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Participatory Music-making in Diasporic Contexts

Bridging the Past, Present, and Future in Cultural Production

Introduction

Between 2014 and 2017, as one of a group of six researchers spanning the fields of musicology, music education, sociology, and ethnology, I conducted the ethnographic study *Music, identity, and multiculturalism: A study of the role of music in ethnic-based associations* in Sweden's three largest cities: Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö. We investigated the connection between participation in musical practices in ethnic-based communities in Sweden and how such participation relates to self-understanding, meaning-making, identity formation, and social relationships between individuals and groups in society (Westvall, Lidskog, and Pripp 2018). Many countries are characterized by a diversity of languages, religions, ethnic groups, and cultural practices, with music often playing a central role in these contexts. Lundberg, Malm, and Ronström (2000) highlighted the importance of exploring the relationship between music as an expression of societal transformation processes and music as the impetus of such changes. Consequently, a key purpose of our study was to investigate what music "means" in these contexts; that is, how it serves as a manifestation and marker of individual cultural identity to foster a sense of belonging on a collective level and connect to wider society as a whole. The central questions for this investigation were: 1) What significance does music have for participants in ethnic-based associations in Sweden, and 2) What impact does musical involvement within such associations have on the participants' sense of social belonging in other contexts?

We conducted fieldwork among musicians, dancers, and other members in a number of associations with varying ethnic and national affiliations. Our research team carried out participatory observations, semi-structured interviews (in which we paid particular attention to the life stories of individual musicians and dancers), and focus group interviews in Finnish and Chilean associations in Malmö; in Gambian, Bosnian, Croatian, and Romani associations in Gothenburg; and both Kurdish and Swedish folk music and dance associations in Stockholm.

Our research led us to a wide range of musical activities. Some were committed to maintaining a collective narrative in the present by emphasizing certain cultural expressions or accentuating elements of descent and cultural heritage that the members wanted to cherish. However, we also identified at least seven forms of cultural produc-

tion in our study wherein various kinds of musical activities held particular importance for the participants in the associations since they represented not only aspects of bonding, but also social, cultural, and creative bridging (Putnam 2000) to various local and global communities. A particular interest in relation to ethnic identification in this study was how the members in ethnic-based associations expressed themselves through processes of *musicking* and cultural production. Were they feasibly re-negotiating various “manuals” for their ethnic affiliation through something that could be defined as the dynamics between *being* (keeping to the “manual”) and *becoming* (what one can “make” oneself into) (Hall 1990)?

This article has three interconnected purposes: 1) To present findings from this project that specifically relate to different forms of cultural production in ethnic-based associations; 2) To consider how diasporic experiences can be investigated and explored through cultural production and the explicit processes of *musicking*; 3) To discuss how citizenship can be understood and expressed through such participatory forms of cultural practices.

Music as a prominent trait in ethnic-based associations in Sweden

Sweden has a long tradition of civic engagement in social movements and associations—a fact that has strongly contributed to the development of the welfare state. There has long been a strong political goal related to the social inclusion of immigrants through popular education and cultural activities, wherein parallels between association membership and democratic principles have been evident (Pripp and Westvall 2020; Söderman and Westvall 2017). Membership in associations demonstrates an intention to work together on equal terms to search for common ground solutions, which requires a sense of mutual trust and shared responsibilities (Demokratiutredningen 2000).

The large influx of foreign-born laborers to Sweden in the 60s and 70s led the state to encourage immigrants to organize themselves into ethnic-based associations. The objective was to create an opportunity for immigrant communities to preserve “their culture.” The hope was that these associations would help to underscore their status as ethnic minorities, thereby enabling them to gain a collective voice in Swedish society. This political intention, as well as subsequent financial support from the state, stemmed from the belief that participation in associations—as part of the popular movement tradition—would support individuals’ experiences of democratic processes (as previously mentioned), which would subsequently sustain social integration and political involvement in society on a wider scale (Khayati and Dahlstedt 2014; Westvall et al. 2018; Pripp and Westvall 2020).

The ethnic-based associations undertook the organization of activities for and with immigrants, wherein music and dance would become central features. Cultural activities in the associations were supported by a top-down political structure and were considered a “tool for integration.” Music was understood to be a cultural symbol with a *catalytic* function, meaning that it strengthens a group’s internal collective identity. It was also thought to have an *emblematic* function (Lundberg and Ternhag 1996), in

which music would represent what the group wanted to convey externally. Based on popular educational ideas of “self-learning,” volunteering, and participation, the aim of musical activities within the framework of social movements was to promote intercultural acceptance and understanding (Veblen and Olsson 2002, 731). As such, musical engagement in associations could be regarded as a way of exercising citizenship (Söderman and Westvall 2017).

Various forms of cultural production in connection with the associations

The overall results from our study revealed that the original political emphasis on the catalytic and emblematic functions of such musical activities evolved into an emphasis on *producing culture* (Lidskog, Pripp, and Westvall 2018b). Thus, the music-making that took place in the ethnic-based associations was often shaped by a repertoire based on specific musical traditions. However, that same repertoire was simultaneously influenced by the internal and external processes within and beyond the associations, whether from the surrounding contacts in society, the country of origin, or by the more diasporic contexts to which the members of the associations related. Consequently, the musical practices were not merely about focusing on replicating a specific repertoire and tradition, but more often involved a more contemporary form of cultural *production* wherein certain cultural artifacts were altered and renegotiated.

In addition to their activities within the associations, our findings indicate that many of the members were simultaneously engaging in musical and social dialogues with other individuals and groups in the surrounding society. For example, many interviewees were involved in musical performances and productions in their associations and unrelated genres/styles outside of them. This demonstrates that the *music-making* processes did not “lock” the participants into a certain tradition. Instead, the production of culture was also a chief concern. What follows is a description of seven forms of such cultural production observed in our study.

The first form was *to be in the music*, which refers to how members of the ethnic-based associations practiced music with the primary purpose of *musical immersion*. This immersion consisted of listening, playing, dancing, and creating music, as well as experiencing “flow,” contemplation, and bodily sensations through music and interactions with others. For some association members, the musical activities were perceived as “being in a musical act,” which they described as pleasurable and meaningful. Music-making was generally perceived as a significant activity that was important to participate in. However, a correlation between music-making in the associations and the ethnic or national connections that these associations represented was not typically evident.

The second form, *engaging in cultural production*, describes how the members organized, marketed, and carried out musical events, which include various forms of musical performances, choreography, and technology. Through organizing and facilitating rehearsals and recordings, the associations’ members developed their skills in marketing and networking. The Gambian club in central Gothenburg, the Kurdish associa-

tion's activities in Stockholm, the Swedish folk dance association's events on a local, national, and international level, and the Finnish association's events in local nursing homes are examples of events organized, performed, and facilitated by the associations' members (Pripp 2018a; Pripp 2018b; Sernhede 2018; Söderman 2018). A significant feature of this form of cultural production was the intergenerational apprenticeship processes observed in Croatian, Bosnian, Swedish, and Kurdish associations, which involved different age groups to ensure the regrowth of dance and music competencies within the associations (Sernhede and Westvall 2018; Pripp 2018a; 2018b).

A third form was *diasporic cultural production*, which refers to how new forms of music are influenced by and developed within the diaspora, particularly through communication between musicians of a shared ethnic background living in different parts of the world. For instance, when conflicts and wars impact Kurds in other parts of the world, this is reflected in the Kurdish association in Stockholm. In the Bosnian and Romani settings, the contacts and influences across the respective diasporas were also significant. For example, recordings and music videos are co-created by musicians over large distances, thereby circulating forms of cultural and musical expression throughout the larger communities. In this sense, *diasporic cultural production* refers to "new" settings and interactions, where the music-making is influenced by past and present factors affecting the larger diaspora.

The fourth form focuses on contributions to and participation in the *city's cultural production and cultural life*, where the associations—and the individual musicians within them—are active and visible in the local music scene. While association activities have become increasingly common in the suburbs over recent decades, they remain present and thrive in the central parts of the cities, especially during city festivals or similar events that aim to highlight the (cultural) diversity of the city. It is evident that the associations—such as the Gambian, Croatian, Bosnian, and Romani associations in Gothenburg—are integral parts of the city's cultural life and often serve as hubs that attract musicians from different backgrounds. It is there that contacts and networks are negotiated and new constellations of transnational musical interactions and performances are sought.

The fifth form of cultural production is *representative and alternative images that challenge stigmas and derogatory stereotypes*, which highlights the participants' self-definition and how they communicate them externally through what could be considered an emblematic approach (Lundberg and Ternhag 1996). For example, one can present oneself as a Kurd, Chilean, Finn, or Swede by using certain props and specific forms of performances, which can be considered a narrative about what it means to have a certain cultural identity in the context of Sweden. It is also a subtle way to express dissent (Shelemay 2011) in relation to the majority of the population's preconceptions of an ethnic group. These narratives can be intended to counteract some generalizations and disparaging perceptions of a particular ethnic group in the Swedish context. In doing so, these narratives reflect the participants' own experiences of Sweden as a locale and thus say something about not only the past but particularly about the present and future aspirations for these communities. In some associations, cross-genre and hybrid

forms are created, such as inter-ethnic hip-hop groups that aim to counteract ethnification, culturalization, and racialization from the majority of society.

The sixth form of cultural production addresses the endorsement of *citizenship* through music-making, which encapsulates the ethnic-based associations' goals of perceiving and involving their members as equal citizens in Sweden, regardless of their ethnic affiliation. This approach includes "Swedish" ethnicity as one ethnicity, but without the special status one might assume.

The seventh form of cultural production focuses on *minority-crossing cultural production and multi-ethnic coexistence*, which emphasizes how the associations are active in inter-minority contexts—once again reflecting concerns for both the present and future of the communities involved. Both traditional forms of music performance and more hybrid music and dance styles are included, depending on the context and purpose. Thus, musical interaction becomes a site for socially-, culturally-, and ethnically-informed connections between minority groups and features complex and sometimes contradictory aspects of coexistence. Musicians and artists with diverse ethnic and national backgrounds collaborate in solidarity associations, cultural centers, club scenes, etc. In this way, organically inclusive and equitable diversity is generated, which comprises *both* minority musicians *and* those who identify as part of the Swedish ethnic majority. In the context of the ethnic-based associations, the seven aforementioned forms of cultural production foreground cultural expression in the process of taking on the ever-widening societal responsibilities associated with citizenship (Lidskog et al. 2018b; Pripp and Westvall 2020).

Which attributes connect a musical community?

Music and dance are often examples of expressive forms of culture that can create heightened moods and experiences (Ronström 1992). Music is an art form that many people draw on to convey their identity and regulate their emotional life (Green 2011; Ruud 1997). Hence, musical engagement can be a means of self-expression, interacting with others, and demonstrating community involvement. The concept of *community music* captures how collaborative, participatory musical practices—whether it concerns audience participation in performances or peer learning in informal workshops—have the potential to empower individuals and groups in various ways. In such musical communities, the attention to musical and social interaction *between* individuals is often more central than individual music-making (Higgins 2007; Schippers and Bartleet 2013; Turino 2016). Community music practices are generally characterized by being grass-root initiatives. However, in the Swedish context, the national and local authorities have traditionally endorsed funding for cultural activities such as choirs, orchestras, and bands, as well as 'ethnic-based' cultural groups (Söderman and Westvall 2017).

A musical community is a social group in which the participants are connected by and through music; however, the reasons for this connection can differ. Shelemay (2011) proposed a framework involving three major aspects: *descent*, *dissent*, and *af-*

finité. These three aspects do not constitute separate units; instead, they can occur in different constellations where *descent*, *dissent*, and *affinity* are combined in various ways. Musical communities can thus be joined by *descent* through what is understood from within to be shared identities, whether they are grounded in historical fact, newly invented, or emerging from a combination of historical circumstance and creative transformation (Shelemay 2011, 367).

A community can also be connected through an interest in opposing (*dissent*) something (often political), where music becomes an expressive form of resistance. Shelemay (2011) stated that many dissent communities emerge through music-making in part because music can give voice to dissent, while partially masking its critical edge and reducing the risk of retribution from more powerful forces (370).

Affinity is the aspect of uniting a music community first and foremost through individual preferences, followed quickly by a desire for social proximity or association with others who share those preferences. Music has proven to be a particularly powerful mechanism for catalyzing affinity in communities, in which straightforward aesthetic and personal preferences may—but do not necessarily—intersect with other powerful diacritics such as ethnic identity, age cohort, or gender identity (373).

Thus, *descent*, *dissent*, and *affinity* can be seen as robust modes of interaction that foster community connections and unite them around varied forms of musical participation.

Different dimensions of music-making and musicking

Participatory aspects of music-making can be a means of identity formation and creating a sense of community and affiliation. It is a socialization process that includes experiences of diversity, collaboration, and interaction since the actual musical activities can create a sense of belonging for individuals. Turino (2016) claimed that participatory music practices can provide alternative models for citizenship, expanding on O’Flynn’s (2005) suggestion that “musical activities and ways of thinking about music relate to the wider beliefs and values of the society concerned” (195).

Aspects of solidarity and sensitivity in a musical act can highlight “the different needs and likes of others” (Turino 2016, 309), which can cause habit changes within individuals and groups. Such changes impact society in a wider sense by affecting the ways people practice citizenship (ibid.).

Since participatory music-making focuses on performances *with* others, Turino (2016) emphasizes the importance of including participants with an eclectic range of abilities in the same performance to create the basis for inspiring and motivating participation for all. This means that participatory performances need to include musical roles that vary in complexity and the degree of required knowledge. A concept related to Turino’s definition of participatory performances is *musicking*, or “to music,” which was introduced by Small (1998) as a way to describe the varied practices and various forms of actual immersion in a musical act:

To 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, 9).

The process of *musicking* involves dialogical relationships based on encounters and mutuality (Westvall 2018) where people can discover, shape, and explore identities and express who they are. Froehlich (2007) emphasizes *musicking* as a purposeful social act of music-making in which both the performers and listeners are involved. *Musicking* can also work as an “investigative tool” and can be described as a social and cultural act that highlights relationships between people, sounds, body movements, and space (Small 1998; Odendaal, Kankkunen, Nikkanen, and Väkevä 2014). Hess (2019) emphasizes that the connective aspects of *musicking* represent ways of creating community and building relationships (42), while Camlin (2014) highlights that while there is a musical purpose in participatory performances at all times, there are generally extra-musical purposes as well. Therefore, Camlin stresses the importance of considering a dialogical approach while discussing aspects of musical quality in participatory music settings. He notes that “the quality of any given instance of musicking—including participatory music—needs to be measured by reference to an integrated and dialogic measure of quality across aesthetic, praxial and social dimensions” (115). Following Camlin’s reasoning, Gaunt et al. (2021) suggested that:

“[m]usicking” deconstructs dialectical opposition between the values of social interaction and the values of abstract art. Rather it creates shared ground between musicians’ artistry and social interaction, and opens up for widening perspectives on the potential of musical practices [6].

Citizenship and cultural practices

How does the concept of citizenship relate to the arts and cultural production more specifically? Within the framework of ethnic-based associations, citizenship seemed to be a vital part of the agenda, even while retaining possibilities for diverse and unique cultural expressions in a diasporic context. The musical activities in the ethnic-based associations were based on the fact that they held some common significance for the association’s members. Some members sang or played, while others DJed or danced. Some listened to music or learned how to play instruments, while others arranged performance-related activities.

As a key activity in these associations, music can thus be understood as a way of exercising citizenship through musical and social interactions in a broader sense (Lidskog, Pripp, and Westvall 2018a), which unites the processes of *musicking* (Small 1998) and participatory performances (Turino 2016). Turino argued that participatory musical practices can provide complementary models for citizenship, and he discussed the impact that music-making can have on “fundamental habit change” within

individuals and social cohorts, which can subsequently shape alternative forms of practicing citizenship. He suggested that:

(a) they operate according to values and practices diametrically opposed to a capital ethos; (b) they are voluntarily open to anyone who is interested and, by nature, engender a kind of egalitarian consensus building; (c) they are pleasurable and, for some people, downright addictive, leading to a continuity of involvement, and thus the redundancy of practice necessary for habit change; and (d) they become the basis of special social *cohorts* (voluntary social groups drawn together by enthusiasm for the activity and by shared, preexisting tendencies toward the broader values that underline the activity) (Turino 2016, 298).

Elliot, Silverman, and Bowman (2016) stated that the concept of *artistic citizenship* captures how artistry (in an inclusive sense, involving amateur as well as professional practitioners) comprises “civic–social–humanistic–emancipatory responsibilities, obligations to engage in art making that advances social ‘goods’” (7). Elliot (2012) discussed an expanded notion of citizenship that encompasses local, regional, national, and international aspects, to mention a few. He noted that citizenship is a fluid concept that incorporates social and emotional aspects that “ebb and flow as a person’s and a nation’s circumstances change” (23), and Elliot et al. (2016) highlighted how the emotionality and sociality of music-making specifically endorse social bonding and group cohesion on many levels.

Furthermore, Alvaro Neder (2019) investigated political activism and cultural production in a sector of the marginalized communities in Rio de Janeiro and their efforts “against stigmatization and for citizenship and acknowledgement of its contributions to culture” (209). In this sense, the production of culture is a way of taking political action *through* the arts, and the communities are often united by aspects of dissent and affinity (Shelemay 2011). Simultaneously, the artistic activity itself emotionally, artistically, and socially empowers the people involved.

Additionally, Bradley (2018) unpacked the complexity of the term citizenship, particularly with reference to negative connotations of the concept that may result in forms of symbolic violence, particularly against those who are not counted as citizens in relation to the nation. She discussed the link between artistry and social responsibility and problematized how metaphorical descriptions of citizenship can clash with the legal meanings of the concept:

What might artistic citizenship as concept mean for those vulnerable to machinations of the state: persons without citizenship status, such as immigrants to a new homeland, or refugees who have fled dangerous conditions only to meet rejection at the doors on which they knock? (Bradley 2018, 73)

On the other hand, Tully (2014) presented the concept of “diverse citizenship,” which emphasizes the importance of horizontal relationships between people in a society. Tully claimed:

Rather than looking at citizenship as a status within an institutional framework backed up by world-historical processes and universal norms, the diverse tradition looks on citizenship as *negotiated practices*, as praxis—as actors and activities in contexts (Tully 2014, 35).

The notion of diverse citizenship is signified by the active engagement and agency of citizens rather than top-down governed subordinates who are dependent on formalized membership to a nation-state.

Ethnic-based associations that integrate musical activities can be regarded as cohorts that target the inner life of the association (i.e., its members), where musical activities such as playing, singing, dancing, and listening occur “internally.” However, according to the findings of our earlier study (Westvall et al. 2018), music-making also considers external contexts through open concerts, dance performances, courses, festivals, etc. This push-pull of internal/external musical performances can thus be understood as a process of citizen engagement through the arts, echoing Tully’s definition of diverse citizenship.

Being and becoming through cultural practices

Participatory music-making and performances were significant features of the activities in ethnic-based associations. In addition to various aspects of citizenship relating to cultural practices, these circumstances were connected to a range of cultural production within the frameworks of the aforementioned associations.

Hall (1990) reminded us that “[c]ultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything historical, they undergo constant transformation.” (225) In a diasporic context, there is a strong likelihood that expressive forms of culture also transform; hence, new forms will be created, impacting musical genres as well as cultural identities. It “is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’” (ibid).

Our study found that individual musicians sometimes felt restricted to specific “ethnic contexts,” while others drew on their involvement in the associations as a means of finding valuable pathways to an array of meaningful musical networks in new local and global settings through shared affinity. This indicates a transition from a (past) notion of ethnic-based association as separate communities performing “their culture”—with descent as a common purpose—to a (present) platform upon which individuals can perform music in various inter-ethnic and cross-minority contexts that display the cultural diversity of their cities. As a principal motive for engagement in musical communities, Shelemay’s framework of *descent*, *dissent*, and *affinity* underlines the transformation processes at play through *musicking* in diasporic contexts. The definitions of the three aspects of *descent*, *dissent*, and *affinity* can be a way of understanding how diasporic aspects of the past, present, and future can merge and thus have an impact on the participants’ sense of coherence in a given musical context. Also of particular relevance are the identity formation processes among a large group of second-generation immigrants in Sweden. Various diasporic experiences are continu-

ously present in their lives through narratives, transnational networks, and expressive forms of culture, such as music and dance. In this sense, they have a relationship to a “home country” that they might never have visited, but which nevertheless affects their perception of ethnic identification and sense of belonging. In this manner, the notion of ethnic and/or national identification in this generation could be connected to Stuart Hall’s definition of “new ethnicities” (1996).

Turino (2016) underscores how participatory music practices can provide complementary models for citizenship, which also highlights the power of music as both an expression of, and impetus for, societal transformation processes (Lundberg et al. 2000). This indicates that it is not only the associations and their members that are affected by these participatory processes. It also suggests the potential for present and future interactions between individuals and groups in society at large. In light of this, they also suggest a new framing of “citizenship,” one that underscores the importance of understanding the horizontal relationships between people with diverse experiences and knowledge as negotiated practices, just as Tully proposes: “as praxis—as actors and activities in contexts” (2014, 35). Therefore, by systematically continuing to draw on the potential of *music* and cultural production as investigative tools, we could gain further understanding of how citizenship can be exercised and conveyed through cultural practices for both individuals and society at large.

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