto é assinalar a importância da *Eneida* de Vergílio para compreender a concetualização e o aparecimento da identidade tanto nacional como pós-nacional. A tentativa de Vergílio de criar uma narrativa coerente que represente o fundamento da identidade nacional romana será comparada com a tentativa da Comissão Europeia de criar uma narrativa coerente que represente a base da identidade paneuropeia. Infelizmente, quer a *Eneida* quer a ideia de uma narrativa da fundação europeia foram mal interpretadas por grupos de extrema direita e anti-imigrantes.

Palavras-chave: *Eneida*; identidade; narrativa; diferença; nacional; pós-nacional.

Resumen: El objetivo de este artículo es señalar la importancia de la *Eneida* de Virgilio para comprender la conceptualización y el surgimiento de la identidad tanto nacional como posnacional. El intento de Virgilio de crear una narrativa coherente que represente el fundamento de la identidad nacional romana se comparará con el intento de la Comisión Europea de crear una narrativa coherente que represente la base de la identidad paneuropea. Desafortunadamente, tanto la *Eneida* como la idea de un relato de la fundación europea han sido malinterpretadas por grupos de extrema derecha y antiinmigrantes.

Palabras clave: La *Eneida*; identidad; narrativa; diferencia; nacional; posnacional.

Résumé : Le but de cet article est de souligner l'importance de l'*Énéide* de Virgile dans la compréhension de la conceptualisation et de l'émergence de l'identité nationale et postnationale. Nous comparerons la tentative de Virgile de créer un récit cohérent pour représenter le fondement de l'identité nationale romaine à celle de la Commission européenne de créer un récit cohérent pour représenter la base de l'identité paneuropéenne. Malheureusement, aussi bien l'*Énéide* que l'idée d'un récit de fondation européenne ont été mal interprétés par des groupes d'extrême droite et anti-immigrés.

Mots-clés : L'*Énéide* ; identité ; récit ; différence ; national ; postnational.