The role of music in ethnic identity formation in diaspora: a research review

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Introduction

Ethnic identity formation among immigrants is a recurrent theme within broader debates on issues such as migration, integration, and social cohesion. Calls for more research on this issue stem from ongoing public discussions, including the extent to which ethnic minorities’ access to their original culture implies a closing off from or opening up to society at large. While studies have demonstrated that connections to home countries foster cohesion in diasporic communities (Erol 2012), it is still unclear whether internal social cohesion distances these communities from the society around them or encourages relations to and exchanges with it. Political debates about international terrorism have stressed the dangers of identity polarisation in opposition to the surrounding society. At the same time, some commentators stress that a multicultural society can thrive only if its members have access to their cultural heritage and that strong collective identities do not necessarily lead to oppositional attitudes to others (Taylor 1991). Engaging with one’s cultural roots does not mean being walled off by tradition; rather, such engagement is an essential part of an individual’s or group’s effort to orient itself in society (Gilroy 1993). Because culture is a process (Hall 1990), not a stable and complete product, cultural resources – artefacts, rituals, and knowledge – provide the basis for continuous construction and renegotiation of ethnic identities. Ethnic identity formation is, therefore, a contested and challenging issue in politics and research, and it has broad implications for minority communities and individuals, as well as for society at large. Global processes – political, social, and cultural – criss-cross each other, resulting in a cultural patchwork of identities and belonging. This has major implications for the conditions of identity formation and for its understanding (Höijer et al. 2004; Ong 1999).

In political and public discussions, the relationship between immigrant groups and the wider society has come to the fore, and different strategies have been proposed for how to better integrate immigrants in their new surroundings (Vertovec 2010). It is noteworthy that whereas models of multiculturalism still seem to be applied to indigenous peoples and national minorities, their applicability to immigrant groups has been questioned (Kymlicka 2010). In Europe, for example, the rise of nationalistic and populist right-wing parties with support from segments of the political constituency combined with new waves of refugees has resulted in a reinterpretation and reorientation of national migration...
policies, and assimilation has been a recurring topic on political agendas (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010).

Multiculturalism – both as an idea and an institutional framework – has been seriously challenged, and many countries are pondering how to foster social cohesion; one issue related to this concerns the relationship between ethnic identities and the wider society. This paper focuses on a particular aspect of identity formation in diaspora: the role of music. Music is at the heart of cultures’ most profound social occasions and experiences (Turino 2008). It involves a variety of social meanings and operates at all levels of society, from the individual to the global, and plays a key role in many people’s lives (Hallam 2009). It has multiple functions; it can allow people to understand themselves, form and maintain social groups, engage in emotional communication, and mobilise for political purposes, among other functions. Previous research into music’s social functions has been largely limited to western culture and much research has focused on individual cognition and perception, despite the fact that music has significant impacts on social interaction, group identity, and the construction of social meaning (Hallam et al. 2009). Studies within ethnomusicology, however, stress that music not only is a cultural and expressive practice that bonds group members together, but can also cross boundaries between social identities and shape new ones (Cidra 2015; Pettan and Titon 2015; Post 2006; Stoker 1994).

Questions about the ways in which ethnic identities are maintained and transformed in diasporic situations have been voiced for a number of years, and the growing number of studies on the role of music in ethnic identity formation makes it important to summarise the research done so far and provide an overview of this growing field. The fact that much of the research so far tends to take the form of idiographic studies of particular genres and contexts (Rice 2013) points to the need for this kind of general overview.

This paper reviews studies on the role of music in identity formation among ethnic groups. Through a systematic literature review, it presents the focus, design, and theoretical underpinning of these studies along with their results. The ambition of this paper is not to develop a coherent theory of how music shapes ethnic identities; rather, it is to give an overview of the field, summarise important findings, and search for areas in need of future research. This methodology was chosen because although a number of studies have been conducted, most of them have been case-oriented in nature, and there have been few attempts to systematically address the role of music in identity formation in diaspora. It is not within the scope of this paper to provide a comprehensive study of this extensive issue, but a first step towards a broader understanding is made here by giving an overview of the field.

The paper comprises six parts, this introduction being the first. The second part elaborates a little further on the topic of the study by discussing music’s role in identity formation more generally, as well as the conceptual meaning of diaspora. The third part presents the empirical study, the research review, and the methodological and empirical implications of its design. In the fourth part, a general characterisation of the material is given. The fifth part conducts a deeper analysis of the material, in particular by identifying four thematic areas in which the reviewed publications are centred. The sixth and concluding part discusses some issues of central importance that hitherto have not been given sufficient attention.

Music, cultural identity and diaspora

Before presenting the study (the literature review), it is necessary to present some more thoughts about the topic of this study. Focusing on the role of music in identity formation in diaspora raises two questions: what does the research have to say about the role of music in identity formation in general? And in a world characterised by processes of globalisation, de-territorialisation, and migration, what should be counted as diaspora?

Music and identity

Music is a human universal, but its meaning is not (Titon 2009b). It occurs in many settings and includes many different kinds of action and ways of organising sound into meanings. Researchers have stressed that the fundamental meaning of music lies not in objects (e.g., a musical work) but in actions, what people do. To study music is to study the multitude of meaning-makings of musical practices. To make music is “to take part,
in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing” (Small 1998, p.9). Small coins the term “musicking” to capture this conceptual meaning: all the meaning-making practices that contribute to a musical performance. This activity is not unidirectional, from musician to listener. Instead, it is a dynamic process involving context and culture, thereby creating, maintaining, and changing meanings.

The theme of the relationship between music and identity is growing in importance in music studies, not least within the subfield of ethnomusicology (Rice 2007). Music is a constitutive part of culture and hence is important for individual and social identity formation. It can serve as a space and practice that binds group members together, so that they understand themselves as belonging to each other and maybe even having a specific task or mission to accomplish. Through musicking, emotional, social, and cognitive ties can develop, implying the construction and enactment of a social identity and a social memory where the individual and social are linked (Sheleman 2006). An important part of all identity formation is the making of boundaries; music can be used to draw boundaries between groups, thereby shaping and strengthening social identities (Rice 2013, p.72). Music can be used as a symbolic identifier of a social group, both by the group’s members but also by the surroundings (its non-members). Music not only functions to express and maintain pre-existing identities, it also provides resources for contesting and negotiating identities and constructing new ones (Jung 2014; Kyker 2013; Stokes 2004). Due to globalisation processes, with their flows of ideas, people and products, hybridisations are continuously arising between cultural identities, practices and belongings (Ong 1999; Robinson 2013). Individuals and groups constantly must respond and relate to new phenomena and practices, and it is increasingly difficult to speak of distinct and fixed cultures. This also applies to music, where the global spread of musical genres provides opportunities for musical hybridity, which may influence identity formation.

To sum up, music provides an opportunity for the expression of identity, and it can facilitate the reproduction and transformation of established social identities. Music provides resources for a group to construct and renegotiate its identity, but it may also be a resource for controlling space and pushing groups into the periphery.

What counts as diaspora?

Diaspora is a vague term, the meaning and coverage of which have shifted over time and have been stretched in various directions, thereby acquiring a broad semantic domain (Brubaker 2005; Shuval 2000; Silverman 2012). In its most general and fundamental sense, diaspora concerns a triadic relation – between a group of people, a host country and a homeland – but the character of this relation and the meaning of its parts are contested.

Originally, the idea of diaspora was developed to conceptualise the historical experience and current situation of peoples that for different reasons have been dispersed and must live between two cultures. The Jewish and Armenian experiences often serve as paradigmatic examples. Diaspora denoted forced dispersal, exile, and loss (Clifford 1994). Those belonging to the diaspora experienced a tension between physically being in one place (where you live and work) but mentally being somewhere else (which you regularly think about and long for). Thus, even in cases where immigrants have become socially adjusted to the host country, they still have maintained cultural and emotional ties to their homeland, making them partly alienated in their host-land (Brubaker 2005; Safran 1991). Criticism has been levelled against this view, both for its characterising of diasporic communities in substantial terms, as concrete and homogeneous entities, and for its making the nation-state a unit of analysis, drawing a sharp line between the cultures of homeland and host-land, between the diasporic communities and other communities, often with the implicit assumption that migration leads to (or should lead to) assimilation (Brubaker 2005; Ramnarine 2007a). In contrast to this view, constructivist understandings of diaspora have emerged, where diaspora is not seen as a product and entity, but as a dynamic process of lived experience. Global diffusion of lifestyles and values, transnational migration, de-territorialisation of identities, and a changed view of citizenship, where states (partly) welcome pluralism and multiculturalism, have resulted in a cultural hybridity where identities are not fixed entities but negotiated and dynamic constructs (Kokot et al. 2004; Ong 1999; Safran 2004; Shuval 2000).
This does not mean that diaspora ceases to be a relevant concept. Identity formation always takes place in particular contexts, and diaspora is a particular context where an immigrant minority’s origin (real or mythical) is privileged (Anthias 2001). Diaspora concerns being part of an ongoing transnational network that includes dispersed people who retain a sense of their uniqueness and an interest in their homeland – a subjective experience of displacement. It is a social construct founded on feelings, consciousness, memory, and mythology, one that narrates and gives meaning to a particular group identity (Shuval 2000, p.43). A persisting transnational network that includes a homeland does not, however, necessitate a binary relation between diaspora and homeland, but rather can constitute a dynamic field of ongoing relations among diaspora communities as well as between these communities and their respective homelands. Processes of homogenisation and heterogenisation can be found within as well as between cultures, which means that members of a diasporic community are confronted by a multitude of others, not only members of other cultures but also representatives of heterogeneous identities within the diasporic community itself (Kokot et al. 2004, p.7). A diasporic identity is only one of many identities a person may encompass. Due to their multiple belongings, members can navigate between different cultural claims and negotiate their identity in relation to different contexts and cultures.

As studies on flexible citizenship have shown, cultural citizenship is not something unilaterally constructed by a state, to which the population then acquiesces (Ong 1996; Studemeyer 2015). Instead, groups take active part in its mutual construction. At the same time, the national context is important, as it often provides schemes of racial differences which homogenise immigrants with different backgrounds (Studemeyer 2015). Also, a diaspora can be strategically used for social and political reasons, either by the group itself, to gain a privileged position (Safran 1991), or by other groups, resulting in an essentialisation of the diasporic identity, which becomes a bounded and fixed entity in which the different experiences and expectations of the members are homogenised.

To sum up, even if it is difficult to separate diaspora from other kinds of minority communities, it does have a distinctive feature: it involves a collective memory (or myth) of, and connection with, something seen as a homeland culture (Safran 2004; Shuval 2000). The content of this homeland culture and the border between it and other contexts and cultures are not given, however, but are constantly negotiated and renegotiated. This means that much of current political and public discussions – referred to in the introduction to this paper – are oversimplified. They are often based on a particular view of national integration where cultures and ethnic populations are distinct and static entities that are not a part of a national culture, and where the general problem is to find a proper balance between minority cultures and the culture of the society at large. Instead, current research on diasporic communities stresses that identification with political or geographical entities does not need to be binary, but often involves several belongings and loyalties (Shuval 2000).

Research design

Systematic literature review is often used to collate and synthesise large amounts of research within a particular field (Bradley 2012; Jesson et al. 2011; Knopf 2006; Petticrew and Roberts 2006). It can be of a quantitative character, where the aim is to understand what works and what does not, how a certain process or intervention works, and why certain processes or interventions work; on the other hand, it may be of a qualitative character, where the aim is primarily to characterise the research conducted within a field. The research review conducted in this paper is performed in three steps. As a first step, the research topic is developed in terms of key words and combinations of key words. As a second step, a literature search is carried out by retrieving references from a specialised database. The first gathering of references is collected in the form of abstracts that are read in order to determine whether they discuss the topic under study. The most relevant of them are then singled out for deeper consideration. The third step is to read and analyse the selected articles using a specific procedure (protocol) developed to focus on their central aspects.

This study uses the database Sociological Abstracts, which covers 1,800 serial publications in the social and behavioural sciences (see appendix for more information about this database). The Proquest platform has been used as a search application. Its “advanced search” function is used here,
which allows the researcher to search by field (discrete indexed information about each individual paper) and to include search operators. Limit criteria chosen are “scholarly journals” (i.e., only documents from academically oriented journals), “peer reviewed” (i.e., only documents reviewed by subject-matter experts), and “English” (i.e., only documents written in English). The search was conducted in October 2014.

A number of key words were used, with “music” as a first-order key word. “And” was used as the search operator and “anywhere” was selected (which means that the search was conducted in all fields of the document, including title, abstract, key words, and full text). Truncation (denoted by *) is used to substitute for many characters (e.g., “ethnic*” means that “ethnicity”, “ethnical”, etc. are included in the search). With “music” as the first-order key word, five different second-order key words were chosen: ethnic*, community, multicultur*, integrat*, diaspora. To making the search more narrowly focused, third-order key words were used (for a detailed description of the literature search, see the appendix). Six search strings were constructed, and the number of articles found by each search is as follows:

- music AND ethnic* AND community (111 articles found)
- music AND community AND diaspora (33 articles)
- music AND multicultur* AND diaspora (6 articles)
- music AND integrat* AND ethnic* (57 articles found)
- music AND diaspora AND ethnic* (50 articles found)
- music AND integrat* AND urban (27 articles found).

As the list shows, the search resulted in 284 hits, but due to overlaps (different search strings find some of the same articles), the total number of articles found was 100. All abstracts were read, and 31 articles were found to be relevant and selected for detailed analysis. The articles are published by 23 different journals, most of which are in the field of cultural studies (see Table 1). The protocol established for the qualitative analysis of the full text articles consists of five aspects (i) research questions, (ii) theoretical point of departure, (iii) object of study (“case”), (iv) method used and empirical material, and (v) results.

It is difficult to synthesise contextual information and make a coherent whole of studies involving different assumptions, designs, and areas of focus (Petticrew and Roberts 2006, p. 272). However, the aim of this study is not to map the state of knowledge or to elaborate a coherent theory on music’s role in ethnic identity formation; rather, it is modestly to explore research that discusses this topic, summarise the findings, and also point to topics in need of future studies.

### Study limitations

Like all research designs, this study has its limitations. The main problem for systematic literature reviews is that even if they are systematically conducted, they may be biased in terms of not including all relevant journals, all formats or all languages.

- All databases are specialised, implying that in many cases there is no perfect match between a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Journal titles of reviewed literature (31 articles)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies (7 papers)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Music and Arts in Action (2 papers)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Journal of Intercultural Studies (2 papers)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- American Quarterly</td>
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<td>- Canadian Ethnic Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Critical Studies: Music Popular Culture Identities</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Cultural studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Culture and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Journal</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Diaspora. A Journal of Transnational Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>- European Journal of Cultural Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Forum: Qualitative Social Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Journal of Intercultural Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Journal of Refugee Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Journal of Religion in Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Journal of Urban Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Patterns of Prejudice</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Qualitative Sociology</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Social &amp; Cultural Geography</td>
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<td>- Social Semiotics</td>
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single database and a research topic, resulting in key literature perhaps not being included in the review. *Sociological Abstracts* covers 1,800 serial publications in social sciences and behavioural science, but provides less coverage of humanities. The research topic studied here is a social scientific issue; however, there are still relevant journals that are not indexed by *Sociological Abstracts*.

- International databases are built on serial publications, meaning that monographs, dissertations, and reports are only covered to a very limited degree. This means that there are fields that are not well represented in the review, because certain disciplinary and sub-disciplinary traditions (not least within the humanities) mainly publish their results in monographs and edited volumes that are not systematically covered by any international database.

- International databases mainly include literature written in English. This means that literature from regions and countries where English is not dominant is not well represented in the literature review.

*Sociological Abstracts* covers the central areas of the studied topic. It indexes journals that explicitly focus on ethnicity, diaspora, identity, and music. As shown above (Table 1), the reviewed articles are published in journals of broad scope, covering culture, migration, identity, and music. It should also be noted that this study is of an exploratory character, and is intended to take the initial steps towards characterising the field and its findings. There may be literature which was not reviewed that goes more deeply into, and/or covers other aspects of the role of music in identity formation in diaspora; however, until now no systematic review has been performed of the general topic of music’s role in ethnic identity formation in diaspora.

**Overview of investigated papers**

A total of 31 papers were analysed, consisting of 28 original papers and three literature reviews (the reviews are Bailey and Collyer 2006; Martiniello and Lafleur 2008; Whiteley *et al.* 2004). Table 1 (above) lists the 23 journals where they appear, while Table 2 (below) gives an overview of the content and character of the papers.

*Topic* is the general issue that the paper discusses, *empirical case* is the studied ethnic group and/or music genre, and *country* is the country where the study was conducted; *materials* indicates which kind of empirical data were gathered, and *theory/concepts* are the central concepts that were used in the study. Concerning this latter category, it should be noted that some papers are empirical studies that do not relate to any specific theory or make use of any theoretical concept. In those cases “central concepts” refers to the focus of the study’s analysis.

The analysed papers employ a variety of theoretical approaches and empirical focuses. It is important to note that none of them has a quantitative design, i.e., all articles are based on qualitative studies. Another characteristic is that the vast majority of the studies concerns diasporic communities in Europe and North America. Of the original articles studied (review articles excluded), 12 of them analyse cases from Europe, ten from North America (seven from the US and three from Canada), three from Asia (two from Japan and one from Jordan), and one each from Africa (Algeria), Australia and South America (Brazil). Thus, as stressed above, there is reason to believe that this result is partly caused by restricting the study to review articles published in the English language.

**Results: context, space, memory and politics**

The analysis of the findings is structured around four themes: context (the diasporic situation), space, collective memory (historical consciousness), and politics (subordination or resistance). To construct these themes is not unproblematic. However, after reading the papers, I have found that these four themes are able to summarise a variety of discussions. These themes are not discrete categories but are partly overlapping. Nevertheless, they capture various important aspects of the literature on music’s role in ethnic groups’ identity formation.

1. **The diasporic situation and cultural transformations**

In the reviewed literature, “diasporic groups” are a common theme. For these groups, music may have a special meaning. It can, in various ways, strengthen the identity and cohesion of a group (Baily and
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Empirical case/country</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Theory/central concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bafekr and Leman 1999</td>
<td>Immigrant identity and cultivation of homesickness</td>
<td>Iranian immigrants/Germany</td>
<td>Observation, Interviews</td>
<td>Alienation, Ethnocultural matrix, Socialisation, Status, Stigma, Identity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baily 2006</td>
<td>Process of de-stigmatisation</td>
<td>Local community of Indian Muslims musicians/UK</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baily and Collyer 2006</td>
<td>Migration and culture</td>
<td>Not relevant</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>Cultural production, Ethnomusicology, Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bennett 1997</td>
<td>Local knowledge, music and ethnic identity</td>
<td>Yong Asian playing Bhangra/UK</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bohlman 2011</td>
<td>Migration, music and mobility</td>
<td>Popular music / Europe, USA</td>
<td>Case studies</td>
<td>Aesthetic expression, Mobility discourse, Public space, Cultural expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boura 2006</td>
<td>Music and identity in diaspora</td>
<td>Greeks in diaspora/Germany</td>
<td>Observations, Interviews</td>
<td>Mental construct, Cultural concepts, Mediatisation, Circulation, Diasporic communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brennan 2012</td>
<td>Music and identity in diaspora</td>
<td>Yoruba community/USA</td>
<td>Observation, Interviews</td>
<td>Habits of listening, Cultural memory, Globalisation, Hegemony</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carstensen-Egwoum 2011</td>
<td>Ethnic identity in local context</td>
<td>Sub-Saharan musicians/Germany</td>
<td>Observation, Interviews</td>
<td>Ethnic identity, Authenticity, Social fields</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapman 2005</td>
<td>Sounds, instruments and ethnic identities</td>
<td>Lao identity/ Australia</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>Habits of listening, Cultural memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawson 2002</td>
<td>Popular culture, subaltern nationalism and hybridity</td>
<td>Asian minority/UK</td>
<td>Lyrics</td>
<td>Globalisation, Hegemony</td>
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<tr>
<td>Erol 2012</td>
<td>Music, dance, identity in diaspora</td>
<td>Alevi community/Canada</td>
<td>Observations, Interviews</td>
<td>Transnationalism, Expressive cultural practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eyerman 2002</td>
<td>Collective identity, memory and action</td>
<td>Civil rights movement, white power movement/USA and Sweden</td>
<td>Lyrics</td>
<td>Social movement, Political opportunity structure, Cultural memory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gonzalez 1999</td>
<td>Cultural politics, salsa and working-class community</td>
<td>Puerto Ricans diaspora/USA</td>
<td>Two albums’ lyrics and music</td>
<td>Colonial diaspora, Cultural politics, Cultural micropolitics</td>
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<td>Grams 2013</td>
<td>Public parades, rebuilding communities and local life</td>
<td>Afro-American working class/ USA</td>
<td>Participant observations</td>
<td>Public space, Cultural pragmatics</td>
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<td>Gross 1994</td>
<td>Cultural identities, music genres and marginalisation</td>
<td>Franco-Maghrebi/Algeria</td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>Line of flight Interculturalisation</td>
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<td>Ingalis 2012</td>
<td>Public musical performance as means to constitute community</td>
<td>Christian minority/Canada</td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>Politics of voice, Public sphere, Sonic identification</td>
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<tr>
<td>Klein 2005</td>
<td>Music’s therapeutic role in diaspora</td>
<td>Maltere Australian/Malta</td>
<td>Observations, Literature study</td>
<td>Re-membering, Witnessing, Place</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maya Knauer 2008</td>
<td>Music and ethnic identity</td>
<td>Afrocuban/USA</td>
<td>Participant observations</td>
<td>Spatial practices, Negotiated identities, Recognition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leonard 2005</td>
<td>Song and dance role for 2nd generation immigrants</td>
<td>Irish community/UK</td>
<td>Interviews, Questionnaire</td>
<td>Cultural identity, Authenticity, Sense of place</td>
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<tr>
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</table>
| Levy 2004               | Local ethnic music and national identity                             | Multi-ethnic music genre/Bulgaria             | Literature study | Exclusion-inclusion  
Local Other  
Hegemonic control |
| Lewis 2010              | Refugee communities and refugee community events and celebrations    | Refugee community events and celebrations/UK | Case study Observation | Community movements  
Rituals  
Transnationalism |
| Macias 2004             | Music dialogues across cultural borders                              | Music life in LA/USA                          | Literature study | Popular music  
Power struggle |
| Martiniello and Lafleur 2008 | Ethnic popular culture and political expression                     | Not relevant                                  | Literature study | Political participation  
Political expression  
Stigmatisation  
Cultural practices |
| Morrison 2005           | The construction of ethnic community                                 | Arab diaspora/ Brazil                         | Interviews  
Observations | Cultural practices |
| Murthy 2009             | Minority culture and negotiation national inclusion                  | Asian minorities/ UK                          | Observations  
Interviews | Hybridisation  
Authenticity  
Globalised performance |
| Piotrowska 2013         | Gypsy music’s position in European culture                          | Gypsy music/Europe                            | Literature study | The Other  
Non/assimilation |
| Pravaz 2010             | Music performance and well-being                                    | Afro-Brazilian ensembles/ Canada              | Observations  
Interviews | Emotions  
Musicking  
Cultural appropriation |
| Reyes-Ruiz 2005         | Cultural flow from Latino culture to Japan                           | Latino culture/Japan                          | Observations | Tropicalisation  
Transnationalisation  
Localised identity |
| Roberson 2010           | Diasporic hybridisation and cultural memory                          | Okinawa songs/Japan                           | Lyrics       | Diasporic consciousness  
Diaspora space |
| van Aken 2006           | Displaces culture as resource for spatial belonging                  | Palestinian refugees/Jordan                   | Observations  
Interviews | Sense of place  
Rituals  
Belonging  
Embodied identities |
| Whitley et al. 2004     | Music, space and diaspora                                           | Not relevant                                  | Literature study | Translocal cultural exchange  
Local communities  
Symbolic power |

Collyer 2006; Boura 2006; Erol 2012; Lewis 2010; Martiniello and Lafleur 2008; Reyes-Ruiz, 2005) and create a diasporic consciousness among its members (Brennan 2012; Roberson 2010). This function is achieved in various ways. One is that music becomes an important medium for maintaining contact with the culture of the home country (Boura 2006; Gross et al. 1994; Klein 2005). The musical practices of diasporic communities are often related to the culture of the homeland (Klein 2005; Maya Knauer 2008). Another way is that music can be a medium for contacting and engaging in cultural exchange with diasporic communities in other countries. A third way is that in groups and communities with political, religious, and social heterogeneity (and perhaps even social tensions), music may provide social cohesion; members can, despite their differences, unite around common expressive music practices (Erol 2012). Music can thus create identity within a group despite its members’ heterogeneity.

However, this view of the meaning and function of music should not be interpreted to mean that music primarily works to preserve a culture, that is, that it mainly functions to stabilise and fix a cultural belonging and collective identity. When music is expressed in a new cultural context, it tends to absorb new musical elements (Baily 2006; Baily and Collyer 2006; Bennett 1997; Murthy 2009). These transnational flows – both in the home

country and in the diasporic communities – mean that music is not only spread but also makes an imprint and has an influence that destabilises and develops cultural identity (Bennett 1997; Dawson 2002; Erol 2012; Reyes-Ruiz 2005). Additionally, music can be used to renegotiate established identities and belongings (Dawson 2002; Murthy 2009). Ethnically coded sub-cultures may question their assumed identities and transform by transmitting different cultural elements in their music practices.

Finally, the literature emphasises that the same musical genre can have different functions in different contexts and for different groups. For example, the type of migration may be important for the function of music in a specific community. Bailey and Collyer (2006) find a difference between diasporic communities created by refugee migration and those created by labour migration. Likewise, music can have different functions depending on the group’s position in its new (diasporic) situation: if a group’s cultural capital significantly changes in a new society, the original meaning of its music may change (Bailey 2006). There are also generational differences in the way people in diasporic situations relate to the music of their homeland (Chapman 2005; Klein 2005).

Thus, the literature shows that music can enable diasporic groups to strengthen, develop, and transform their collective identity and social cohesion.

2. Space for recognition and recovery

The relationship between identity formation and music is a recurring theme in most of the reviewed papers. Listening to and performing music facilitates the articulation, shaping and acknowledgement of a particular cultural or ethnic identity (Boura 2006; Chapman 2005; Erol 2012; Grams 2013; Gross et al. 1994; Klein 2005; Maya Knauer 2008; Morrison 2005; Roberson 2010; Van Aken 2006). Furthermore, national identities can be articulated and shaped through musical practices (Boura 2006; Chapman 2005; Leonard 2005; Maya Knauer 2008; Whiteley et al. 2004).

However, recognition requires space, especially public space. Several studies stress the complex relationship between cultural identity, musical performance, and public space. This is most explicit in Maya Knauer’s (2008) case study on Afro-Cuban cultural expression in New York City, which stresses the spatial dimension of music practices. Musical practices utilise, explore, and may even politicize public space. Knauer states that the right to use public space implicates the cultural expressions that are acceptable in a given place. A number of studies also stress that musical performance in public space serves not only to make a particular group visible in society, but it also shows that a particular culture should be part of the wider society (Bennett 1997; Bohlman 2011; Maya Knauer 2008; Van Aken 2006; Whiteley et al. 2004).

Additionally, studies find that after catastrophes, music in public space can serve to rebuild communities and recover cultural identities. For example, after hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, public parades that included musical performance (such as Mardi Gras) were an important part of the construction of meaning in the post-disaster city (Grams 2013). Through these parades, both participants and spectators became involved in processes that created a sense of social connection and cultural belonging that was not available to former residents who were displaced to other parts of the United States.

In a similar vein, Klein (2005), in her study of the Maltese-Australian community, stresses the importance of “witnessing”, a concept invented by Oliver (2001), which refers to a group’s reclamation and restoration of its subjectivity through musical performance. In musical performance, a subordinated group can act in a way that prevents them from being placed in the negative objectified position of “other”. Thus, the performance of engaged and living history can have healing functions by allowing the subordinated group to gain subjectivity and “response-ability”. According to Klein, this is a mode other than the mode of recognition, which is based on otherness, objectification and exclusion by a dominant culture that aims to receive recognition from those in power.

For displaced communities, there is a significant need to “make place” in displacement (van Aken 2006). The construction of community requires a place for reproduction and contestation. Musical performances are places where marginalised cultures find public expression and contribute to the construction of a particular community. That is, it is a space not only for
self-definition and inclusion but also for exclusion and construction of “the other”.

Thus, recognition and recovery are not necessarily aligned with each other. What both demand, however, is space. Recognition demands public space for articulation, expression, and acknowledgment, and recovery requires a space that promises continuity, because traumatised groups are groups that have lost their original lived space. Thus, the struggle for space is an important aspect of diasporic groups’ work to restore and renegotiate their belongings and identity. However, music is important not only for recognising or restoring an ethnic group’s identity because music and the context in which it develops may shape opportunities to transcend ethnic, cultural, and national borders (Dawson 2005).

3. Remembering and historical consciousness

Another theme, related to both recognition and recovery, concerns music’s role in remembrance and identity-maintenance, as well as the shaping of emotional ties within a community. Several studies stress that collective memories are formed, preserved, and defended through music (Klein 2005; Lewis 2010; Roberson 2010). Stories are told and collective experiences are narrated in songs. Music is thus a means to transfer a historical consciousness over generations and maintain and shape a diasporic consciousness, which becomes an important part of a group’s cultural identity (Roberson 2010). This concerns mainly music not in diaspora, but about diaspora, i.e., songs with narratives that concern their position and life in their new country. Furthermore, Klein (2005) finds that music performs an important function in transferring a particular identity from first-generation immigrants to those in the second and third generations who do not have their own experience of their parents’ and grandparents’ homeland. Klein uses the concept re-membering, which underscores that it is not an abstract collective memory that is maintained, but instead it is particular persons (group members) who remember. It is a challenge to pass this collective memory on to younger generations, and Klein finds that cultural performance (in her case, a style of Maltese folk music called Ghana) provided a means to enact identity and collective experience through stories of displacement and relocation. However, this process is not a simple reproduction of collective identity; instead, younger generations (who relate both to their parents’ ethnic identities and to the dominant culture) dynamically negotiate their fixed identity and history, which often leads to changed ethnic identities.

Whereas Klein and Roberson’s studies concern old migrants (meaning that a long time has passed since they left their homeland), other studies focus on new immigrants and the role of music in their new situation. Some studies find that music can enhance trust in the context of danger and disorientation and can have a therapeutic effect for a refugee community (Baily and Collyer 2006; Lewis 2010). Additionally, specific sounds, usually from instruments that are played in the homeland, may evoke strong memories and emotions for people living in diaspora (Chapman 2005). Thus an ethnic and/or national identity is maintained. However, in time this function seems to attenuate because second- and third-generation immigrants do not have this strong connection to their relatives’ homeland and musical tradition.

Thus, music can serve to maintain a collective identity by creating a space where the members internalise a “diasporic consciousness”. However, this is not a simple process of transmission whereby members passively absorb a collective identity, but it is rather a process of negotiation in which many sources are used to the shape a collective identity.

4. Politics: subordination or resistance

A number of papers discuss the way music can reproduce or transcend an ethnic community’s position in society, which raises questions about politics and the emancipatory potential of music. Music may be used to marginalise “the other”, but in a different way. Levy (2004) shows how the genre Chalga, which originally had multi-ethnic and oriental sources, was used by nationalist Bulgarians to draw a border between the Turkish and Romani people. Thus, groups that had originally been part of a musical genre were excluded and “local others” were constructed (others that are not geographically distinct from a certain national culture). The study shows how a cultural elite, by redefining a musical genre, drew boundaries between those who belonged to a dominant (national) culture and those who did not. Similarly,
Pitrowska (2013) shows how music associated with the Romani people (“gypsy music”) was partly incorporated into the national musical identity of certain countries and was thereby included as part of national culture, while at the same time this music was partly excluded – largely through processes of “racialisation” and “exoticisation” – and thus contributed to discrimination against the Romani people. This study shows the dynamic relationship between a specific music genre and the broader culture. Gypsy music was partly assimilated, which reflects a broader European phenomenon of fear and fascination, hatred and admiration, with regard to “the other” (in this case the Romani culture).

Both of these studies stress the way that music can be used to subordinate and even discriminate against ethnic groups. There are also studies that stress other aspects of music’s stigmatising effects. When people already have a marginalised position in society, their music may be referred to in negative terms by others. Some studies show how particular musical genres, associated with specific groups, can be questioned, especially from a nationalistic perspective (Levy 2004; Piotrowska 2013). The dominant culture’s views on particular music (and thus its practitioners) can lead musical practitioners to adapt to existing expectations and prejudgetments, often causing stereotypes to be confirmed (Carstensen-Egwuom 2011).

There are, however, examples of music performance that shift from stigmatised to non-stigmatised. Bailey’s (2006) study of a Muslim minority (Khalifa) who moved from India to the United Kingdom, shows how a group that was originally a disadvantaged minority in its place of origin, due to the caste system, migrated to a context where stigma was attached neither to their profession nor to their music. It is interesting to note that Bailey also finds that the ethnic group did not use music as a means to maintain their cultural identity. Instead of tracing their roots by connecting to traditional music, they invented hybrid forms of music, entailing a westernisation of the repertoire. This hybridisation resulted not in the composition of new songs, but in new performance styles (including the use of keyboard, electric guitar, bass guitar and percussion).

Finally, music can be a means for social mobilisation. Groups can resist and oppose social inequalities and uneven power relations through music (Gross et al. 1994; Martiniello and Lafleur 2008; Whiteley et al. 2004). Rap and hip-hop are two often-mentioned genres that are used by minorities in their struggle to achieve recognition by a dominant culture. However, as Eyerman (2002) shows in his study of white power music in contemporary neo-fascist movements, music can be used by social movements with very different positions and agendas. Irrespective of the political programme involved, music works to make a specific group visible in the wider society (Eyerman 2002; Klein 2005; Macias 2004; Maya Knauer 2008; Murthy 2009).

Thus, music can serve a political purpose; it can be part of discrimination against and stigmatisation of an ethnic group, as well as facilitating mobilisation and empowerment of a group and raising issues of social injustice and inequality.

**Discussion: gender, generalisation and the future**

The finding of this research review is that music has an important role in identity formation in diasporic situations. Music can serve both to stabilise and maintain identities and belongings – but also to destabilise them, providing new material and resources for identity formation. A number of studies have examined this, highlighting the importance of context (the diasporic situation), space, collective memory and politics.

As stressed in the method section, this study has limitations. Only including studies published in English probably reinforces the bias towards the western world; only six of the 31 reviewed articles investigate diasporic communities located outside Europe and North America (see Titon 2009a for a broad overview of music genres in all the world’s regions). The choice only to include journal articles, together with the fact that the selected database primarily indexes social and behavioural sciences, implies that subfields of relevance may be poorly covered. This can be due to the fact that some research traditions mainly publish in the form of monographs and book chapters, or because potentially relevant studies are not indexed as social or behavioural sciences (and hence are not part of the selected database). To some extent this is the case for the subfields of musicology and ethnomusicology, which implies that important contributions may not have been covered. In order to check whether the findings are in line

with recent discussions in ethnomusicology, I have reviewed the latest volumes of two key journals: *Ethnomusicology* (journal of the Society of Ethnomusicology) and *Ethnomusicology Forum* (journal of the British Forum for Ethnomusicology). This review finds a number of studies that are relevant but are not covered in the systematic literature review. However, none of these articles run contrary to the findings; indeed they rather support and deepen them.²

The exploratory character of this review also needs to be stressed; its aim is to glean broad insights from the research, map some trends, and discuss general aspects of studies of music’s role in identity formation. There may be studies that go more deeply into the issues or that discuss other areas than the four found here, but what the reviewed literature has revealed is still important and provides important insights into the diverse and complex function of music in diasporic settings.

On the basis of the reviewed literature, three aspects need to be discussed in more depth: differentiation (the role of gender), methodology (the justification of generalisation), and the future (the performative role of diasporic consciousness and its new conditions).

**Gender**

Many of the reviewed papers discuss power, inequality, and marginalisation. Focusing on the social position of a diasporic community, they analyse the role of class and ethnic identity in the construction of marginalisation and stigmatisation. Class is especially emphasised in the discussion on ethnicity and music, while age is addressed in some studies, especially in the context of generational change. Surprisingly, only a handful of studies elaborate on gender issues in any depth, despite the fact that musical performance to a large extent seems to be gender-coded. (For example, most of the studied cases are populated by men.) Some of the reviewed literature shows that music and dance often function to reproduce and strengthen gender identities and relations, i.e., that practices and spaces shaped by the performance of these practices are gendered (Dawson 2002; Leonard 2006; Lewis 2010; Maya Knauer 2008; Roberson 2010; van Aken 2006). However, music does not only contribute to the enculturation of gendered identities, it also can challenge them, as well as their practices and relations. For example, Bennett (1997) describes how young Asian women are given the opportunity to become community DJs and creatively shape tracks in which Bhangra music is mixed with contemporary music, such as rap and house, and shows that this position influences their relations and identities. Thus, music creates a space that can stabilise and destabilise established gender identities, often both at the same time. An important area for future studies is thus to investigate gendered aspects of the stabilisation and transformation of social identities.

**Methodology**

The reviewed literature is mainly of a case-oriented character, where particular groups, phenomena, or events are studied through the use of interviews and observations. Ethnography is the most common method; it is highly relevant because there is no other way to understand the role of music in diaspora than to investigate it in its real life context, and this methodological approach provides a rich, detailed, and complex understanding (Gobo 2008).

The reviewed studies show the manifold functions of music, the decisive role of context and the ongoing processes of essentialisation and hybridisation of social identities and cultural belongings. Some studies are limited to only drawing conclusions about the studied case, whereas others also draw more general conclusions. In both quantitative and qualitative studies it is always necessary to methodologically justify the making of generalisations, to explain how and to what extent results are transferable to cases and contexts other than the one studied. For studies making use of more intensive methods of data analysis, methodological strategies exist (such as re-contextualisation and abstraction) for making results transferable to other contexts or for discovering fundamental mechanisms behind specific empirical results (Kvale 2007; Sayer 2010). None of the reviewed literature, however, includes any discussion of how to gain more general knowledge from particular cases. This is therefore an important aspect to discuss in future studies.

**The future**

As shown in this research review, music plays a dynamic role in social life and cultural experience; it can be a means for individual or collective self-understanding, for political mobilisation, for strengthening a group’s cultural identity as well as transcending it, and for reinforcing boundaries

between groups as well as perforating them. This is because music provides cultural resources and expressive practices that, consciously or unconsciously, are used by individuals and groups to understand themselves and their place in the world, to structure social relations, to shape identities, and to develop actions. Music therefore works performatively: the past is not only remembered but also shaped; the diasporic consciousness is at once a resource and a restriction in the social positioning and orientation of groups, and thus has consequences for the future. However, the reviewed studies primarily focus on the current situation and explain the music’s role in the present, giving only limited attention to the consequences of this (temporary) diasporic consciousness. This may partly be a result of the methodological approach chosen, which stresses particular cases and their settings, and rarely investigates the wider implications for the surroundings. In a world characterised by migration, transnational networks, and global flows, there is likely to be a growing need for knowledge about identity formation in diaspora, including the role of music in this process. Increasing transnational migration makes it likely that new diasporic communities will be formed, and old ones renewed; immigrants and refugees will have to develop political and cultural strategies to navigate in their new contexts. Also, many host countries that previously welcomed cultural diversity have now initiated political and public discussions on the need for assimilation strategies and less inclusive citizenship for immigrants. This reorientation in migration policies and understandings of integration constitutes a partly new context for the shaping and negotiation of diasporic consciousness. Changes in context provide new opportunities (and restrictions) for identity formation, and music will continue to be one important way for immigrants and refugees to maintain, negotiate and develop their identities in their new setting.

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Appendix: The selected database, Sociological Abstracts

(Source: http://proquest.libguides.com/SocAbs)

Sociological Abstracts indexes 1,800 serial journals in the social and behavioural sciences. It covers 29 broad areas, among them Culture and Social Structure, Social Psychology and Group Interaction, Women’s Studies, Poverty and Homelessness, and Race and Ethnicity. The selection policy classifies journals into three categories. Core journals are journals published by sociological associations, groups, faculties, and institutions, or with the term “sociology” in their titles. All substantive articles appearing in these journals are abstracted and indexed. Priority journals are drawn from related social sciences (such as anthropology, communication, education, medicine and political science) that address topics of sociological relevance. More than 50 per cent of the substantive articles appearing in these journals are selected for coverage. Selective sources are journals from related social sciences that occasionally publish works of sociological relevance. Less than 50 per cent of the substantive articles appearing in these journals are covered.

The indexed journals have geographically broad coverage and scope, and the list of their titles runs from Aboriginal Linguistics to Zimbabwe Journal of Educational Research. Despite this broad coverage, the distribution of the index’s journals is mainly in the western world: North America 60%, Western Europe 31%, Eastern Europe 4%, Asia, Middle East and Africa 3%, South and Central America 1%, and Australia and New Zealand 1%.

Sociological Abstracts includes journals related to the central concepts used this paper:

- Ethnicity (such as Ethnic and Racial Studies; Ethnicities; Journal on Ethnopolitics and
Minority Issues in Europe; Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies; Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies)

- Diaspora (such as Contours. A Journal of the African Diaspora; South Asian Diaspora; Wadabagei. A Journal of the Caribbean and Its Diaspora)

- Identity (such as African Identities; Identities. Global Studies in Culture and Power; National Identities; Social Identities)

Music (International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music; Music and Arts in Action)

This means that Sociological Abstracts has broad coverage of journals and topics, and covers most aspects of identity-construction in diaspora. There are, however, some central journals within the fields of musicology and ethnomusicology that it does not cover (e.g., Ethnomusicology and Ethnomusicology Forum).

Notes

1. Leonard (2005) includes a questionnaire, but it consists of open questions which are qualitatively analysed.

2. Context: Ramnarine (2007b) shows how diasporic groups relate to views on diasporic relativism and diasporic essentialism, stressing that diaspora is not only about understanding the past but also about shaping the future; Douglas (2013) shows how an ethnic identity was maintained and performed in a multi-ethnic setting through the use of distinct musical traditions. Memory: Sheleman (2006) discusses music as a site of memory, where historical narratives are shaped, something that is also stressed by Cidra (2015); Kyker (2013) investigates how transnational identities are produced and negotiated through musical listening, with songs making it possible for listeners to symbolically relocate themselves within the social setting of a remembered home. Politics: Cidra (2015) shows how songs questioned the legacy of colonial narratives and provided embodied experience of a diasporic present; Jung (2014) examines how social media provide opportunities to circumvent racial barriers in the music industry; Alajaji (2013) shows how the re-diasporisation of a community affected the inclusivity of an ethnic identity, making it more exclusive; Kyker (2013) discusses how audiences routinely interpreted songs about migration and diaspora as subtle criticism of postcolonial domestic politics, whereas Robinson (2013) investigates how residents claim a regional music traditions as their own, and thereby express local identification as well as national patriotism.

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