

Echoes of Home:

Understanding the Role of Music in the Former Yugoslavian Diaspora's Cultural Identity in
the Netherlands

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Master's Thesis

June 2025

Word Count: 20.000

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how music functions as a cultural practice through which second-generation former Yugoslavian diaspora youth in the Netherlands construct their identities. While first-generation migrants often have direct lived experiences from their homeland, second-generation individuals relate to their heritage through cultural memory, everyday cultural practices, and digital platforms. Furthermore, although cultural identity among first-generation migrants has been studied, there is little academic attention to how second-generation youth engage with their cultural background, especially through music. This study thus addresses that gap by exploring how contemporary Balkan genres influence identity formation among the second-generation diaspora. Furthermore, the theoretical framework draws from cultural identity theory, diaspora studies, and digital media studies, which allows music to be understood as a symbolic tool for negotiation and belonging. These perspectives define identity as dynamic and shaped by both shared and personal experiences, and transnational flows. Moreover, this research will be conducted using a qualitative method. Data was collected through ten semi-structured interviews with second-generation diaspora who engage with contemporary Balkan music genres. Later, thematic analysis was used to interpret the participants' reflections and identify patterns across the data. The findings revealed that music serves several important functions: it offers an emotional connection to a symbolic homeland; provides space for performing hybrid identities; supports intergenerational cultural transmission, especially through language, and makes it possible to participate in transnational cultural communities via digital platforms like TikTok and Spotify. Instead of passively inheriting culture, participants use music to reinterpret their sense of belonging as personal to them. Their engagement illustrates a dynamic process of developing cultural ties in a digitally connected and globalized society. This thesis argues that music promotes more cultural continuity and connection while acting as an essential tool for negotiating the dual context of being both Dutch and Balkan. Lastly, this research contributes to academic debates on cultural identity formation, popular music research, and digital diaspora studies. It additionally has a broader societal impact by highlighting the need for acknowledging second-generation youth as actively involved in forming their identities; on their own terms and often through the everyday, emotional interaction with music.

KEYWORDS: Music, Cultural Identity, Diaspora, Former Yugoslavia, Netherlands

Acknowledgements

This thesis is the result not only of academic work, but of a personal journey through identity and memory. I want to thank everyone who openly shared their stories, emotions, and experiences with me. Without you, this research would not have been possible. To all those navigating life between cultures, your voices inspired every page of this research. Your stories reflect not just individual experiences, but a collective feeling of what it means to belong everywhere, yet nowhere at all.

Therefore, I dedicate this work to the diaspora.

To the children of Yugoslavia. Though divided by borders, forever united by music.

“Dođe mi nekad da ostavim sve i odem,
Znam da preko je bolje, ali preko nije moje.”

- Coby, “Biseri iz blata” (2020)

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1. Introduction

“Music was there before we even learned how to speak, before religion, before politics, before everything.”

- Goran Bregović (as cited in Shand, 2019)

1.1 Background

Music played a significant role in shaping identity and creating a sense of togetherness in former Yugoslavia, both during and after its existence. In the 1980s, Yugoslav New Wave music was able to create a shared cultural identity among Yugoslav youth despite their ethnic differences (Mozara, 2017, p. 6). Bands like Bijelo Dugme were widely loved which fostered a sense of community across the country. Initially, this music was therefore used to build a common Yugoslav identity among the people (Mozara, 2017, p. 2). Today, for the former Yugoslavian diaspora in the Netherlands, music is once again able to serve as a medium for negotiating, expressing, and preserving their cultural identity. Even after the country's dissolution, music continues to act as a tool for shaping its diaspora's cultural identity (Baker, 2016, p. 2). While this New Wave music was once relevant in unifying this region, it has now evolved in response to globalization, generational shifts and technological progression. In more recent years, music in the Balkans and its diaspora has developed into more modern and hybrid genres, following the rest of world (Vilotijević, 2020, p. 4). According to Vilotijević (2020, p. 8), after the 2010's the music scene has shifted to contemporary styles such as Balkan Pop-folk, Trepfolk and Hip-Hop. This type of music is now often times accessed through social media channels and digital platforms, which shows that technology plays an important role in discovering these cultural products and explains how it is able to circulate transnationally (Jung, 2014, p. 114).

Moreover, the concept of cultural identity is central to this research and, in the context of this study, is understood as the dynamic process shaped by the diaspora's connection to their heritage, their lived experiences and interactions with cultural products such as music (Brah, 1996, p. 16; Hall, 1990, p. 235). More specifically, this thesis will focus its lens on second-generation diaspora youth, for which cultural identity is not only inherited through familial ties but is also constructed through their everyday lived experiences; including their consumption of popular Balkan music genres such as Hip-Hop and rap. In this thesis, Vilotijević's (2020, p. 1) definition for popular Balkan music will be

used, namely: “Balkan popular music is contemporary popular folk music produced in the countries of the Balkans and intended for the Balkan markets (specifically, the people in the Western Balkans and diaspora communities).” These genres have specifically been chosen since they play an important part in representing contemporary Balkan identity through music (Vilotijević, 2020, p. 2). Trepfolk, for instance, has gained great popularity among the Balkan youth and diaspora, since this genre is able to blend traditional Balkan elements with more modern global influences.

Furthermore, this group holds a unique position since they are often navigating and balancing both the heritage of their parents and the societal norms and values of the country they were born in. The first-generation differs from second-generation immigrants, a term used here to refer to the individuals that were born in the Netherlands to parents who had migrated from another country, in the sense that they have direct experiences of their country of origin, while the second-generation individuals do not (Crul & Schneider, 2010, p. 1251). In this study, the country of origin will often be referred to as homeland, which is understood as the country from which the parents emigrated; in this case one of the former Yugoslav republics (Brah, 1996, p. 27). Navigating two cultures can create challenges in terms of the diaspora’s identity and sense of belonging. The second generation might experience feeling caught in-between cultures by feeling disconnected from their homeland while simultaneously not feeling fully accepted in the Netherlands. According to previous research done on diasporic identity, these individuals often feel the pressure to integrate in society while also being expected to uphold their cultural values (Hall, 1990, pp. 225 - 226). As a result, they must continuously negotiate their position in both contexts.

Following Brubaker’s (2004, p. 4) notion of diaspora, this study will therefore define diaspora not only as the displacement of a group, but as a way for these people to create an identity for themselves and feel a symbolic belonging with a certain country or heritage. This highlights how the diaspora needs to continuously navigate their identity formation, without experiencing their culture firsthand, which can present both challenges and opportunities when trying to construct their personal connection to their cultural background (Niraula, 2024, p. 1). Music, in particular, is able to be a key tool in this process. A study conducted by Condé (2021, p. 69) showed that second-generation immigrants in Sweden use music to express and navigate their cultural identities, which highlights the importance of music in promoting a sense of continuity and belonging with their roots. Additionally, the data shows that both individual and group identity formation is made possible through listening to the music from the diaspora’s parents’ home countries (Condé, 2021, p. 27).

Since this group has not been able to live in their countries of origins, the music helped them find their place in their cultural heritage, through it sharing collective memories and cultural narratives across generations.

Furthermore, drawing on Hofstede's three dimensions of cultural identity, this concept will be approached from three different angles: emotional, social, and personal (Kowalski, 2002, p. 257). First, *human universals* refer to shared emotional needs, such as nostalgia or longing, which music helps evoke, allowing the diaspora to connect with their roots (p. 257). Second, *group associations* involve shared characteristics like ethnicity or nationality; in this context, music becomes a way for the diaspora to affirm their heritage and foster belonging (p. 257). Lastly, *individual personality* reflects how personal beliefs and choices shape identity beyond group affiliation (p. 259). Here, the diaspora is able to listen to songs or genres that relate to their own connection to the Balkans. These dimensions will aid in investigating how music contributes to the cultural identity construction among this group and will address the intersection of cultural heritage and transnational belonging.

1.2 Societal and Academic Relevance

Previous research touched upon how music plays a crucial role in sustaining a cultural memory and identity in diaspora settings (Hall, 1990, p. 234). Yet, much of the already existing literature focuses merely on Serbian and Croatian diasporas or emphasizes traditional music (Samson, 2013, p. 61). Less attention has been paid to the role of modern, popular music genres, such as rap and hip-hop, in shaping identities among the younger generation of former Yugoslavians in Western Europe. This lack of attention creates a significant academic gap, particularly in studies focusing on second-generation youth who will often rely on these contemporary cultural expressions, such as music, to connect to their heritage. Building upon the former, according to Appadurai (1996, p. 35), transnational cultural exchanges are having an increasing impact on diasporic identities, and digital platforms are making music more accessible. Especially among the youth, the negotiation of belonging within these communities takes place not only in physical places but also within, now more than ever, digital spaces (Georgiou, 2006, p. 10).

Furthermore, the Netherlands becomes interesting to explore given it is a society that is continuously being shaped by its growing cultural diversity in combination with the rise of digital media and its use. In 2023, the number of the Dutch population that had a migration background was 4.706.987, making up 26.3% of the total population (Centraal Bureau voor

de Statistiek, 2024). Therefore, since over a quarter of Dutch citizens have a migration background, topics of culture, diasporic identities and belonging are important in the national discourse. Building upon this, data retrieved from CBS (2022) shows that as of 2022, a total of 85.055 individuals living in the Netherlands have a migration background linked to the former Yugoslavia. More specifically, this includes 51.905 first-generation migrants and 33.150 second-generation individuals, representing the people with roots in one of the former Yugoslav republics. These numbers highlight how this diaspora has not only had a long-term presence in Dutch society but has also grown across generations, making it relevant to explore how this community continues to shape their cultural identity over time.

Moreover, thus far research has largely focused on Turkish, Moroccan or Surinamese communities (Vermeulen & IMISCOE, 2006); underrepresenting diasporas from Eastern Europe and more specifically former Yugoslavia. This underrepresentation in both the academic and public discourse is exactly what suggests a need for more inclusive research that takes into account the less visible or supported diasporic or immigrant communities. Music does not only serve as a tool for shaping individual identity but also as a medium to connect people socially and unite the diasporic communities; this creates a shared space for their collective expression and solidarity (Frith, 1996, p. 124). The Dutch context is therefore capable of providing valuable insights into how music serves as a cultural practice in negotiating and expressing the diaspora's cultural identity in a multicultural society. The societal relevance of this research thus lies in its potential to shed light on how music shapes the cultural identity and everyday experiences of a significant yet underrepresented group in Dutch society. By understanding the role of music in identity formation, it could inform broader discussions on integration, multiculturalism, and the overall cultural inclusion of diaspora communities. Most importantly, the music preferences and practices of diaspora youth should not be overlooked, since they are playing an active role in shaping the way Balkan identity is represented and perceived. This happens both within their lived communities and outside of them (Vilotijević, 2020, p. 2). The second-generation's engagement with popular Balkan music genres is able to redefine what it means to be part of the Balkan diaspora; it shows cultural identity is not only inherited but continuously being shaped through music.

1.3 Research Scope

Thus, the following research question will be central to this study: *How does music contribute to the construction of cultural identity among the former Yugoslavian diaspora in the Netherlands?* By answering this question, the study aims to enhance our knowledge on the relationship between music, identity, and belonging in diaspora contexts. In order to effectively explore this topic, the thesis will be structured as follows: the second chapter will review and reflect on existing literature on diaspora, cultural identity, and the role of music in migrant contexts. The following chapter will focus on the chosen methodology and delve deeper into the use of a qualitative research approach and the choice for a thematic analysis. Furthermore, chapter four will encompass the results and findings of the analysis and will be accompanied by a discussion on the themes by relating them to relevant literature. The conclusion, which will be the final fifth chapter, will give a summary of the most relevant findings and provide an answer to the research question. This chapter will be concluded by noting the limitations of the study and presenting implications and recommendations for society and future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

To better understand the role of music in the construction of identity, this study is grounded in Cultural Identity Theory developed by the scholar Stuart Hall (1990). Hall's (1990, p. 225) theory conceptualizes identity as an ongoing process, instead of viewing it as something fixed; noting that identity is shaped through history, memory and representation. This perspective is particularly valuable in guiding this research since diasporic identities are continuously influenced by various shifting cultural contexts and therefore are constantly renegotiated. Building on this theoretical foundation, this framework will bring together various theoretical perspectives from diaspora studies, popular music studies and digital media theory. These frameworks will aid in the analysis of the intersection of migration, belonging, identity negotiation, and music as a cultural practice.

This chapter is divided into four sections, which each delve deeper into a different factor playing a part in cultural identity formation. Instead of treating these as separate concepts, the framework recognizes them as mutually reinforcing each other. It will begin by introducing the concept of identity, specifically cultural identity, and how it is constructed within diasporic spaces. Consequently, it will discuss diaspora theories and belonging, which will help create an understanding of the emotional and also symbolic significance of the diaspora's heritage. Furthermore, this framework will explore music as a cultural practice and highlight its role in performing and creating identity. Finally, digital media will be touched upon, considering how online platforms are able to shape music consumption and foster a sense of belonging within diaspora communities. Together, these theories and concepts will provide a solid foundation to anchor the research in and will create a lens through which to analyze the role of music in cultural identity formation.

2.1 Cultural Identity

The first concept, and in turn the core concept of this thesis, will be that of cultural identity. The understanding of this concept is crucial to this study, since it contextualizes how the Balkan diaspora makes sense of their cultural background in relation to their current environment. Instead of viewing it as something that is fixed, cultural identity will here be understood as a fluid and an ever-evolving process, which is shaped by multiple factors including memory, social interaction, and cultural practices such as music. This process will be further elaborated upon in the following subsections.

2.1.1 Identity as a process

For decades, cultural identity has been understood as a concept of essentialist nature. In their paper, Petkova and Lehtonen (2005, pp. 16-17), explain that this essentialist view assumes that communities are defined by a core set of values or characteristics that remain unchanged no matter the time passed, and geographical location. It was thought that these values are fundamental to the group and create a sort of collective attitude and behavior that people automatically adopt just by belonging to that community. This view treats identity as something that is inherited rather than created, which offers little consideration to individual experiences or the impact of social environments. Although this perspective provides a sense of continuity and belonging, it neglects how identity is dynamic and constantly shifting in everyday life.

Paradoxically, Hall (Bhandari, 2021, p. 105; 1990, p. 226) critiques this view and offers a different perspective on the matter. He believed that cultural identity is not static but rather of a dynamic social constructivist sort; it is shaped through the continuous process of expression and social interaction, rather than being made up of foundational unchanging values. Hall (1990) therefore defines cultural identity as

“a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power.” (p. 225)

Meaning, cultural identity is something that is created through interacting with factors such as language, memory and history, and not something that is pre-determined; a social construct, drawing on social constructivist theory. Particularly in diasporic contexts, individuals adopt many identities based on their environment which continue to change. This aligns with Jenkins' (2008, p. 40) notion which views identity as having a dual nature, both internal and external. The internal symbolizes how an individual might view oneself, while the external is how others view and classify them. This is relevant for the second-generation diaspora since they are often navigating conflicting cultural expectations. In the society they were born and raised in, they might be viewed as outsiders, while within family contexts or their ethnic community, they can be seen as not being connected or part of their heritage

enough (Giguère et al., 2010, p. 2-3 & 6)

Furthermore, Anthias and University of Roehampton (2008, p. 6) add to the discussion by highlighting that identity, rather than being fixed, is affected by various intersecting social constructs, including race, gender, class and generation. These elements of identity, depending on the social environment, can become more or less visible in an individual, however they are not necessarily always equally as noticeable. For the diaspora, identity may thus shift over time depending on the setting and take on different forms or identities among their peers, around family, or online. Additionally, with identity being both internally experienced and outwardly performed, individuals are able to express their sense of belonging to one identity through cultural practices and the language they speak (Nagel, 1994, p. 154). Among these cultural practices, music is able to play an important role. It provides a way to perform identity, which allows people to control how others see and understand them rather than just reflecting who they are. Diaspora can therefore use music as a means for navigating and expressing their dual identities that do not fit into merely one culture. Instead of simply listening to music, they utilize it as a way of association, self-expression, and cultural negotiation, which makes it a key part of their constant identity formation.

2.1.2 Dimensions of identity

To explore how the former Yugoslavian diaspora navigates their cultural identity, this study draws on a three-dimensional model developed by Kowalski (2002, pp. 256 - 260). This model makes sense of cultural identity by dividing it into three dimensions, namely human universals, group associations, and individual personality. While Kowalski's (2002) framework was originally derived from Hofstede's (2011) cultural dimensions theory, which focused on national cultures and values, it reinterprets Hofstede's ideas to explore the structure of identity itself. This makes it particularly useful for this study where diasporic and intercultural contexts are central.

The first dimension, human universals, encompasses all the fundamental emotional, cognitive, and social traits that all human cultures share. These include characteristics such as the need for belonging, the expression of emotions like nostalgia, and the appreciation for symbolic practices such as music (Kowalski (2002, p. 257). For instance, diaspora youth may be able to connect with Balkan music on an emotional level even without having any direct experience with their homeland; they are ultimately driven by the shared emotional feelings such as pride and longing for their home country (Matsumoto et al., 2000, p. 180).

Furthermore, the second dimension, group associations, refers to the affiliations that individuals are born into or adopt, such as ethnicity, nationality, religion, or even digital communities and friend groups (Kowalski, 2002, pp. 257 - 258). For the diaspora, these cultural affiliations often overlap due to being a part of multiple groups at once, which can either complement each other but also create tensions. Through these different affiliations, people are able to create hybrid identities by identifying with both their parents' heritage and the cultural norms of the society they currently live in. These identities can be formed through cultural transmission between families, but also by exposure to media and cultural products such as Balkan hip-hop music. Appadurai (1996, p. 35) argues that these affiliations are no longer only based on location; they are being influenced by digital platforms and international media flows that both maintain and transform a shared identity. In the context of the former Yugoslavian diaspora, this becomes even more complicated. Due to the dissolution of the country of Yugoslavia, the now divided national identities result in individuals identifying as either Bosnian, Serbian, Croatian, or even Yugoslav, which depends on their family history and political context and beliefs (Palmberger, 2016, p. 30).

The final dimension, individual personality, highlights the role of personal agency individuals have in shaping their identity. While identity is influenced by these group affiliations and shared values, individuals are ultimately able to decide how to engage with and interpret these influences; they are not merely passive (Kowalski, 2002, p. 259). As Kowalski notes “individuals decide to what extent each group association determines their own cultural identity” (p. 259). For instance, two people from the same background might have different perspectives; one may feel strongly connected to their nationality, while another chooses to distance themselves from it. Music becomes greatly important in this identity formation process. It is a tool for the diaspora to explore but also express who they are. As Frith (1996, p. 115) notes, music is not simply a reflection of one's identity, but also a performative act. It provides a way for individuals to construct and communicate who they are or want to be, both to themselves and to others. Therefore, the individual personality dimension shows that cultural identity develops through continuous, creative acts of resistance, meaning-making, and personal expression in addition to other external influences.

It is important to note that these dimensions do not operate by themselves but rather as an interconnected system (Kowalski, 2002, p. 256). An individual's cultural identification may influence their sense of social belonging, while both are shaped by personal narratives

and emotion. For instance, one's identification with a certain ethnic group may create a sense of community in the diaspora, but it can also be a reason for exclusion in larger society. Therefore, experiences of discrimination or even marginalization can on one hand weaken a sense of belonging, while on the other hand shared cultural practices, such as music, can help restore it (Wu & Finnsdottir, 2021, para. 5). Ultimately, Kowalski's (2002) framework highlights that identity is a product of both social structures and personal agency, which are both adaptive and influenced by changing cultural contexts.

2.1.3 Diaspora space

The concept of diaspora space, introduced by Brah (1996, p. 16) is able to offer a lens to help understand the lived experiences of the Balkan diaspora. Unlike older definitions of diaspora that mainly focus on people being physically separated from their homeland geographically, Brah (1996, p. 16) describes diaspora space as something more symbolic and abstract. It is shaped by different narratives and experiences related to where someone comes from, how they adapt, and their sense of belonging. Instead of being passed down in a fixed way, cultural identity is something that people actively shape and renegotiate across generations. Music can serve as a medium within this space, by becoming a way to express both the tensions but also positives of a hybrid identity. For the second-generation Dutch diaspora, music is a key medium for this discussion. It is able to serve as a border and a bridge; it separates people's shifting identities from both conventional Dutch society and more conventional views of their heritage but also connects them to a sense of cultural continuity.

Additionally, technology and online platforms add another level of complexity to the concept. Digitalization is able to create a way for individuals to engage with music that can simultaneously feel local, be tied to their diasporic roots, and also be global. According to Born's musical mediation theory (2005, p. 7), music is able to move through platforms socially, technologically, and emotionally. On platforms like YouTube and Spotify, the diaspora can access playlists curated or shared by peers or other diaspora members; helping them reconnect with their cultural background, while also providing them with new ways to express their identity (Ponzanesi, 2021, para. 41). Ultimately, diaspora space is not a physical location, but a dynamic place, where identity can be simultaneously lived and made sense of.

2.2 Diaspora and Belonging

The second concept that plays a central role in this study is that of diaspora, along with the notion of belonging. Understanding these concepts is essential, since they provide insight into how the diaspora places itself between their cultural origin and life in the Netherlands. Rather than viewing diaspora as the displacement of a group, this thesis will approach it as a dynamic and more symbolic connection to a homeland, which is passed down through generations, in which music is able to play a key role in shaping and expressing this connection. The following subsections will elaborate on how diaspora and belonging are negotiated, both emotionally and culturally, through listening to music.

2.2.1 Diaspora as both inherited and constructed

Firstly, the concept of diaspora is important for understanding the experiences of second-generation former Yugoslavian diaspora. Similarly to the definitions of identity, some definitions of diaspora frame it as something that is fixed; imposing an essentialist view. Diaspora was viewed as the physical and geographical displacement of people from their homeland. Believing that, while away from their homeland, their cultural essence stays preserved and remains unchanged (Carter, 2005, pp. 54 - 56). However, Hall (1990, p. 235) critiques this view and redefines diaspora not as “those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return” (p. 235), but as a sense of belonging and the creation of identity that is “constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.” (p.235). Meaning that diasporic identity is an ongoing negotiation between memory, cultural transformation and representation, rather than merely a geographic continuity. Therefore, according to Hall (1990, p. 235) diaspora, like identity, is not something that is inherited passively, but actively lived and constructed, even by those who have not migrated themselves.

Moreover, Hall (1990, p. 225) notes that diasporic identity is shaped by systems of power that view and construct the diaspora individuals as “Other”. Defined by Said (1979, p. 45) as a way for the West to create a divide between a “they” and an “us”; the west against the rest. Hall (1990, p. 225) believes that these dominant systems of representation, forced upon the people by the power of the West, resulted in individuals viewing *themselves* as the “Other”. By internalizing this feeling of an imposed otherness, it complicates the relationship between the

diaspora's identity and sense of belonging within their heritage. Especially for the second-generation of immigrants who frequently feel torn between their experienced realities and inherited culture. For this group of people, according to Brah (1996, p. 188), home is "mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination." Meaning that their sense of home is more of a symbolic nature rather than an actual place they will return to. Here, diaspora space becomes the symbolic space where their identities are continuously being shaped and reshaped. Building upon this, Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, in which he frames diaspora as a network of cultural exchange rather than being a narrative of loss (Gilroy, 1993, p. 745). While his work focuses on the African diaspora, it is still relevant for this study, especially in considering how music is able to act as a tool for identity construction and negotiation and resistance. In the diaspora space, music serves as both a tool to share a collective cultural memory and a way for the second-generation diaspora to create new cultural meaning that is personal to themselves. It allows them to feel connected to a past they never directly experienced, while also expressing their place within Dutch society.

Thus, diasporic identity is not a fixed notion but is shaped dynamically through cultural products and symbols, memory and everyday practices. Music, as a cultural product, can therefore play an important role in maintaining a connection to the second-generation's homeland. This act of belonging highlights how Hall's (1990, p. 235) notion of diaspora is a form of actively positioning oneself and how it is a process that is always moving.

2.2.2 Transnational belonging and hybrid identity formation

Belonging for the diaspora is rarely straightforward. They are caught between the cultural expectations of their homeland while also having to fit in with the norms of their host society (Lainer-Vos, 2010, p. 894). This results in negotiating a form of identity that spans several social and geographical contexts. Instead of forming a fixed or singular sense of self, many develop a hybrid identity that draws from both lived realities; both Dutch and Balkan. This reflects the complex ways in which the diaspora situates themselves both socially and culturally.

Appadurai (1996, p. 33) adds to the discussion by introducing the notion of transnational cultural flows in order to make sense of this complex process. He argues that due to today's globalized world and the accessibility of worldwide cultures, identity is being shaped by both local and global influences, meaning that

the borders of a country are now purely symbolic. Therefore, for the diaspora, culture is not something that is fixed to merely one place, but something that is flexible, fluid and moving. This can be experienced through media, social networks and platforms and different peer communities that stretch globally. Levitt and Schiller (2004, p. 2) share this sentiment as they note that “the lives of increasing numbers of individuals can no longer be understood by looking only at what goes on within national boundaries” (p. 2). They emphasize that the life of a migrant is not split between the notion of a “here” and “there”, but rather by simultaneity (Levitt and Schiller, 2004, p. 2). This entails that the connection with both host country and transnational networks is what shapes one’s identity. Therefore, the simultaneous way of belonging allows one’s attachments to culture and social practices to work together instead of contradicting each other.

Furthermore, belonging is often expressed through symbolic practices, such as the use of language, fashion or other cultural products (May, 2011, p. 370). Increasingly, this is happening through the production and exchange of music (Bloustien, 2007, p. 449). More importantly than music itself, is the way it is used to navigate a dual identity; connecting to other with similar backgrounds and situating oneself in a larger community. This balancing act can happen both online and offline, both in everyday situations and digital communities. This is supported by Bhandari (2021, p. 103) who highlights that holding onto one’s own cultural traditions while integrating new values and practices is what ultimately shapes these hybrid identities. This enforces the notion that a hybrid identity is the result of active choices and not based on passive inheritance of one’s culture. This reflects diaspora having cultural agency, in the sense that they resist being formed by fixed ideas of ethnicity or national identity, and instead is personal process.

Additionally, these processes are a part of larger societal dynamics. Experiences of marginalization or exclusion, such as being called not Dutch enough in one place or not Bosnian, Serbian, Croatian, or Montenegrin enough in another, can make it harder for one to blend in. According to Anthias (2006, pp. 5-7), fitting in culturally is not the only factor for belonging; social status, access, and acknowledgment are all equally as important. Hybrid identities are therefore not just a blending of multiple cultures, but also strategically navigating inclusion and exclusion.

Ultimately, transnational belonging is a dynamic and continuous process where the second-generation takes the role of actively constructing and reinterpreting who they are; influenced by various global cultures. Instead of viewing their hybrid identities as being confused by who they truly are, it should be seen as an expression of adaptability and sense of agency; they combine their inherited past and current reality to make a whole.

2.3 Music as a Cultural Practice

The third central concept in this thesis is the role of music as a cultural practice. Music can act as a powerful medium through which the diaspora's cultural identity can be shaped and retained. In this context, it serves multiple roles, firstly as a tool to express one's identity, secondly to connect people to a collective memory, and to reflect the experience of living between two or more cultures. These roles will be further explored in the following sections, with a particular focus on popular contemporary genres that resonate with the younger generation and are able to circulate and get shared on these digital platforms.

2.3.1 Music and identity performance

Music provides a tool for the diaspora to express their identities in both subtle and more obvious ways. According to Frith (1996, p. 115), music not only reflects identity, but it also shapes it. In other words, individuals do not merely use music as an expression of themselves, but also become who they are through this engagement. This reflects Hall's (1990) idea of identity as "not an essence but a positioning" (p. 226); one's identity is acted through their musical choices. This is particularly relevant in this study where cultural identity is defined as being hybrid and dynamic. For the second-generation Yugoslavian diaspora central to this research, listening to and sharing music becomes a form of identity formation and expression. Building upon this, Born (2005, pp. 7 - 8) highlights how music circulates through emotional, social, and digital networks, which enables both self-expression and a shared cultural identity among diaspora members. For instance, they might share Balkan songs on social media, remix traditional songs to match a more modern style, or listen to older song to evoke a sense of emotion. Participating in these actions, it allows them to shape how they are seen by others and how they see themselves.

However, some scholars challenge music's association with agency and self-expression and highlight its potential to actually reinforce norms. Hesmondhalgh (2008, p. 3) claims that music's emotional and cultural influence may also serve to uphold conventional norms and restrict one's expression due to it creating standards and

expectations for authenticity. The diaspora may feel under pressure to express a certain sort of “Balkan-ness” through music, even if it does not accurately represent their lived experiences. In such instances, music might reinforce rather than question established identity norms.

Nonetheless, one’s identity performance is often times connected and dependent on a certain context. Musical engagement is not always public. Its performance can both be loud and visible in certain settings, think parties or on social media, or quieter and more personal. DeNora (1999, p. 32) adds that often it takes a more personal form, such as choosing to listen to certain genres or artists as a way of privately affirming one-self to their culture. Ultimately, these less visible acts of listening are just as meaningful as the more visible performances and will serve as subtle expressions of identity. Thus, music offers second-generation youth a way to feel accepted and part of a larger community. In whatever way they choose to interact with it, it allows them to navigate their dual identities. By doing so, music creates a tool for the diaspora to articulate who they are and who they wish to become.

2.3.2 Collective memory and belonging

Music is not only a means to perform one’s identity, but also aids in creating and sustaining a collective memory and a sense of belonging (Nora, 1989, p. 9). Nora (1989, pp. 23 -24) introduces the concept of “*lieux de mémoire*”, which she uses to explain that memory is not just embedded in physical places in the world, but is deeply connected in cultural practices; including music. Music as a cultural practice enables history to be passed down through generations. Moreover, collective memory refers to “a form of memory that is shared by a group and of central importance to the social identity of the group's members” (Roediger & Abel, 2015, p. 2). For this group, the music is able to bridge a gap between the past, which is unknown to them, and the present; helping them stay connected to their cultural heritage. Through music, they are able to inherit a sense of culture and in turn this strengthens the bond to their homeland.

Furthermore, according to Appadurai (1996, p. 3), media and the imagination support the preservation of emotional ties to an often imagined country. Even those who have never lived in the Balkans may feel nostalgic, proud, or sad while listening to certain songs. Ultimately, these musical genres become transmitters of the emotional and collective memory a country and their people hold.

However, not all scholars agree that music is able to foster this collective memory and sense of belonging. Eyerman (2004, pp. 4 - 6) critiques this view and notes that the way music carries cultural memory does not always bring people together. Music can highlight differences between groups, since the same songs or genres may have different meanings depending on one's generation, background, or personal experience. For instance, the older generation might perceive certain genres as meaningful and emotional, while the younger generation may see the same genres as less important or even outdated. Meaning that, efforts to maintain a certain continuity in music can actually highlight generational divides or the pressure to fit into cultural norms.

Nevertheless, Condé (2021, p. 4) highlights that memory work is ultimately dynamic. When the diaspora reinterprets the music of their parents' generation using their own perspectives and experiences, the meaning of the music changes. This shows that music is not merely about preserving it but also about adapting to newer times. This will allow for there to still be a form of continuity throughout the music, while still being flexible and responsive to the current society. Ultimately, while the meanings may change, the emotional connection will remain the same. Thus, music does help sustain a sense of continuity across generations, while also allowing for reinterpretation and adaptation to what makes sense for them.

2.3.3 Micromusics and hybrid genres

While music is frequently seen as a tool to unite people, not all scholars believe it is able to do so. According to Straw (1991, pp. 369 - 370), it is important to note that while some praise the hybridity of genres, it should not be ignored that it can result in masking the power dynamics that are present in the creation of cultures. Meaning, dominant global genres may overshadow those of more local or traditional forms. The mix of styles could potentially dilute the original cultural elements and create a product that is made to sell and appeal to the masses; resulting in erasing cultural identities to fit within certain expectations or stereotypes. This is especially relevant when examining how the diaspora interacts and reshapes music to fit within their identity.

Nonetheless, the diaspora does not just listen to music, they actively participate in how it evolves over time. Empirical studies support this notion, for instance, Slobin's (1992, p. 46) *micromusics* theory studies how smaller, diasporic communities use music to express cultural difference while integrating into larger

societies. In the case of former Yugoslavians, traditional folk music can coexist with contemporary genres like Balkan trap and rap, which have gained popularity among younger generations (Lazevic, 2018, para. 2). The coexistence of these two genres eventually made it possible for a new one to emerge, namely Trepfolk. Vilotijević (2020, p. 2) defines Trepfolk as a fusion between Balkan folk and trap music, which as a genre is able to resonate with the diaspora. It has created a sound that pays homage to the traditional melodies while merging these with more contemporary beats or lyrics. Even though there has been a blend of styles, their unique characteristics can still be traced back in the music, while at the same time influencing each other. The rap is able to modernize the music in order to appeal to the younger generations, while the folk adds a historical and cultural element. Instead of viewing this hybrid genre as diminishing the tradition, it is highlighted as cultural innovation.

Additionally, digital platforms play a key part in the way these hybrid music genres are spread. As Born (2005, p. 7) has explained music being shaped moving through different platforms and technologies, social media algorithms help shape what diaspora are exposed to. Through this easy access to all types of different music, people can build an identity that is both tied to their cultural background while still being open to global influences. Furthermore, these digital spaces are not merely about listening to music, they are also about socializing and connecting with other members of the diaspora (Georgiou, 2006, p. 10). Whether through shared playlists or community pages, these platforms allow diaspora to interact with others who share similar a similar culture or background, which will be further explored in the last section of this framework. On these platforms they take control over how other perceive them. By doing so, music becomes a tool not only for their personal expression but also for a sense of belonging.

2.4 Digital Mediation of Identity and Belonging

The fourth and final key concept central to this research is the role of digital media in shaping transnational belonging. In today's connected world, digital platforms have become helpful spaces for diaspora in which they can construct and perform their identity. Particularly for second-generation youth central to this research, since they often inherit a culture but do not directly experience their home countries firsthand. Therefore, digital media provides a way to navigate the feeling of being in between and help stay connected to

their heritage, through music and community. The following subsection will explore how digital media and platforms are able to create new ways of staying connected to one's culture, reinterpret identity, and build community globally without the restrictions of borders; acknowledging the limits these platforms impose.

2.4.1 Digital belonging and identity reinterpretation

It has become clear that in today's connected world, social media platforms play an active and important role in the lives of people. The transnational nature of diaspora communities makes digital media an integral part of their cultural practices. These spaces provide them with a way to connect to places they are not directly experiencing, such as their homeland; helping them maintain their cultural identity. This section explores how social media platforms enable second-generation Balkan diaspora to access and engage with content that reflects both their Balkan background and their Dutch identity. Appadurai (1996, pp. 33 - 36) argues that the global flows of media blur the gap between one's physical location and one's cultural imagination. Meaning that it is not necessary to physically be in the Balkans in order to feel connected to the region's culture. Instead, individuals can perform their identity through playlists they create, content they post and comments they leave. Through these acts, the diaspora can take part in what Ponzanesi (2021) calls "digital diasporas", which she defines as "oppressed, minority or endangered groups, often organized in diasporas, use the Internet to keep up with their homeland and native culture, thus strengthening their ethnic ties and lessening their isolation" (para. 23).

These platforms, ranging from social media such as Instagram and TikTok to more private channels such as WhatsApp, reshape how the connection is experienced (Ponzanesi, 2021, para. 41) Due to this connection being constantly and immediately accessible, it offers an illusion of proximity to home, even if not being close to it physically. These everyday interactions with media now become environments where belonging is not only performed but also directly felt.

However, digital platforms are not without limitations and challenges. El-Tayeb (2011, pp. 121 - 123) counters by noting that one's visibility in these online spaces, does not automatically result in inclusion. The diaspora's expression of a hybrid identity may not be positively accepted by everyone, including the diaspora itself. This highlights possible tensions between the traditional norms and values and a more contemporary way of expressing oneself. Moreover, technology and in turn digital literacy, is not accessible to all, which can restrict people's ability to fully participate in these spaces; creating a divide

within the diaspora (Appadurai, 1996, p. 84). Thus, while digital platforms can provide opportunities for cultural identity expression and formation, they can also reflect social inequalities. Though, ultimately, digital media has become an essential aspect of the diaspora's cultural identity formation and expression, due to creating new ways for people to connect and build communities without the limits and constraints of physical borders.

3. Methodology

In this chapter, the methodological approach used for this thesis, will be further elaborated upon. This chapter begins by outlining the research design and explains the reasons for choosing a qualitative approach over a quantitative method, by highlighting its suitability in reaching the study's aims. Following that, the sampling method will be described, and the choice of participants will be identified and justified. Moreover, the data collection will be explained, highlighting the interview process and how the main concepts were operationalized in the interview guide. The chapter will continue with the data and thematic analysis where the steps taken in the process will be described in detail. Lastly, the ethical considerations of the research are addressed, ensuring that the study meets academic standards of research integrity. Additionally, special attention will be given to the position of the researcher, by recognizing the potential bias due to their personal background during data collection and interpretation.

3.1 Research Design

This research will employ a qualitative approach to examine how music contributes to identity formation among second-generation former Yugoslavian diaspora in the Netherlands. While both quantitative and qualitative have their advantages, ultimately a qualitative research design was selected for this study since it will allow for a better and deeper understanding of the personal experiences, cultural meanings, and emotional connections that participants associate with music (Sofaer, 1999, para. 3). A quantitative method, such as surveys, could potentially measure patterns of music consumption and identity, but it would lack the contextual depth that is needed to construct and uncover the meaning of their cultural identity (Monrad, 2013, p. 350).

Therefore, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data since they allow for open, participant-driven interactions and are flexible when exploring pre-established themes (Dilley, 2004, p. 129). By allowing participants to voice their unique experiences and perspectives in their own words, it will encourage a more thorough discussion on the identity formation, which cannot be done through numeric data (Hadžiomerović, 2023, p. 59). The interviews ensure that all participants are asked the same core questions, while still providing the researcher room to explore unexpected topics that come up during the conversation. This is especially useful for answering the research question, since it allows, and encourages, the participants to share their personal stories and experiences in their own words, with no limitations (Barrick, 2019, p. 1). Furthermore, interviews took place in

person or via video conferencing tools such as Zoom, which depended on the participants' preferences and convenience. Three of the interviews were conducted online, while the remaining seven took place face to face. Additionally, an interview guide will be prepared to ensure that key themes related to identity, belonging, and music engagement are all mentioned and addressed. Lastly, the interviews will be recorded on audio, with the participants' consent, and additional notes will be made to ensure contextual observations and non-verbal cues are also noted.

3.2. Sampling

For this study, a non-probability sampling approach was employed, combining purposive and snowball sampling techniques to make sure the selection of participants was relevant to the research question and its scope. Firstly, purposive sampling was deemed appropriate since it is a technique used to intentionally select individuals who meet the specific criteria that are needed for the research (Etikan, 2016, p. 2). Secondly, snowball sampling compliments this approach, since it leverages the participants' networks to find others that would be equally as relevant (Sedgwick, 2013, p. 1). The participants were selected according to three key criteria they had to meet: they had to be second-generation diaspora born in the Netherlands, have their roots in one of the former Yugoslav republics - Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, or Montenegro - and be familiar with and engage in listening to popular contemporary Balkan music genres such as rap, hip-hop, or trap. Although the participants were not required to listen exclusively to this type of music, they did need to view it as part of their general listening habits.

Moreover, the target age group for this study was 18 to 25 years. This was due to this age being able to capture a group of individuals that is entering adulthood. According to Arnett (2000, p. 469), this is when the life phase starts in which people actively explore both their identity and culture. Moreover, it was essential to impose no limitations regarding gender to ensure inclusiveness in the sample and a diverse number of perspectives for the study (Allmark, 2004, p. 188). Though, the eventual sample consisted of nine female participants and one male.

Furthermore, the first number of participants were recruited through sending out a message on groups on WhatsApp, explaining what the research entailed and what kind of participants were needed; this resulted in the recruitment of 6 participants. Consequently, the snowball sampling approach was implemented. The already recruited participants were asked to refer others who met the inclusion criteria, which helped expand the pool of

potential interviewees, aiding in finding 4 additional relevant participants. By combining purposive and snowball sampling it was possible to strategically recruit and identify individuals who were relevant for answering the research question.

Table 1. Overview of participant demographics

Interviewees	Age	Gender	Country of Origin	Residence
Participant 1	20	Female	Bosnia & Herzegovina	Hoogvliet, The Netherlands
Participant 2	22	Female	Bosnia & Herzegovina	Rotterdam, The Netherlands
Participant 3	22	Female	Bosnia & Herzegovina	Rozenburg, The Netherlands
Participant 4	23	Female	Montenegro and Bosnia & Herzegovina	Rotterdam, The Netherlands
Participant 5	21	Female	Serbia	Rotterdam, The Netherlands
Participant 6	24	Female	Croatia and Bosnia & Herzegovina	Rotterdam, The Netherlands
Participant 7	22	Female	Bosnia & Herzegovina	Rotterdam, The Netherlands
Participant 8	23	Male	Serbia and Montenegro	Etten-Leur, The Netherlands
Participant 9	23	Female	Bosnia & Herzegovina	Rotterdam, The Netherlands
Participant 10	25	Female	Bosnia & Herzegovina	Waddinxveen, The Netherlands

3.3 Data Collection

After finalizing the recruitment for interviewees, the data collection phase for this study could commence. The interviews took place between April 23rd and May 10th, 2025,

and consisted of ten in-depth semi-structured interviews. Interviews were either conducted in person or online, which was dependent on the participants' preferences and availability. Three of the interviews were done digitally using Apple's FaceTime function, while the other seven were held face-to-face at locations chosen by the participants, such as cafés or their homes. This approach made sure the interviewees were comfortable and in a setting that encouraged their openness and trust during the conversation, since that was crucial for the study.

Furthermore, each interview was created to last approximately 45 to 60 minutes and followed a flexible although guided structure. An interview guide was prepared in advance to ensure consistency across all the interviews, while also allowing the possibility to follow up on topics that unexpectedly emerged during the conversations (See Appendix B). Moreover, the guide was divided into multiple groups of questions that reflected the core concepts of the study, namely Cultural Identity, Diaspora and Belonging, Music as a Cultural Practice, and Digital Media and Transnational Belonging.

Moreover, the interviews were audio recorded on Apple's Voice Memos application and included the informed oral consent of all participants. In addition to audio recording the interviews, field notes were taken during and after each interview to document the details that can only be picked up on through context, such as the tone of voice and interviewees' body language, which added depth to the interpretation of the responses. Moreover, most of the interviews were conducted in Dutch, namely eight, while the remaining two were held in English. Therefore, two versions of the interview guide were made, one in Dutch and the other in English (See Appendix B). This was done to accommodate participants' language preferences and make sure that they could express themselves comfortably and eloquently. This approach was important, since it helped maintain the participants' autonomy in the interviewing process and it ensured that the data reflected their thoughts to their best abilities, without feeling the pressure of speaking in a language they may not be as proficient in. The collected data was then transcribed verbatim through the website Good Tape, which prepared the data to enter the analysis phase (See Appendix E). Transcribing the interview verbatim was essential for ensuring transparency during the study (Davidson, 2009, para. 26). Finally, the transcriptions were stored safely, and any identifying information of the participants was anonymized to uphold the participants' privacy and ensure the research ethics were respected.

3.4 Operationalization

To operationalize the main concepts of the study - Cultural Identity, Diaspora and Belonging, Music as a Cultural Practice, and Digital Media and Transnational Belonging – the key concepts will be grounded in already existing theoretical frameworks. Firstly, drawing on the conceptualizations of Hall (1990, p. 226), Brah (1996, p. 16), and Kowalski (2002, pp. 256 – 260), cultural identity is understood as a dynamic and evolving process shaped by both cultural heritage and lived experiences. Within the interviews, participants will be asked to reflect on how music connects them to their former Yugoslavian roots and their home country, while also balancing shaping their sense of self within the Dutch context. In the context of this study, sense of self will be defined as the way an individual perceives their evolving identity, which is shaped and influenced by personal experiences, their cultural heritage and their social environment (Schwartz et al., 2010, p. 11). The interview will explore how interactions within their social environment, which includes fellow diaspora, influences participants' identity perception.

Furthermore, the concept of diaspora and belonging in this study refers to the ways individuals experience a sense of connection to both their heritage and the broader community of people with similar backgrounds. Drawing on the framework of May (2011, pp. 366 - 370), belonging is here understood as shared experiences, the perception of fitting in and ultimately the emotional connection they feel to their cultural heritage. For second-generation diaspora, this sense of belonging could be shaped through everyday practices such as engaging with music that reflects their cultural background. During the interviews, participants will be asked to reflect on how Balkan music influences their sense of belonging. More specifically, the aim is to discuss whether certain songs, artists, or genres create a feeling of closeness to the diaspora or provide them with a deeper understanding or connection with their heritage. Other questions were created to find out whether participants ever feel like they are balancing multiple cultures, and how music helps bridge or navigate this feeling of being in-between.

The next concept is that of music acting as a cultural practice. It entails the ways in which individuals use music to express and perform different aspects of their identity. This study will therefore draw on Frith's (1996, pp. 115 & 124) argument that music is not only a reflection of someone's cultural identity but that it also actively helps shape it through emotional and symbolic practices. In this context, music is seen as something meaningful that can connect individuals to their heritage and contribute to the creation of a sense of self. Within the interview guide, this concept will be explored through questions that focus on

participants' daily listening habits, their emotional responses to music, and their engagement with popular Balkan music genres. For instance, emotional connection will be contextualized through questions about how they feel when listening to Balkan music in contemporary styles, and if this music feels more relevant to them than the more traditional genres.

The final concept, digital media and transnational belonging, will refer to the ways in which online platforms make cultural connection and identity expression among diaspora youth more possible and accessible. In the context of this study, it will delve into how participants use these digital spaces to access, share, and interact with Balkan music, and how this does or does not affect their sense of belonging. This concept emphasizes the role of digital platforms in shaping cultural practices across borders and will draw on Born's (2005) notion of musical mediation and Ponzanesi's (2021) article on digital belonging. To explore this in the interviews, the participants were asked questions about if they use digital platforms such as Spotify, YouTube, and TikTok to discover and engage with Balkan music. They were also asked if they share this music with others, and if so, how this shapes their sense of connection to the diaspora. Additionally, the questions explore whether online music consumption has helped the participants feel more connected to their heritage or to the diaspora in general.

Table 2. Example questions in interview guide

Concepts	Sample Questions
Introductory Questions	Can you briefly tell me a bit about yourself? How would you describe your connection to your background?
Cultural Identity	How would you describe your cultural identity? Has music helped you build or shape your cultural identity in any way?
Diaspora and Belonging	Do you feel a sense of belonging in the Yugoslavian or Balkan diaspora community? Has music helped you connect to your experience as part of a diaspora community?
Music as a Cultural Practice	How do you feel when you listen to Balkan music in contemporary styles like Hip-Hop or rap? Do these genres feel more relevant to your experiences than traditional Balkan

Digital Media and
Transnational
Belonging

music?

Do you use platforms like Spotify, YouTube, or TikTok to find or follow Balkan music? Do these platforms help you feel more connected to your cultural background or community?

3.5. Data Analysis

The analysis of the collected data will follow Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 78) thematic analysis method, which will provide a systematic yet flexible framework for identifying and interpreting the reoccurring patterns within the data that was gathered. The six-step process entails familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming them, and at last producing the report (Braun and Clarke, 2006, pp. 87-93). Moreover, an inductive approach was implemented since this allows the data to speak for itself and makes it possible for themes to emerge organically, instead of being pre-established (Creswell, 2009, p. 53). This approach is especially useful in exploratory research, since it ensures the analysis stays focused on the participants' own experiences, and allows openness in order to gather unexpected findings, and minimize potential bias.

Furthermore, following Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 78), the analysis process will begin with familiarization with the data, meaning that the interview transcripts were carefully read and re-read to develop an initial understanding. During this stage, notes were taken to capture early reoccurring ideas such as reflections of feeling in-between cultures or references to the music as connector to the participants' homeland. Secondly, using Atlas.ti software, the transcripts were coded to identify quotes that relate to the research question, resulting in a number of 1175 open codes across all interviews. These codes were kept general and short to capture specific parts of the data. Example codes consist of "contemp. music as part of identity" and "longing for homeland". It was crucial to stay close to the participants' own words to ensure the meaning of the quotes was preserved, of which an overview can be found in the quotation output report in Appendix F.

During the third phase, these open codes were merged into broader codes that showed recurring patterns across the participants' answers. For example, open codes such as "emotional connection to home country", "reliving memories through music", and "Balkan music evokes emotion" were merged under the broader category "emotional connection to

music”. The point of this phase was to refine the large number of codes into a more manageable amount, which results in similar codes being grouped together and therefore start resembling early stages of a thematic structure.

Furthermore, the fourth phase encompassed reviewing these early themes and checking them against the data to ensure coherence and accuracy. At this stage, the codes were renamed, merged or reallocated in order to reflect the data better. For instance, an early theme that was labeled “Cultural Memory” was merged with another early theme labeled “Music as Language Learning Tool”; creating a new main theme namely, Music as Carrier of Language and Cultural Memory.

After carefully and thoroughly analyzing the data in the fifth phase, a number of 5 main themes were clearly defined and named to reflect the content they capture. These included Affective Dimensions of Contemporary Music, Identity and Belonging Through Musical Practice, Music as Carrier of Language and Cultural Memory, Digital Media and Cultural Mediation, and Balancing Heritage and Change. For example, the main theme Digital Media and Cultural Mediation emerged to describe how the diaspora uses digital platforms to discover new music and stay connected to other diaspora. Each of these main themes is supported by several subthemes necessary to explore the theme in its entire depth.

Finally, in the sixth phase, the findings of the thematic analysis were translated into a results and discussion section, which were supported by literature and direct quotes from participants in chapter 4. Where needed, the quotes were translated from Dutch to English. To ensure transparency and preserve the meaning of the quotes, the original Dutch text was included in parentheses following the English translation. Lastly, the themes, subthemes and open codes were neatly categorized into a comprehensive Coding Frame, which can be found in Appendix A.

3.6. Ethics & Research Quality

Ethical considerations are always central to any study, and particularly this one given the method and the personal and cultural nature of the topics explored (Orb et al., 2001, p. 94). Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection, and participants received detailed information about the study’s purpose. Informed consent was secured, both oral and written (Appendix C), making sure that the participants understood their right to withdraw at any stage without negative consequence. Lastly, anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study by the use of pseudonyms and the safe storage of all the audio recordings and transcripts.

In terms of research quality, different approaches were taken to ensure both the validity and reliability during the research process. In qualitative research, these concepts should be attained through transparency, consistency, and reflexivity (Arslan, 2022, p. 1). Therefore firstly, to establish reliability, the interview guide was developed which made sure all the interviews were coherent while also still allowing for flexibility. Furthermore, a pilot interview was conducted that tested the flow and clarity of the questions, which lead to minor adjustments. Secondly, to ensure validity of the study, theory triangulation was implemented, which was done by drawing from various theoretical frameworks during the analysis process (Carter et al., 2014, p. 1). Furthermore, the role of the researcher should be acknowledged, since it could be a potential influence on the study's findings. As a member of the former Yugoslavian diaspora with personal ties to the topic, the researcher was aware of possible bias. Reflexivity was therefore highly needed; a pilot interview helped identify any unconscious bias and member checking with the participants was done to critically evaluate the interpretations that were made during analysis (Lloyd et al., 2024, p. 3). Ultimately, maintaining a reflexive state was crucial during this study to ensure an authentic perspective with minimal bias.

4. Results & Discussion

This chapter will present the key findings of this study related to the role of music in contributing to the construction and negotiation of cultural identity among the Balkan diaspora in The Netherlands. After a thorough thematic analysis of the ten conducted interviews, 5 main themes, and their respective subthemes, emerged. Namely, *Affective Dimensions of Contemporary Music*, *Identity and Belonging Through Musical Practice*, *Music as Carrier of Language and Cultural Memory*, *Digital Media and Cultural Mediation*, and *Balancing Heritage and Change* (See Table 3). These themes are not mutually exclusive but reflect how intertwined and nuanced the participants' engagement with music is, when constructing and expressing their cultural identity. Therefore, these themes are suitable to answer the research question central to this study: "How does music contribute to the construction of cultural identity among the former Yugoslavian diaspora in the Netherlands?". The complete coding frame can be found in Appendix A and provides a complete visual for the main themes, sub-themes and their respective illustrative open codes. Furthermore, the results will be followed by a discussion supported by relevant academic literature. In order to contextualize the findings, the themes will be linked back to the theoretical framework discussed in chapter two.

Table 3. Overview of themes and subthemes

Themes	Sub-themes
Affective Dimensions of Contemporary Music	Music as emotional anchor in everyday life
	Positive emotional resonance
	Perceived emotional superficiality in contemporary music
Identity and Belonging Through Musical Practice	Navigating hybrid identities through music
	Social spaces fostering belonging
	Perceived internal and external exclusion

Music as Carrier of Language and Cultural Memory	Language learning and retention through music Intergenerational transmission of cultural memory
Digital Media and Cultural Mediation	Platforms as tools for music discovery Platforms as spaces for diasporic interaction and connection
Balancing Heritage and Change	Generational shifts in musical taste Contemporary music as personal cultural reinterpretation

4.1 Affective Dimensions of Contemporary Music

The first core theme that emerged is that of Affective Dimensions of Contemporary Music. This theme dissects the way in which the second-generation former Yugoslavian diaspora is able to create a connection to their home, through contemporary music, while living in the Netherlands. The subthemes touch upon the role of music in everyday life, the way it evokes positive emotions, and how the participants perceive the music's emotional depth. This relates to the research question since it shows that music not only reflects one's cultural identity but also shapes it through affective experiences. All ten participants noted that they formed a sense of emotional connection to contemporary music, which indicates that emotion is a central aspect of how they engage with and make sense of their cultural background.

4.1.1 Music as cultural anchor in everyday life

The first subtheme highlights the role of Balkan music functioning as a cultural anchor in the daily lives of the diaspora. During the interviews, participants expressed that music is often one of the few, if not only, ways to remain connected to their homeland. By listening to it often and during their daily routines in the Netherlands, it creates a consistent sense of cultural continuity, without physically being there. All participants noted that they listen to Balkan music on the daily and 8 out of 10 reported it as being part of their daily routine such as driving or having it play in the background while doing chores. Participant 9 shared: "For example, I do not speak the language every day, but I do listen to the music

every day” (“Bijvoorbeeld dagelijks spreek ik de taal niet, maar ik luister wel dagelijks de muziek”), this illustrates that listening to music can maintain the diaspora’s cultural engagement even when other factors, such as speaking the language, are not being done as frequently.

Furthermore, engaging with Balkan music also played a more symbolic and emotional role in reinforcing their sense of identity. When not listening to the music at home, it can feel like something is missing, realizing that the music is a fundamental part of who they are (Participant 10). Another participant even went as far as believing that if they were to go a long time without listening to Balkan music or attending any events, they would most likely feel their connection to their homeland weakening (Participant 6). This shared statement by the diaspora was well summarized by Participant 1, who explained that “what we want is simply to feel connected to where you come from... one of the few ways to do that is by listening to music” (Wat wij willen is gewoon je verbonden voelen met waar je vandaan komt... een van de weinige manieren om dat te doen, is door muziek te luisteren).

The participants’ reflections show that music plays an active role in how they hold onto their cultural identity while living in the Netherlands. From the findings, listening to Balkan music during daily activities, such as driving, allows the participants to create a way for their culture to be present in their day to day lives. This supports Frith’s (1996, p. 115) argument that music is not just a reflection of identity but helps to perform and shape it. The daily engagement with music is intentional in order for the diaspora to affirm their identity. This affirmation of identity is backed by DeNora’s (1999, p. 32) notion of music taking a more personal form. Through listening to these genres, the participants are able to express their identity in private, and connect more to their cultural background. Furthermore, Appadurai’s (1996, pp. 33-35) framework on global cultural flows explains how the diaspora is able to maintain this connection despite the geographical distance. The ability to engage with Balkan music in the Netherlands is what allows the participants to stay in touch with their heritage. Cultural flows such as music, are what enables influences of the homeland to stay present. This subtheme thus highlights how daily musical practices not only keep a sense of cultural continuity but also shape how the diaspora experiences and maintains their cultural identity over time

4.1.2 Positive Emotional Resonance

The second subtheme explores how participants associate contemporary Balkan music to a sense of enjoyment and fun. While the traditional music tends to create a sense of

nostalgia, this genre of music is linked to uplifting settings and categorized as casual listening. All participants share that this type of music, to them, fits more within social and leisurely contexts. According to Participant 9, the newer music reminded them of going clubbing with friends, drinking together, dancing and overall having fun. This showed that the emotional connection to contemporary music is related to positive social group experiences that are “just happy” and evoke “simply the feeling that I also want to be there and want to live there” (Participant 10, “gewoon vrolijk en gewoon het gevoel dat ik ook daar wil zijn en daar wil leven”). This quote highlights how contemporary music evokes a more lighthearted form of cultural attachment, which contrasts traditional genres which were said to be more emotionally loaded. Participant 7 supported this more casual nature of music by explaining that it provided a way to “just switch your brain off for a moment” (“als je hiernaar luistert is het gewoon echt even je brein uitschakelen”). Moreover, in addition to feelings of joy, pride also emerged as a shared emotion when listening to Balkan music. Participant 3 noted that being able to understand and sing along with the lyrics of these songs made them feel proud to be from their homeland: “That you can understand it and sing along, and that it’s just a part of you, that actually makes me quite proud” (“maar dat jij dat kan verstaan en mee kan zingen en dat gewoon een deel van jou is, ja dat maakt mij best wel trots”).

Thus, the findings suggest that contemporary Balkan music does foster emotions among the diaspora, though rooted in social connectedness, pride and joy, instead of nostalgia that is often associated with the traditional genres. Compared to more traditional genres, this change in emotional tone is consistent with Born's (2005, p. 7) idea of musical mediation, which presents music as a tool for fostering interpersonal connections and collective emotion. For the diaspora, this type of music plays a role in shaping how cultural experiences feel to them emotionally, especially in social contexts. This is supported by Roediger and Abel (2015, p. 2) who explain that collective memories influence the way we recall and give meaning to past experiences. In the case of Balkan music, these emotions are shaped through more positive and social environments, such as clubbing culture. Therefore, these genres are remembered through feeling a sense of belonging and joy. From the findings, it is able to suggest that the diaspora engage with these genres in an effort to create spaces that are built upon shared emotions; connecting through having fun. Moreover, Matsumoto et al. (2000, p. 180) argue that this emotional expression also reinforces cultural values. This becomes clear in how the participants described feelings of pride and happiness when engaging with contemporary styles. While the genres may lack the nostalgia found in

more traditional styles, it still contributes to the diaspora's cultural identity formation. Instead of evoking feelings of loss, it allows the diaspora to connect with their cultural heritage rooted in feelings of joy and pride.

4.1.3 Perceived emotional superficiality in contemporary music

While contemporary music plays an important role in the lives of the diaspora, every participant perceived it as less emotional and meaningful than traditional music. This subtheme will therefore cover a common perspective among the participants, namely that these newer genres, while providing a connection, induce different emotions. Participant 4, for instance, shared that modern music, rap in particular, is mainly for entertainment and usually does not induce deeper feelings such as nostalgia. Traditional music was said to evoke emotions related to sadness, longing and memories of a past home. A comparison of the two genres was explained by Participant 1 who stated: "one brings us together in a cozy way, where we're all dancing together, and the other, the old version, brings us together through real emotion, like 'let's all cry together because we kind of miss Bosnia'" (De een brengt ons samen als in gezelligheid ... en de andere brengt ons samen qua echt gevoel en emotie ... 'laten we samen met z'n allen huilen omdat we Bosnië een beetje missen'). This quote clearly showcases that participants tend to find the contemporary genres superficial and lacking emotional depth, though still connecting to it in their own generational way; grounded in their lived experiences.

Moreover, this distinction was also evident in how the participants spoke about lyrics. A participant explained that contemporary music reminded them of a Western clubbing environment, where young people meet and dance to songs that "probably makes no sense in terms of lyrics, but just focuses more on rhythm" (Participant 9, "waarschijnlijk qua tekst inhoud nergens op slaat, maar wel gewoon meer op ritme focust"). This sentiment was shared throughout the interviews, with 7 out of 10 participants acknowledging that, while the beat and overall experience of contemporary music is enjoyable, the lyrics often lack the symbolic or emotional depth that older music has.

When considering these reflections, it thus indicates that while contemporary music does play a central role in the diaspora's life, it is often viewed as being emotionally superficial. Participants viewed contemporary genres as being less linked to history and more to joy, rhythm, and everyday leisure. This change aligns with Eyerman's (2004, pp. 4-6) critique on music not being universally unifying, by highlighting differences in

generations or experience. These findings expand on his view by showing that memory and meaning in music, while different, is not lost but renegotiated.

Therefore, this does not indicate that contemporary music lacks cultural significance for the diaspora. As Anthias (2006, pp. 5-7) notes, authenticity is not a fixed concept but is shaped by the context and the generation. With the traditional music styles, the participants are reminded of a time they did not directly experience; creating a distance. Contemporary music, on the other hand, reflects their *own* lived and emotional experiences, thus affective experiences of joy, pride and generational belonging are still aiding in shaping their cultural identity. Rather than replacing traditional music, contemporary genres offer an alternative affective dimension, grounded in a shared belonging. They make it possible for the diaspora to rethink cultural ties in a way that seems affirming and current to them. Ultimately, these findings challenge the definitions of authenticity and show that the diaspora's cultural identity is shaped not solely by music's emotional depth, but also by forms of belonging that reflect their lived experiences.

4.2 Identity and Belonging Through Musical Practice

The second main theme that was found will encompass the way the diaspora uses music to navigate questions surrounding their identity and sense of belonging. The data revealed reoccurring topics such as contemporary music acting as a bridge between identities, music creating a sense of community in shared spaces, and feelings of in- and exclusion. All ten of the participants discussed how they balance and shape their identity, and touched upon lived experiences of belonging. This main theme is essential to the research since it aids in understanding how music does not merely act as a cultural product, but also as a tool for expressing one's identity and belonging to a certain cultural group.

4.2.1 Navigating hybrid identities through music

Having a dual identity revealed to be hard to navigate for the participants. This subtheme will explore how contemporary music can therefore act as bridge between their Western Dutch identity and their Balkan heritage. Participants expressed that this genre of music is able to help them position themselves between two cultures, by blending both Balkan and more Western elements; mirroring their hybrid identities. This was acknowledged by Participant 4, who described that this music "kind of creates a bridge ... between like two cultures". It was noted that the inclusion of Western music styles, made the genres feel more familiar and accessible. One participant added that this blend of different

influences is what allowed the diaspora to connect to the music more easily, especially since these Western styles are already part of their daily lives (Participant 9). Additionally, it was emphasized that, the modern Balkan songs reminded them of Dutch music they already had an appreciation for, which helped them connect these two worlds (Participant 1). To them, this genre of music helped negotiate the in-between space the diaspora often occupies. However, not all participants experienced this bridging effect. For some, the music still felt like it had a distinct Balkan style, which is something that does not resonate with non-Balkan communities. Participant 8 states:

“No, I don't think it's a bridge necessarily ... I think it's like different. It's not Western. If you would play like a contemporary Balkan song at a Western party ... it still has its own identity that only diaspora or people from the Balkans can understand. I do think it helps shaping your identity as a diaspora, but I don't think it's necessarily a bridge between like the country you grew up in and the Balkans.”

Overall, while contemporary music can serve as a tool for navigating hybrid identities, its role does differ depending on personal experiences. For some it is able to create a bridge between two cultures, while for others it reinforces a distinct sense of identity that separates them from the Dutch society.

These findings indicate that contemporary Balkan music plays a dual role for the diaspora; acting as both a cultural connector and, at times, a boundary. As noted by some, the blending of Balkan and Western influences in these genres is what reflects their own hybrid identities; feeling represented in feeling in-between. This supports Bhandari's (2021, p. 103) claim that individuals actively construct their hybrid identities via cultural engagement, by balancing continuity and change, rather than having them passively inherited. Similar to this, Kowalski (2002, pp. 256-259) three interrelated dimensions of identity, namely human universals, group associations and individual personality, which help explain music as a tool. Here, participants' engagement with contemporary Balkan music reflects the three dimensions; music supports emotional needs, affirms group affiliations and enables one's individual agency in shaping identity. Through music, second-generation diaspora is able to negotiate their position between two cultural contexts, with these genres becoming part of their everyday symbolic practices. Appadurai's (1996, pp. 33-36) transnational flows help explain how these global influences are being adapted locally, which results in identities that are shaped by both Dutch and Balkan cultural elements.

However, the reflections of Participant 8 bring nuance to this view. For some, the music's Balkan distinctiveness did not feel inclusive but actually emphasized the cultural difference between the two contexts. This supports Hall's (1990, p. 225) idea that identity is also about positioning; these genres can affirm belonging for some, while simultaneously reinforcing a sense of cultural difference for others. For some, music becomes a bridge that connects their two worlds, while for others it underscores their Balkan heritage in contrast to the Dutch society; heightening the feeling of being in-between. This former suggests that navigating one's hybrid identity through music is not static or a one-size-fits all process. It is instead, shaped by the diaspora members' personal context and background.

4.2.2 Social spaces fostering belonging

Social gatherings such as clubs, Balkan parties in the Netherlands or hanging out with friends all reinforce the sense of Balkan cultural identity. All participants shared that being physically surrounded by others who share the same background and music taste, enhanced their sense of belonging and cultural connectedness. These spaces were not only described as being fun or social, but as proper meaningful experiences that are able to reinforce their identity and create emotional bonds with other diaspora members. Participant 9 expressed that when going out in the Netherlands to places that played Balkan music "you really do feel that connection with each other" ("Dan voel je toch wel echt die verbondenheid met elkaar"). This same sentiment was also shared by Participant 3 who mentions that having a shared musical taste and music knowledge provides them with an accessible way to connect to others, stating that "you have a common ground" ("Je hebt een gemeenschappelijk vlak").

Moreover, live events such as concerts were described as being particularly impactful. One participant reflected on a childhood memory where the audience sang along to an artist's song so loudly that "he didn't even need to sing ... the audience was singing his entire song" (Participant 3). They share how this memory is one of the first they can remember and experiencing a large group singing along to the same song, made them feel connected to everyone there (Participant 3). These collective experiences were not only said to help foster a shared cultural identity but also strengthened the connection within their generation. Participant 10 described that when they started going clubbing in summer with their friends and heard the modern Balkan music, it made them feel "more connected with my own generation" ("Meer verbonden met mijn eigen generatie").

These findings suggest that social spaces centered around Balkan music are more than just entertainment for the diaspora, but places where their cultural identity, sense of belonging and generational connection are all reinforced. This is supported by Brah's (1996, p. 16) concept of diaspora space, in which multiple cultural narratives intersect, and identities are shaped through interacting with each other. Acts such as singing and dancing to the music, while being surrounded by others who share the same background, became a way to express their identities and foster belonging in a social setting. This reflects Nagel's (1994, p. 154) view of identity as something that is enacted through symbolic practices, rather than being a fixed internal trait someone has. In these environments, participants were not simply listening to music but expressing their identity that was being formed by these shared experiences. Similarly, Born (2005, pp. 7-8) emphasizes how music is more than just sound, since it is shaped by the social and emotional context in which it is experienced. For the diaspora, social events became spaces where their cultural identity was affirmed through their participation. Ultimately, these findings show that social spaces centered around music play an important role in shaping cultural identity by reinforcing a sense of belonging through shared participation and interaction with the diaspora.

4.2.3 Perceived internal and external exclusion

Another subtheme that emerged under this main theme, was that of how the diaspora uses knowledge on Balkan music as a metric for being Balkan enough. Participants noted there were instances of both internal and external exclusion tied to their engagement with Balkan music.

Internally, participants expressed that they feel the need to stay up to date with the music on the Balkans in order to maintain a sense of closeness to their culture. By keeping up with the newest releases it is a way to stay connected, especially when visiting their homeland and spending time with their local friends and family. Participant 7 shares how they used to make sure they knew the most popular songs when on vacation in their home country: "Back then, when you went to a terrace and you didn't know the music, I would literally Shazam the music so I could listen to it all summer ... so that you are sure that when they start singing it you can just sing along too" ("Vroeger, als je daar naar een terrasje ging en je kent de muziek niet, ik ging letterlijk muziek Shazamen zodat ik het heel de zomer kon luisteren ... zodat je weet dat je dat liedje kent als ze het liedje gaan zingen dat je ook gewoon mee kan zingen"). Participant 1 shared a similar view on the importance of music for belonging, by stating that "the only way I can feel like I belong is somewhat through

music” (“De enige manier hoe ik er wel bij kan horen is een beetje door muziek.”). This active engagement with music showed that for the participants, music functioned as a crucial tool to prepare for cultural experiences and to ensure their inclusion during them.

Externally, 7 out of 10 participants stated that, while they would want to say they do not, they do in fact judge other diaspora members on their knowledge of Balkan music. Knowing less Balkan songs means you are seen as less Balkan, while knowing more equals to being more Balkan. Here, music is used as a metric for one’s cultural authenticity. Participant 9 expressed that not listening to Balkan music or following the Balkan news, can make one feel “less Balkan” (“Dus je voelt je dan ook, naar mijn doen voelt je dan ook gewoon minder Balkan”). Similarly, Participant 3 found that there was a correlation between the diaspora’s connection to music and their perceived Balkan-ness: “When people don’t feel a connection with Balkan music, they also just feel a lot less Balkan” (“Als mensen die connectie niet voelen met de Balkan muziek ... ze zich ook eigenlijk gewoon een stuk minder Balkan voelen”). Music was seen as a cultural foundation and not knowing the songs could imply that one had a weaker connection to their heritage (Participant 4).

Therefore, these findings illustrate how music is not only an emotional connector, but also acts as an indicator of one’s in- and external belonging in the Balkan community. While existing literature often highlights music as enabling social connection and emotional belonging (Bloustien, 2007, p. 449; Frith, 1996, p. 124), music can also serve as a way to regulate belonging within the community. The reflections on using music as a metric for in- and exclusion, reflect Jenkins’ (2008, p. 40) argument that identity is both internal and external; a negotiation between how one sees oneself and how one is defined by society. This dynamic shows the tensions present in hybrid identities. As Bhandari (2021, p. 103) claims, insecurity and exclusion are not separate from identity development but rather contribute to it, especially for individuals from the diaspora who are second-generation and balancing several cultural norms. In this instance, keeping up with Balkan music is not only a preference, but a way for the diaspora to position themselves as authentically Balkan, while distancing themselves from those perceived as less (Hall, 1990, pp. 225-226).

Moreover, the judgement towards those that are perceived as having less knowledge on Balkan music, illustrates that music can reinforce a culture’s expectations of authenticity. Similarly, Hesmondhalgh (2008, p. 3) points that the emotional power of music can both encourage self-expression as it can reinforce conformity within the community. While May (2011, pp. 366-370) suggests that music as a symbolic practice can promote inclusion, this subtheme reveals that there are possibilities of it producing social boundaries within

diaspora. Thus, it can be derived that belonging is not viewed and experienced the same by everyone and music acts as a reference point through which inclusion and exclusion are negotiated.

4.3 Music as Carrier of Language and Cultural Memory

This theme highlights how music serves as a medium for maintaining both the native language and cultural memory among the second-generation diaspora. Through the exposure to music with lyrics in their mother tongue, participants reported that this is able to help retain and strengthen their vocabulary. Furthermore, the data showed that music is also a way for memories and cultural values to be passed down from generation to generation. This theme is important since it shows how the diaspora maintains a sense of continuity with their homeland, especially when being born and raised away from said countries. Again, all ten participants referred to music as a key tool for preserving both their language and cultural memory, making this theme relevant for answering the research question.

4.3.1 Language learning and retention through music

Under this main theme, the subtheme of music acting as a tool to stay connected to their language, emerged. All 10 participants state that music acted as one of the few ways for them to stay connected to their mother tongue, especially since they spend their daily lives speaking Dutch. They note there not being many opportunities to speak the language in everyday contexts, which is why listening to music became a way to keep it present in their lives. If not for the music, Participant 9 shares they “could go days, maybe even weeks without having spoken my own language or Bosnian at all” (“Dan zou ik dagen, misschien weken wel kunnen zonder mijn eigen taal of de Bosnische taal gesproken te hebben”). When asked if it strengthened their cultural identity, one participant added that being able to understand the lyrics of the Balkan songs plays an important role in feeling connected to the music and in turn the culture: “it’s in your mother tongue and you understand it” (Participant 2, “want het is in je moedertaal en je begrijpt het”).

Additionally, music was viewed as a tool for learning the language in a modern and accessible way. Participant 6 shared that they have felt insecure about their cultural identity due to lack of linguistic skills and that to them listening to contemporary songs “felt like I was getting to know the language better in a modern way ... listening to the new music also created a bond again with my family and friends” (“Op deze manier had ik het gevoel dat ik op een hele moderne manier ook de taal beter leerde kennen ... door middel van de nieuwe muziek luisteren vormde dat ook weer een band met mijn familie en vrienden.”). This quote

illustrates that, in addition to language learning, music can also help build one's confidence within their cultural identity and in turn strengthen their interpersonal relationships with family. Lastly, Participant 3 described that for future generations music can be a way for them to grow their vocabulary since they themselves have, through music lyrics, learned new words by looking them up when unfamiliar.

Therefore, the findings highlight how music is a valuable tool for the diaspora for both developing and maintaining their linguistic knowledge. For the participants, when engaging with their mother tongue through music, it took a symbolic form; something that tied them back to their heritage and created a sense of belonging. This aligns with Nagel (1994, p. 154) who points out that, symbolic markers like language, can also have a performative function, where the mere act of using or understanding certain words becomes a way of enacting one's cultural identity. Similarly, May (2011, p. 370) highlights how symbolic practices, such as in this case music and language, are central to how belonging is felt and negotiated.

Furthermore, participants shared that music served as a natural language learning tool, especially for those who felt insecure in their cultural identity. Here, music acted as both a cultural and linguistic bridge for the diaspora, since it made them feel closer to their heritage while also growing this connection and confidence over time. This supports Bloustien's (2007, p. 449) view that music's influence is growing when considering how cultural identity is increasingly shaped through everyday media use and more creative practices. Therefore, lyrics of Balkan songs became more than just words to the participants. They offered a flexible and accessible way to connect and reconnect with language in their daily lives; a form of linguistic preservation. Through this engagement, music can help sustain a sense of cultural identity for the diaspora.

4.3.2 Intergenerational transmission of cultural memory

The second subtheme explores how music is able to transfer memories of a past symbolic home country and preserve cultural memory. Participants note that music has been more than something they grew up listening to, it was a way for them to learn about and stay connected to their heritage, especially without having consistent access to their homeland. Instead of solely relying on visits to the Balkans, music can provide a symbolic link to their home. Certain songs were said to be tied to emotional memories, with Participant 3 explaining that they carry "moments that are no longer there, but it brings you back home" ("Momenten die er niet meer zijn, maar het brengt jou terug naar huis.").

Moreover, music was also described as one of the foundations of culture that is passed down through generations; in addition to “language, food” and “mannerisms” (Participant 4). Participant 4 emphasized that taking music away, would mean losing a part of that cultural foundation. Additionally, music was viewed as fostering a sense of connectedness within the Balkan community, which Participant 2 shared with the following quote: “Music really is a tool to feel connected to people and your own culture” (“Muziek is wel echt een middel om je verbonden te voelen met mensen en je eigen cultuur.”). It is believed that, without music, the connection to their background would have been different, stating that “I was raised in such a way that music had to be part of it I would have had a completely different connection to where I come from if music wasn’t there.” (Participant 3, “Ik ben zo opgevoed dat muziek daar een deel van heeft moeten zijn ... En had ik een hele andere connectie met waar ik vandaan kom als muziek er niet was geweest”).

Thus, music shapes how the diaspora remembers and connects with their cultural background. In this context, Contemporary Balkan music is able to become a modern *lieux de memoire*, a space where cultural memory is kept alive (Nora, 1989, pp. 23-24). It allows the participants to create an emotional connection to their homelands past that, while distant, still feels personal. Palmberger (2016, p. 30) supports this by noting how memory within the diaspora is not of fixed nature but formed through everyday practices, such as music, which are able to foster generational continuity regardless of past displacement. This is further built on by Eyerman (2004, pp. 4-6) and Condé’s (2021, p. 4) view that music is what enables collective memory to be experienced, shared and reinterpreted. Supporting the participants’ reflections of having felt less connected in their heritage without music; underscoring its importance in maintaining their cultural identity (Frith, 1996, p. 117). Lastly, Bloustien (2007, p. 449) highlights how diaspora youth use music to connect their personal experiences to a wider cultural narrative. This turns memory into something that is changing and lived rather than simply preserved through generations. Here, music becomes not merely a reflection of collective memory, but part of how cultural identity is shaped through it.

4.4 Digital Media and Cultural Mediation

The fourth theme the analysis provided will explore the role of digital media platforms in shaping the participants’ engagement with Balkan music and their sense of cultural identity. From the data, it emerged that the participants find platforms such as Spotify and TikTok, highly important when discovering and sharing music from back home. Not only are these platforms useful for music discovery and engagement, but they also

enable interaction between the diaspora. It connects individuals who share a similar background and have gone through similar experiences.

This theme is significant for the research since it shows that cultural identity is increasingly becoming mediated through digital spaces, which allows for new ways to belong and express oneself; not limited by geographical distance. Participants share that these platforms have been key spaces and tools for them to connect to Balkan music and the broader Balkan community.

4.4.1 Platforms as tools for music discovery

From the data, digital platforms have emerged as heavily influencing how the diaspora accesses and engages with Balkan music. Eight participants shared that social media platforms and music streaming services, such as TikTok and Spotify, now play a central role in how they discover new music. Additionally, participants mentioned finding more music through these platforms than through their peers. Participant 7 explained the different functions of these platforms by stating that “TikTok has really become my main platform for discovering music lately, and then Spotify, for example, is what I use to actually listen to it” (“Denk dat TikTok de laatste tijd wel echt mijn main platform is waar ik aan muziek kom, en dan Spotify bijvoorbeeld waar ik gebruik om het echt te luisteren”).

Furthermore, in the interviews, participants highlighted that by seeing Balkan music on their social media feeds, the algorithm helped shape and reinforce their music taste. For instance, Participant 4 noted that the online visibility of these genres made them more accessible, especially for the younger generation: “Social media is really influential. I think young generations relate more to this new type of genres that are also upcoming in the Balkans because they also see it online.” By repeatedly seeing this type of music online, it contributed to this music being part of one’s daily listening practices. Moreover, beyond the function of music discovery, the participants also viewed these platforms crucial in staying connected to their culture. Without social media, they would have felt more disconnected from Balkan music in general (Participant 6).

The findings show that platforms such as TikTok and Spotify are not merely entertainment for the participants, but tools that help them maintain a connection to their cultural identity through music. Instead of primarily discovering music through their friends and family, participants now rely on social media and its algorithms to guide their listening habits. This reflects Born’s (2005, pp. 7-8) notion that music is not only shaped by technology, but also by the cultural and social contexts in which it circulates. Participants

described these platforms as actively shaping their taste, rather than merely offering them a neutral access to music engagement. This aligns with Bhandari (2021, p. 103) who argues that digital spaces are central in shaping cultural identity for the second-generation diaspora, by providing them a space to explore their belonging in ways that combine both their inherited cultural values with everyday experiences. Appadurai's (1996, p. 33) has shown music is able to move across borders digitally, which gives diaspora a sense of connection to their homeland while being online. These findings can therefore suggest that music and technology now play a key role in how the diaspora maintains and defines their cultural identity.

4.4.2 Platforms as spaces for diasporic interaction and connection

In addition to aiding music discovery, digital platforms such as TikTok and Instagram were described as important social spaces for the diaspora. These platforms enable the Dutch Balkan diaspora to connect with other diaspora members who share the same background, which fosters a sense of shared experience and symbolic belonging across borders. It enables the participants to not only share music, but also to witness how other diaspora members express their cultural identity online. Participant 9 explained that these platforms act as simple and effective ways in which the diaspora can stay connected to other diaspora members: "It's just an easy platform to use to share things with others or to see things from others. To see what they post. To see what they listen to. And to stay connected with each other. Also to share things about where we come from." ("Ik denk dat het ook gewoon een makkelijk platform is om zo anderen ook dingen mee te geven. Of van andere dingen te zien. Kijken wat ze posten. Kijken waar ze naar luisteren. En zo verbonden blijven met elkaar. En dingen delen met elkaar. Ook waar we vandaan komen.").

Furthermore, Participant 10 reflected on the surprising sense of community that they felt within these spaces. They shared that seeing others on the platforms listening to and sharing Balkan music, made them realize how widespread the diaspora in reality is: "I see all these diaspora people and think, oh, we're actually with quite a lot. I didn't know we were there too." ("Ik vind het ook altijd wel inderdaad dat ik van die nieuwe liedjes zie en dat ik ook allemaal diaspora zie en denk Oh, we zijn eigenlijk met best wel veel. Ik wist niet dat we daar ook zaten."). Building upon this statement, when asked if the connection to the diaspora was fostered by these digital platforms, Participant 6 shared that without the connections with others found online, their cultural identity would also diminish: "I feel quite connected with the culture through music and have shaped my identity that way.

Without it, I would probably feel it less” (Participant 6, “Dat ik me best wel verbonden voel met de cultuur door muziek en ook mijn identiteit daardoor heb gevormd. Zou ik zonder, wat minder voelen zo.”).

Thus, the participants illustrate how digital platforms additionally function as transnational spaces for the diaspora to engage with each other and reaffirm their cultural identities. As Georgiou (2006, p. 10) argues, online platforms aid diaspora members maintain a feeling of community despite geographical distance by enabling new kinds of socialization and cultural interaction. This has been made clear by how participants claim to use Instagram and TikTok to see what other Balkan diaspora members were posting, listening to, and identifying with. Even when informal, these interactions help foster an emotional connection and a sense of symbolic belonging that is not limited by geographical distance. Moreover, this aligns with Appadurai’s argument (1996, pp. 3 & 33), since it suggests that media can blur the lines between geographic location and cultural imagination. For the participants, seeing other diaspora online contributed to a feeling of being part of a larger, imagined and transnational community; reinforcing the idea of cultural identity through shared practices. This supports El-Tayeb’s (2011, pp. 121-123) notion of networked belonging, where diaspora not only consume content but actively contribute to a shared sense of community through their presence on digital platforms. However, El-Tayeb’s (2011, pp. 121-123) notion of exclusion online was not reflected; the platforms felt inclusive instead. By making their cultural identity visible online, the participants create recognition for their cultural group beyond borders, that can often be overlooked (Hall, 1990, p. 225). Additionally, these platforms act as modern diaspora spaces, where identity is being shaped and reshaped through the diaspora’s interaction (Brah, 1996, p. 16). Ultimately, digital platforms, such as social media, have become spaces where the diaspora can connect to one another and negotiate their cultural identities in real time and without restrictions.

4.5 Balancing Heritage and Change

The fifth and final theme will touch upon the tension between the diaspora’s culture that they inherit and the evolving music scene they engage with. A reoccurring topic in the interviews was the generational difference in music preferences and the clash between old and young. This theme is important for the study since it reveals that cultural identity, while partially inherited, is also actively reinterpreted. Participants emphasized how the contemporary Balkan music feels more representative of their own lived experiences,

becoming a personal and generational way to express and balance their cultural identity as diaspora.

4.5.1 Generational shifts in musical taste

The first subtheme under this theme will explore the generational gap between the older and younger generation's appreciation for contemporary music. The older generation sees no value in these genres, while the diaspora often reported feeling more connected to this type of music instead of traditional music. This contrast in music taste highlighted that there is a difference in how the generations felt their cultural identity should be expressed.

Seven participants noted that their parents deemed the contemporary music they listen to either offensive or unappealing. Participant 3, for instance, explained that "if I let my parents hear what we listen to now, they find it absolutely awful" ("Als ik bijvoorbeeld nu aan mijn ouders laat horen wat wij nu luisteren, vinden ze het echt afschuwelijk."). From the interviews, it was gathered that the participants' parents viewed these genres as vulgar and simply not real music. This suggests that there is a contrast between the traditional understandings of Balkan music and the way the younger generations engage with it.

Despite this criticism, the participants emphasized that contemporary music still holds cultural meaning and emotional significance to them. Participant 8 acknowledged that there are indeed differences but underscored that these songs are important and relevant in shaping their generation's identity: "The music is popular for us now, even though it's like more vulgar or whatever. It's part of who we are ... it shapes us even in 20, 30 years." This shows that for the participants, contemporary Balkan music is not merely about keeping up with the latest trends, but a way of expressing their personal cultural connection to their heritage. Due to this, contemporary music will continue to hold its value later in life, since participants associate it with memories and shared moments with family and other diaspora members. Participant 7 confirms this view by stating that "to bring back memories from your younger years, I definitely think you'll keep listening to these genres" ("Maar om toch de herinneringen weer naar boven te halen die je had in je jongere jaren, denk ik dat je zeker gaat blijven luisteren naar deze genres.>").

Thus, these reflections show while the contemporary Balkan genres may be disliked and dismissed by the older generations, they still play an important role in the cultural identity formation of the second-generation diaspora. This contrast suggests that cultural memory is not passed down in a static form but gets reshaped through lived experiences. As Eyerman (2004, pp. 4-6) states, memory is not fixed, but renegotiated by generations, which

is here seen through the diaspora creating new emotional bonds with music that is dismissed by their parents. Instead of viewing this music as disconnected from the past, it is viewed as a valid way to connect with their cultural identity in the present day. Palmberger (2016, p. 30) supports this view through finding that post-Yugoslav youth often relate to cultural memory through everyday life, rather than more formal ways of connecting. For the participants, these genres become tied to everything personal to them; memories, shared social experiences and emotional expression. This way, the music still holds cultural and emotional relevance even if moving away from traditional forms; becoming a *lieux de memoire* (Nora, 1989, pp. 23-24). In this sense, the rejection of these genres by older generations is not merely a difference in musical taste, but a reflection of shifts in how cultural memory is experienced and expressed. Ultimately, contemporary Balkan music becomes a way of remembering that is generationally distinct; less shaped by inherited nostalgia and more through lived and shared experiences within the diaspora.

4.5.2 Contemporary music as personal cultural reinterpretation

The last subtheme that came up during the interviews was how the diaspora has a special connection to contemporary music due to it reflecting their lived experiences; functioning as a generational expression of their identity. Rather than holding onto the inherited ways of what identity means, this music allows them to create their own version of what being Balkan means. One that is personal and different from their parents' experiences. Participant 9 expressed that taking ownership of their identity expression and formation was seen as something tied to their own generation:

“That really felt like my thing, because no one else listened to it, only me or my little sister, for example. But then it really felt like our thing. It's our thing from our generation. And we are that generation of Balkan youth who listen to this. And we are the diaspora who listen to this ... And I think that the older generations didn't really understand us in that. Because it was something very different from what they were used to in their time” (Participant, 9, “Dat voelde wel echt mijn ding, want niemand anders luisterde dat, alleen ik of mijn zusje bijvoorbeeld. Maar dat voelde dan echt als ons ding. Het is ons ding van onze generatie. En wij zijn die generatie Balkan jongeren die dit luistert. En wij zijn de diaspora die dit luistert ... En ik denk dat ook de oudere generaties ons daar niet echt in begrepen. Want dat was wel iets heel anders dan wat zij gewend waren in hun tijd.”).

This quote shows how music fostered a sense of personal as well as a collective identity. The participants discovered the music by and for themselves, shared it with peers and felt that it represented who *they* were, instead of who their parents once were; acting as a “reflection of who I am” (Participant 9, “spiegelbeeld is van wie ik ben”).

In contrast to their parents’ generation, some participants found that this music even helped them symbolically distance themselves from traditional cultural expectations. One participant shared that listening to contemporary Balkan music allowed them to move away from their parents’ cultural norms and expectations and instead shift closer to their peers and younger relatives, such as their cousins (Participant 6). This shows that participants can shape and reshape their cultural identity through interacting with peers instead of solely through tradition. Lastly, Participant 4 added that due to growing up in-between cultures “diaspora is more open to any type of music because we've seen a lot. We are more multicultural because of where we live.” Suggesting that the second-generations openness and acceptance for contemporary genres, reflects their hybrid identity.

Thus, the data illustrates how contemporary Balkan music is not merely consumed by the diaspora but actively interpreted. For many, it became a way to feel understood, both by themselves and their peers. The findings of the final subtheme have shown that the second-generation diaspora are not simply inheriting a fixed cultural identity, but play an active role in reshaping it through their engagement with contemporary Balkan music. This genre allows them to define what being Balkan means on their own terms, in contrast to the understandings of the older generation. This music develops into a generational expression rather than a passive continuation of past tradition; serving as an outlet for reimagining cultural identity in the context of their contemporary reality (Kowalski, 2002, p. 259). This supports the idea by Bhandari (2021, p. 103) that continuous negotiation between lived experience, exclusion, and inclusion shapes hybrid identities. Furthermore, the participants’ connection to this music further supports Frith’s (1996, p. 115) theory that music is performative; not merely reflecting one’s identity but simultaneously constructing it. Their music preferences are part of a larger cultural process of self-definition rather than being chosen at random. Slobin's (1992, p. 46) idea of micromusics is relevant in this process as these modern genres serve as small, but all the while meaningful, activities that allow the diaspora to express their sense of belonging in a broader cultural context. Vilotijević’s (2020, p. 2) work on Balkan genre innovation supports this, by showing how these new Balkan sounds mirror the realities of the younger generations, rather than relying on

inherited nostalgia. By embracing this music as *theirs*, they are not rejecting their heritage but adapting it to a version that aligns with their identities as second-generation diaspora; hybrid and generationally different. Ultimately, contemporary Balkan music gives the diaspora a way to reinterpret their culture, express their identity and maintain a sense of continuity in a way that feels personal and relevant to them.

5. Conclusion

This thesis has explored how music contributes to the construction of cultural identity among the second-generation former Yugoslavian diaspora in the Netherlands. The goal of this research was to delve into how contemporary music genres are used by the second-generation to express their cultural identities, foster a sense of belonging, and maintain a symbolic connection to their homeland. By doing so, the study has shed light on an often-overlooked community and contributed new insights to identity, diaspora, and music studies.

The phenomenon that was researched is the identity formation of second-generation diaspora, not through direct experience with their homeland, but through their everyday engagement with music as a cultural practice. Unlike the first-generation migrants, the second-generation engages with their heritage through inherited cultural memory that is felt rather than lived (Crul & Schneider, 2010, p. 1251). Music, particularly genres that blend both Balkan and Western contemporary influences, emerged as a useful tool in this process.

Therefore, the findings show that music has multiple functions in the identity work of the diaspora. Firstly, music serves as an emotional anchor in everyday life, by offering participants a sense of closeness to a homeland they have never lived in but feel connected to. This affective engagement reaffirms Kowalski's (2002, pp. 256-260) emotional dimension of identity and supports DeNora's (p. 32) argument that music structures everyday experiences in personal ways. Secondly, music provides a way through which hybrid identities can be performed and negotiated, which allows the diaspora to navigate the dual identities of being both Balkan and Dutch. This confirms Hall's (1990, p. 235) notion of identity as a process rather than being of a fixed nature which further aligns with Frith's (1996, p. 115) notion of music being a medium for performing identity. Third, music plays a role in intergenerational cultural transmission, particularly through language, as the participants described music as a tool for maintaining their mother tongue. Finally, digital platforms such as TikTok and Spotify have allowed Balkan music engagement to transcend physical borders. These findings confirm Ponzanesi's (2021, para. 41) concept of digital diasporas and Appadurai's (1996, p. 35) concept of transnational cultural flows, which both highlight how online media is able to shape identity construction and symbolic belonging in transnational spaces. This study therefore concludes that the answer to the research question, *"How does music contribute to the construction of cultural identity among the former Yugoslavian diaspora in the Netherlands?"*, is that music functions as a cultural, emotional

and digital site for cultural identity negotiation. Instead of passively inheriting culture, the second-generation actively reinterprets their cultural identity through music as part of their everyday life. Thus, music plays an important role in not only how the diaspora positions themselves in the Balkan community, but also in how they maintain and strengthen their ties to their heritage.

Furthermore, the theoretical framework of this study proved to be highly suitable in capturing the different aspects of cultural identity. Hall's (1990, p. 235) view of identity as dynamic offered an important perspective for understanding the different aspects of the participants' identity negotiation. Additionally, Kowalski's (2002, pp. 256-260) model helped by highlighting the emotional, social, and individual dimensions of identity through musical engagement. Moreover, Brah's (1996, p. 16) concept of diaspora space introduced music as a site where cultural memory and contemporary lived realities intersect, while Appadurai's (1996, pp. 33-35) and Ponzanesi's (2021, para. 41) theories underscored the digital and transnational nature of this process. Together, these frameworks provided a suitable lens that made it possible to interpret the interview data in an insightful manner.

Moreover, in terms of the methodology, the use of a qualitative approach was both fitting and effective. Through ten semi-structured interviews, this study was able to capture the emotional depth and richness that was needed to understand the participants' subjective experiences (Hadžimerović, 2023, p. 59). The thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 78), provided a structured but flexible method to identify patterns and insights from the data while staying close to the participants' own words. Furthermore, the use of purposive and snowball sampling made it possible to access a relevant group of second-generation diaspora who were actively engaging with Balkan music. By following this approach, it allowed for a more authentic representation of how cultural identity is constructed in *practice*, rather than merely in theory.

5.1 Social and Academic Implications

This research contributes to academia in several ways. Firstly, it shifts the focus within diaspora studies from first-generation to the identity formation of second-generation youth. This study emphasizes how second-generation individuals interact with their past in ways that are influenced by both memory and their current realities, instead of focusing on direct continuity of culture. Secondly, by demonstrating that hybrid genres are more than merely entertainment, it strengthens the field of popular music studies. For participants, these genres serve as symbolic tools through which their cultural belonging and intergenerational

connections are strengthened. Lastly, the study expands on the work on digital diasporas by illustrating that identity formation increasingly takes place in online environments. These platforms are allowing diaspora youth to express and share their culture globally, which makes them important spaces for modern identity work.

From a societal perspective, the findings highlight the importance of recognizing how second-generation diaspora engages with their cultural heritage on their own terms. In multicultural societies like the Netherlands, where integration often ignores the emotional and cultural sides of belonging, this research can offer a different perspective. One that sees young individuals as having agency in how they relate and connect to their culture instead of inheriting tradition passively. Here, cultural identity is not about fully integrating or preservation. These findings suggest that more attention should be given to creating and supporting spaces where diaspora's cultural expression can be validated and supported; especially in education and governmental institutions. Here, music becomes a way for youth to stay connected, be seen and feel a sense of belonging beyond the standard notions of identity.

5.2 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Despite the study's contributions, it also has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The sample size was relatively small and included a gender imbalance, with nine women and one man participating. This means that the findings may not fully capture the potential differences in how gender shapes musical engagement and identity within the diaspora. Additionally, the research was based solely on in-depth interviews, which, while rich in detail, could have been complemented by other methods such as a content analysis of social media content. Lastly, the study focused specifically on the Dutch context, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other national or diaspora environments.

Future research could build on these findings by conducting more comparative studies, either between different European countries or between the former Yugoslav diaspora and other post-migration communities. This would allow for a better understanding on how national environments shape the role of music in identity formation. Additionally, it could be investigated how second-generation diaspora engage in music production themselves, rather than focusing only on consumption. Furthermore, due to the researcher's shared cultural background with the participants, there is a possibility of interpretive bias, as familiarity with the diaspora context may have influenced the interpretation of the data. Future research could consider involving researchers with more cultural distance, to provide

other perspectives and reduce potential bias. Finally, future studies could explore the intersections between cultural identity and other dimensions such as religion, sexuality, or socio-economic background, which could offer a more nuanced and intersectional perspective on how music functions within diaspora contexts.

In conclusion, this research has shown that music is more than merely a cultural product; it is a medium through which second-generation diaspora make sense of who they are, where they come from, and where they belong. Since their identities are constantly negotiated across generations and locations, music offers them a sense of cultural continuity. In the end, music gives diaspora the ability to not only inherit culture but also adapt it on their own terms; serving as both a reflection and expression of their cultural identity.

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Appendix A: Coding Frame

Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Illustrative Open Codes
1: Affective Dimensions of Contemporary Music	Music as emotional anchor in everyday life	Music as core of identity Music part of daily life Music as everyday tool to connect to roots Music always on at home Music helps keep connection alive with home
	Positive Emotional Resonance	Contemporary music is fun Modern music evokes socialness Enjoyment Positive connection to Balkan music
	Perceived emotional superficiality in contemporary music	Contemporary genres less emotional Contemporary music less emotion Contemporary genres seen as less serious No meaning in contemp. music Contemporary music does not require a lot of engagement
2: Identity and Belonging Through Musical Practice	Navigating hybrid identities through music	Dual identity Contemporary music connecting both identities Found balance in dual identity Hybrid identity Music helps create bridge between two identities
	Social spaces fostering belonging	Balkan parties connect diaspora through music Feeling of connectedness at Balkan parties Connectedness at social gatherings Clubbing shared liking diaspora People gather at Balkan music event
	Perceived internal and external exclusion	Feels as "other" Outcast when not knowing music Outsider in both countries Using music to support one's Balkanness Within diaspora music as metric
3: Music as Carrier of Language and Cultural Memory	Language learning and retention through music	Music as language learning tool Music helps keep language alive Connection to language grew Language fluency strengthens cultural identity Language connects to roots
	Intergenerational transmission of cultural memory	Intergenerational communication through music Early childhood music shaped cultural identity Music connects to narratives of homeland through parents Grandparents influence Music as generational bridge

4: Digital Media and Cultural Mediation	Platforms as tools for music discovery	Music discovery through algorithm Discovering new artists on TikTok Spotify for finding new music Digital media shaping taste Finds music primarily through social media
	Platforms as spaces for diasporic interaction and connection	Platforms help stay connected to home Diaspora connecting on TikTok Community-building online Platforms create connectedness through shared listening practices Social media connects diaspora
5: Balancing Heritage and Change	Generational shifts in musical taste	Generational shift in music perception Difference in music taste between parents and children Younger generations grew up with contemporary music Music taste shifts over time Generational rejection of newer music
	Contemporary music as personal cultural reinterpretation	Contemporary music truly own identity Contemporary music way to create own cultural identity New music part of diaspora Music as self-expression tool Modern Balkan music shaped personal identity

Appendix B: Interview Guides

A.1 English interview guide

Hi! Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me today. Before we begin, I'd like to explain a few things. This interview is part of my master's thesis research at Erasmus University Rotterdam, and it's focused on how music shapes cultural identity among people from the former Yugoslavian diaspora living in the Netherlands. This interview will take about 45 to 60 minutes, and your participation is completely voluntary. You can skip any question, take a break, or stop at any time.

With your permission, I'd like to record the interview to help me transcribe and analyze it later. The recording and transcript will be kept confidential and used only for research purposes. In my thesis, I will not use your real name, and your responses will be anonymized.

- Do you have any questions before we begin?
- Are you okay with me recording this interview?

1: Introduction and Background

1. Can you briefly tell me a bit about yourself? - for example, your age, where you live, study, etc.
2. Where is your family originally from?
3. How would you describe your connection to your background?
 - i. Would you consider it to be strong?
4. What kind of cultural elements were present in your upbringing? This could be language, food, music, values - anything.

2: Music in Daily Life

5. What kind of role does music play in your daily life?
6. What kind of music do you usually listen to?
7. Do you listen to genres like hip-hop, rap, trap, or other contemporary styles?

-> By contemporary styles, I mean newer or modern music genres like hip-hop, rap, trap, or any other similar styles that are popular among the younger generations today.

8. Are there any artists from the Balkans or from the diaspora that you listen that produce music in these genres?

i. Were you raised with this music, or did you discover this yourself?

9. Can you describe how it felt for you when you *first started* listening to this type of music?

3: Music and Emotional Connection

10. How do you feel when you listen to Balkan music in contemporary styles like trap or rap?

11. Do these genres feel more *relevant* to your experiences than traditional Balkan music? Why or why not?

* 12. Is there a specific song or artist that has felt especially meaningful to you?

4: Identity and Diaspora

I would now like to ask you some questions about your cultural identity and your experience as part of the diaspora. By that, I mean how you see yourself in terms of your background and heritage, and what it's like to grow up in the Netherlands while still feeling connected to another culture or country through your roots.

13. How would you describe your cultural identity?

i. What does it mean to you?

14. Has your sense of cultural identity developed over time?

15. Do you feel a sense of belonging in Dutch society?

16. Do you feel a sense of belonging in the Yugoslavian or Balkan diaspora community?

17. Imagine you had to pick between identifying most with the Balkans, Netherlands or diaspora group, which one would you choose?

18. In what ways do you stay connected to your cultural background as part of the diaspora?

19. Do you ever feel like you're navigating between two cultures as diaspora? If so, how

5: Music and Identity Formation

20. Do you think your music taste reflects something about who you are?
21. Has music helped you build or shape your cultural identity in any way?
 - i. Has it strengthened it?
22. Has music helped you connect to your experience as part of a diaspora community?
23. Have you ever felt the need to prove yourself in the Balkans by showing others you know the music/songs?
24. How do you think your relationship with this music differs from your parents' or older generations'?
 - i. Do you think the diaspora will hold onto this genre after 20, 30, 40 years?
25. Do you think contemporary music makes Balkan music more accessible to the younger generations?
26. Would you find someone "less Balkan" if they knew less Balkan songs and vice versa?

6: Digital Aspect

27. Do you use platforms like Spotify, YouTube, or TikTok to find or follow Balkan music?
 - i. Do they help you stay connected?
28. Have you ever shared this type of music with others?
29. Do these platforms help you feel more connected to your cultural background or community?

7: Reflection

30. Do you think Balkan music has influenced how you see yourself or your background?
31. Do you feel more or less connected to your roots now compared to earlier in your life?
32. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your identity, your background, or your relationship to music?

Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts and experiences with me today. If you have any questions or think of anything you would like to add later, feel free to reach out.

I'll be transcribing and analyzing the interviews in the coming weeks, and of course, your identity will remain anonymous throughout the process.

Would you like me to send you a short summary of the research findings once the project is completed?

Thanks again for your time! I really appreciate it!

Definitions

- **Cultural identity:** How you see yourself in terms of background, heritage, and culture.
- **Diaspora:** People who live outside their country of origin but still feel connected to it through culture, family, or community.
- **Belonging:** Feeling accepted or at home in a group, place, or society.
- **Second-generation:** Someone born in the Netherlands to parents who were born in former Yugoslavia.
- **Hybrid identity:** A mix of cultural influences that shape how someone sees themselves.

A.2 Dutch interview guide

Hoi! Bedankt dat je de tijd neemt om vandaag met mij een interview te voeren. Voordat we beginnen, wil ik graag een paar dingen toelichten. Dit interview maakt deel uit van mijn masterscriptie aan de Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam en richt zich op hoe muziek bijdraagt aan de culturele identiteit van mensen uit de voormalige Joegoslavische diaspora die in Nederland wonen. Het interview duurt ongeveer 45 tot 60 minuten. Je deelname is volledig vrijwillig en je mag op elk moment een vraag overslaan, pauzeren of stoppen.

Met jouw toestemming zou ik het interview graag willen opnemen, zodat ik het later nauwkeurig kan uitwerken en analyseren. De opname en transcriptie blijven vertrouwelijk en worden alleen gebruikt voor onderzoeksdoeleinden. In mijn scriptie zal ik je echte naam niet gebruiken, en je antwoorden worden geanonimiseerd.

- Heb je nog vragen voordat we beginnen?
- Ga je akkoord met het opnemen van dit interview?

1: Introductie en Achtergrond

1. Kun je kort iets over jezelf vertellen? Zoals je leeftijd, waar je woont, wat je doet (studie of werk).
2. Waar komt je familie oorspronkelijk vandaan?
3. Hoe zou je jouw band met die achtergrond omschrijven?
 - i. Zou je die als sterk beschrijven?
4. Welke culturele elementen waren aanwezig in je opvoeding? Denk aan taal, eten, muziek, waarden, enzovoort.

2: Muziek in het Dagelijks Leven

5. Wat voor rol speelt muziek in jouw dagelijkse leven?
6. Naar wat voor soort muziek luister je meestal?
7. Luister je naar genres zoals hiphop, rap, trap of andere hedendaagse stijlen?

-> Met hedendaagse stijlen bedoel ik nieuwere of moderne muziekgenres zoals hiphop, rap, trap, of andere vergelijkbare stijlen die nu populair zijn onder jongere generaties.
8. Zijn er artiesten uit de Balkan of diaspora waar je naar luistert die muziek binnen deze genres produceren?

i. Heb je dit meegekregen in de opvoeding via je ouders of zelf ontdekt?

9. Hoe voelde het voor jou toen je *begon* te luisteren naar deze muziek?

3: Muziek en Emotionele Verbondenheid

10. Hoe voel je je als je luistert naar Balkanmuziek in hedendaagse stijlen zoals trap of rap?

11. Zijn deze genres voor jou relevanter dan traditionele Balkanmuziek? Waarom wel of niet?

*12. Is er een specifiek nummer of artiest die veel voor je betekent?

4: Identiteit en Diaspora

Ik ga je nu een aantal vragen stellen over je culturele identiteit en je ervaring als onderdeel van de diaspora. Daarmee bedoel ik hoe je jezelf ziet in relatie tot je achtergrond en afkomst, en hoe het is om op te groeien in Nederland terwijl je je nog steeds verbonden voelt met een andere cultuur of land via je roots.

13. Hoe zou je jouw culturele identiteit omschrijven?

i. Wat betekent dit voor jou?

14. Is je gevoel van culturele identiteit in de loop der tijd veranderd?

15. Voel je je thuis in de Nederlandse samenleving?

16. Voel je je thuis in de Joegoslavische of Balkandiaspora?

17. Als je moest kiezen met welke groep je je het meest identificeert: de Balkan, Nederland of de diasporagroep; welke zou je dan kiezen?

18. Op welke manieren blijf je verbonden met je culturele achtergrond als lid van de diaspora?

19. Heb je weleens het gevoel dat je tussen twee culturen in zit? Zo ja, kun je daar een voorbeeld van geven?

5: Muziek en Identiteitsvorming

20. Denk je dat je muzieksmaak iets zegt over wie je bent?

21. Heeft muziek je geholpen om je culturele identiteit op te bouwen of vorm te geven?

i. Heeft Balkan muziek de band met je achtergrond versterkt?

22. Heeft muziek je geholpen om je verbonden te voelen met de diaspora?
23. Heb je ooit het gevoel gehad dat je jezelf wilde bewijzen op de Balkan door aan anderen te laten zien dat je bepaalde liedjes kent?
24. Hoe verschilt jouw relatie met deze muziek van die van je ouders of oudere generaties?
 - i. Denk je dat de diaspora van nu dezelfde liedjes zal blijven luisteren over 20, 30, 40 jaar?
25. Denk je dat de hedendaagse genres, de Balkan muziek toegankelijker maakt voor jongere generaties?
26. Zou je iemand als ‘minder Balkan’ beschouwen als diegene minder Balkan liedjes kent, en andersom?

6: Digitale Platformen

23. Gebruik je platforms zoals Spotify, YouTube of TikTok om Balkanmuziek te ontdekken of te volgen?
 - i. Helpen deze jou om verbonden te blijven?
24. Heb je deze muziek weleens gedeeld met anderen?
25. Helpen deze platforms je om je meer verbonden te voelen met je culturele achtergrond of gemeenschap?

7: Reflectie

26. Denk je dat Balkan muziek invloed heeft gehad op hoe je naar jezelf of je achtergrond kijkt?
27. Voel je je nu meer of minder verbonden met je roots dan vroeger?
28. Is er verder nog iets dat je graag zou willen delen over je identiteit, achtergrond of je relatie tot muziek?

Heel erg bedankt dat je je gedachten en ervaringen vandaag met me hebt gedeeld. Als je later nog iets wilt toevoegen of vragen hebt, mag je me altijd een bericht sturen. De komende weken zal ik de interviews transcriberen en analyseren en je identiteit blijft uiteraard anoniem.

Zou je het leuk vinden om aan het einde van mijn onderzoek een korte samenvatting van de resultaten te ontvangen?

Nogmaals dank voor je tijd! Ik waardeer het enorm!

Definities

- **Culturele identiteit:** Hoe je jezelf ziet qua achtergrond, afkomst en cultuur.
- **Diaspora:** Mensen die buiten hun land van herkomst wonen, maar zich nog steeds verbonden voelen met die cultuur, familie of gemeenschap.
- **Ergens bij horen:** Het gevoel hebben dat je geaccepteerd wordt of je thuis voelt in een groep, plek of samenleving.
- **Tweede generatie:** Iemand die in Nederland is geboren, maar ouders heeft die geboren zijn in voormalig Joegoslavië.
- **Hybride identiteit:** Een mix van culturele invloeden die samen bepalen hoe iemand zichzelf ziet.

Appendix C: Interview Consent Form

CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:

Sara Tokic, 585500st@eur.nl

DESCRIPTION

You are invited to participate in research about cultural identity formation through music. The purpose of the study is to understand: *How does music contribute to the construction of cultural identity among the former Yugoslavian diaspora in the Netherlands?*

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms,⁵ my questions will be related to your personal background, cultural identity, sense of belonging, music preferences, emotional connection to music, and your experiences with digital music platforms.

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will make an audio recording of the interview.

I will use the material from the interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. I will not use your name or other identifying information, such as contact details or exact location, in the study. To participants in the study will only be referred to with pseudonyms, and in terms of general characteristics such as age, gender, and cultural background.

You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point.

TIME INVOLVEMENT

Your participation in this study will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes. You may pause or stop your participation at any time.

PAYMENTS

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

DATA COLLECTION AND RETENTION

During the interview, the following personal data will be collected from you: Name (optional), age, gender, occupation, cultural and ethnic background, opinions and feelings related to music and identity, and audio recordings (if you consent). If you wish to receive a summary of the research findings, I will ask for your **email address** to send it to you.

Though, you are not required to provide it.

Your data will be retained for a minimum of 5 years. I retain the data so that, if needed,

other researchers have the opportunity to verify that the research was conducted correctly.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions.

If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact –anonymously, if you wish— Carmen Longas Luque, MSc at longasluque@eshcc.eur.nl

Do you have a complaint or concerns about your privacy? Please email [Sara Tokic](mailto:Sara.Tokic@eur.nl), 585500st@eur.nl, or visit www.autoriteitpersoonsgegevens.nl. (T: 088 - 1805250)

SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you DO NOT NEED to sign this form. In order to minimize risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be recorded during this study:

Name

Signature

Date

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study

Name

Signature

Date

This copy of the consent form is for you to keep.

Appendix D: AI Declaration Form

D.1 Declaration

Student Information

Name: Sara Tokic

Student ID: 585500

Course Name: Master Thesis CM5000

Supervisor Name: Carmen Longas Luque

Date: 25 - 06 - 2025

Declaration:

Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools

I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously.

GenAI use would include, but not limited to:

- Generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, Quillbot) limited strictly to content that is not assessed (e.g., thesis title).
- ~~Writing improvements, including~~ grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)
- Language translation (e.g., DeepL), without generative AI alterations/improvements.
- Research task assistance (e.g., finding survey scales, qualitative coding verification, debugging code)
- Using GenAI as a search engine tool to find academic articles or books (e.g.,

☒ I declare that I have used generative AI tools, specifically [Name of the AI Tool(s) or Framework(s) Used], in the process of creating parts or components of my thesis. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of thesis work.

☐ I declare that I have NOT used any generative AI tools and that the assignment concerned is my original work.

Signature: [digital signature]

Date of Signature: [Date of Submission]

Extent of AI Usage

☒ I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the thesis were undertaken by me. I have enclosed the prompts/logging of the GenAI tool use in an appendix.

Ethical and Academic Integrity

☒ I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was used responsibly, and any content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my

creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Signature: Sara T.

Date of Signature: 25 – 06 – 2025

D.2 Prompts

Grammarly was used to check grammar issues and help improve sentence quality and readability.

Furthermore, ChatGPT was used for supplementary tasks. Below are some example prompts:

- “Simplify this so I can understand it better. Pretend I am a kindergarten student.”
- “Are all the references that are in the text, also in the reference list? If I missed any provide me with a list of which.”
- “Is this the correct APA reference for this article/book?”
- “How do I implement a quote before my introduction?”
- “Help me refine my acknowledgements.”
- “What is another word I can use instead of ...?”
- “Check if the structure of my thesis and subsections make sense/if they flow well”
- “Do you think ... section overlaps too much with ... section?”
- “Does my interpretation of this concept adhere to the article by ...?”
- “Help me think of a strong title for my thesis.”
- “Help me think of strong titles for my themes/subthemes.”
- “Summarize this article for me in a 100 words so I can understand its argument better”
- “How do you structure a strong conclusion section/what elements are needed?”
- “How do I apply codes in Atlas.ti?”
- “How do I start my page numbers on a different page?”
- “Review my whole thesis and let me know if I need to improve any sections in terms of clarity, mistakes or strength.”