



## Music, Memory, and Affect Attunement: Connecting Kurdish Diaspora in Stockholm

By Ulrik Volgsten & Oscar Pripp

### Abstract

This article takes its point of departure in Maurice Halbwachs' notion of collective memory, adding the distinction made by Jan Assmann between communicative and cultural memory, and Alfred Schütz's notion of communication, understood here as the sonorous communication of bodily affect. By combining and cross-fertilizing the concept of memory with that of affective experience, our aim is to take a new and productive perspective on music's role as and in cultural memory as well as the crucial role played by *affect attunement*. As examples, we use interviews and observations from an on-going research project on the role of music in ethnically-based associations in Sweden. In addition, we show how music often transgresses the categorical distinctions of collective memory. The main questions we ask are a) to the extent that there is a difference between music serving as a means for and as content of collective memory (what the memory is "about"), how can we account for and explain this difference? and b) how does verbally-narrated content relate to the sound of music when it comes to collective memory?

**Keywords:** Affect Attunement, Collective Memory, Diaspora, Identity, Kurdish, Music

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In 1939, Maurice Halbwachs described the role of collective memory for the performance of music (Halbwachs 1939/1980). Prefiguring present day research on mirror neurons, Halbwachs suggested that when we listen to music, the human brain produces motor schemata on which the listener later relies to recall and recognize the music. However, as complexity and quantity of information increase, individual memories become insufficient, requiring the mnemonic support of externalized collective memory (Halbwachs' primary example is musical notation). In 1951, twelve years after the publication of Halbwachs' seminal article, Schütz criticized Halbwachs' conclusions by claiming that the important social dimension of music lay not in the conventional norms for reproducing music but in the culture-specific ways of communicating the content of Halbwachs' motor schemata, what Schütz described as the experience of the flow of "inner time" (Schütz 1951). Here, we take as our point of departure Halbwachs' notion of collective memory, adding the subdivision made by Jan Assmann between communicative and cultural memory, and Schütz's notion of communication, understood here as the sonorous communication of bodily affect (rather than cognitively encoded experiences of time). By combining and cross-fertilizing the concept of memory with that of affective experience, we take a new and productive perspective on music's role as and in cultural memory as well as the crucial role played by *affect attunement* and the way the latter informs personal and collective identity. As examples, we draw on interviews and observations from an on-going research project on the role of music in ethnically-based associations in Sweden, in this case the Kurdish association *Komciwan* in Stockholm.

### Music as/in collective memory

Halbwachs' concern regarding music was the role of collective memory for musicians – e.g., the musicians' memory for music such as remembering repertoires and remembering performance practices. Although there are studies on musicians' collective memory along Halbwachs' line (e.g., Arom 1990, Helmlinger 2001), we are interested in how music contributes to collective remembering. More specifically, how music functions *as* memory.

According to Jan Assmann, who does not speak particularly about music, memory "enables us to form an awareness of selfhood (identity), both on the personal and on the collective level" (2008: 109). Although Assmann does not say much about individual personal memory, he makes a fruitful and cogent distinction between communicative memory and cultural memory (Assmann 1995). Both communicative and cultural memory are collective. Both are crucial for the

formation of our identities. Both connect the past with the present. The difference lays in how communicative and cultural memory are collective, how they form identity, and how they connect the past with the present. Communicative memory is based on everyday communication within relatively small groups. It is colloquial and non-specialized, non-formalized and reciprocal. Cultural memory, on the other hand, is distanced from the everyday. It is organized and institutionalized through rites, sacred sites, and canonized texts (cf. Sandberger 2008). In contrast to the limited and changing horizon of the past in communicative memory, cultural memory fixes a past as a mythological common heritage. It serves, one might say, as a portal to an everlasting origin. As the term indicates (without assuming any essentialist notion of culture), cultural memory concerns identity formation in culture at large.

To what extent is music involved in communicative and cultural remembering? Considering music as informal everyday communication between coequal participants (i.e., music as communicative memory), the example that first comes to mind might perhaps be children's songs and nursery rhymes. Playing together is a socializing and self-defining activity that relates children to their peers and to old and new activities. Karaoke singing might be a contemporary example that bridges childhood and adulthood in terms of its communicative possibilities (Young 2012; see also articles in Mitsui & Husokawa 1998). A third example of communicative memory is the recording and exchange of mixed cassette tapes among teenagers, which became a widespread activity from the 1970s to the early 1990s and which enabled the expression and articulation of self-identity in terms of personal taste and preferences (Peiseler, et al. 2005; Hasbargen & Krämer 2005). Of similar importance is the more recent sharing of mp3 files within a close circle of friends (Werner 2009), and exchange of playlists on digital platforms such as Spotify (Kaun & Fast 2014, 26ff.). José van Dijk summarizes the point well: "Shared listening, exchanging (recorded) songs, and talking about music create a sense of belonging, and connects a person's sense of self to a larger community and generation" (van Dijk 2006: 357; see Anderson 2004 for more on private listening and re-collective practices).

Turning to cultural memory-functions of music, one could refer to more or less any canonized repertoire of songs or performance practices, classical or popular, old or new. Music in most cultures is manifestly functional.<sup>1</sup> Different repertoires exist for weddings, funerals, religious feasts, etc. And although Western modern aesthetics has regarded music a fine art to be contemplated exclusively for its disinterested aesthetic qualities (effectively hiding its lowly commercial conditions), some studies convincingly show the indispensable function of Western classical music for the reasserting of middle and upper class identities (e.g., Martin 2006). In all these cases, Western and non-Western, music can be seen

as an example of cultural memory that “directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of a society [in a form] that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice”, a practice through which this society “derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity” (Assmann 1995: 126, 130). Where there are no appropriate traditions to fulfil the requisite functions, new traditions are made: such as the Swedish “song treasure” collected for school education in the early twentieth century (Flodin 1998), the turning of the *Dengbêj* tradition into an institutionalized Kurdish tradition in Turkey (Scalbert-Yücel 2009; Schäfers 2015), and the celebration of rock music as cultural heritage during Liverpool’s status as European Cultural Capital in 2008 (Cohen 2013).

These are examples that fit relatively smoothly within Assmann’s descriptions of communicative and cultural memory: i.e., examples where music is either somehow a means for communicating among the participants (communicative memory) or where music is that which forms the substance of the rites and canonized repertoires (cultural memory). However, judging from descriptions in the existing literature as well as in our own empirical research on Kurdish music, many musical activities seem to fall somewhere in between the two categories, being on the one hand more specified regarding the roles given to the participating singers and players and on the other hand being less canonized in terms of repertoires and celebrating a fixed common past or origin. For instance, George Lipsitz describes Rock ‘n’ Roll in terms of an on-going dialogue between the artists and their tradition (rather than between musicians and their audiences), and how the same music may simultaneously have very different meanings to different listeners in different social and historical contexts (Lipsitz 1990: 99ff.).

In addition, often it seems as if music is not just the means for communication, but also *that which* is communicated about in verbal narrative terms. Examples abound of more or less formalised and established stories about the origins of such different musics as for instance that of the Assyrian church (Lundberg 2009) and punk rock (Turrini 2013), to more explicit biographies telling of the life and music of artists such as Robert Johnson (Rothenbuler 2007) and Bob Dylan (Strachan 2008).<sup>2</sup> As pointed out by Alan Merriam decades ago, there are no musical cultures that do not talk about their music (Merriam 1964: 117). And, according to van Dijk, “[v]erbal narratives help in the conveyance of musical preferences and the feelings associated with them, to the extent that it becomes difficult to tell ‘lived’ memories from the stories told” (van Dijk 2006: 363).

But what does this emphasis on the verbally narrated – as distinct from the musically sounding – mean? Where does it position talk about music and experiences of sounding music when it comes to collective memory? And to the extent that there is a difference between music serving as a means for and music as the narrated content of collective memory, how can we account for and explain this

difference? In the next section we will answer these questions by referring to a theory according to which musical experiences are *affective* and depend on the *attunement* between music and its interlocutors in concrete social situations. Here is not the place to enter an argument over theoretical detail. Instead of referring to any physiological or cognitive theory of emotion which explains the feeling and emotional impact of music in terms of antecedent evaluations and perceptions, as for instance van Dijk does, we will give the outline of a more socially- and phenomenologically-oriented model (see Volgsten 2006; 2012; 2013), accommodating both Halbwachs' motor schemata and Schütz's experiences of inner time. This theory differentiates between the verbal and non-verbal aspects of musical experiences and the way these experiences are formed by narrative and narrative-like structures. It accounts for music's role as identity re-enforcer for both the individual and collective level. In short, this theory of musical sound, identity, and affect has explanatory power better suited, we believe, for issues concerning music and collective memory. In a subsequent section, we will relate our views on collective memory and musical experience to empirical material based on interviews with Swedish youth with Kurdish background. This strategy will help us answer our two initial questions: 1) Given that there is a difference between music serving as a means for and as content of collective memory (what the memory is "about"), how can we account for and explain this difference? and 2) How does verbally-narrated content relate to the sound of music when it comes to collective memory?

## Music, identity, and affect attunement

Human beings are social animals of a reflexive kind. We can see ourselves in others, as Paul Ricoeur (1992) has pointed out. Equally true, we are, borrowing a phrase from Julia Kristeva, strangers to ourselves (Kristeva 1992). However, neither Ricoeur nor Kristeva has paid attention to how this multifaceted reflexivity is at bottom musical or, as we prefer to say, *protomusical*. Our experiences of music draw upon similar processes that underlie our most basic social interactions. As we shall see, this protomusical aspect of human sociality – as well as Ricoeur's and Kristeva's insights – has some interesting consequences for understanding music as collective memory.<sup>3</sup>

Hearing music may in certain ways feel similar to having an emotion. The feelings that lie at the bottom of our experiences of music are similar to those forming the felt substrate of emotions. They have been described in neurophysiological terms as "temporal pattern[s] of changes in density of neural firing" (Stern 1995: 84; see also K ppe, et al. 2008). These patterns enable more than just the coding of corresponding motor schemata (cf. Johnson 2007, 17ff.). As a result of these temporal patterns of neural firing being hedonically appraised by our aurally

sensitive bodies (Berlyne 1971), the phenomenological experience is affective. In other words, it is not just a case of music's formal shape, its particular ebbs and flows, being similar to the "morphology of feeling" (Langer 1948: 193). Rather than being just an achronic formal matter (i.e., a musical shape being similar to the feeling shape of some emotion or other for our minds to recognize), this similarity in the flow of inner time, as it were, enables music to *sound* the way emotions are *felt*. We will refer to these temporal feeling shapes as "affect", reserving the term "emotion" for feelings with a representational content.

It should be noted that despite their importance for our musical experiences, affect does not determine either the intentional content of the emotions (i.e., what the emotions are about) nor the aesthetic significance of sound (i.e., that which turns sound into music). However, the affective properties of music are what underlie the specific semiotic codes of many musical cultures, whereby more or less extensive plots may be built up by smaller musical phrases and units, so-called "musemes" (Tagg 1979, McClary 1991). Similar affective feeling shapes are also what enable the earliest processes of human socialisation. To see how such processes of early socialization influence our ability to experience music, we will briefly look at some important findings from developmental psychology.

Within its first days of life, a new-born can distinguish her mother's voice from other voices (DeCasper & Fifer 1980; Karmiloff & Karmiloff-Smith 2001). By two months, infants react differently to different prosodic speech patterns: falling speech melodies soothe, rising melodies attract attention, bell-shaped and falling melodies maintain attention, monotonous voice melodies are likely to discourage on-going behaviour (see Papousek, et al. 1991). This is not just a case of innate reactions. The affective qualities to which the child attends when hearing her caretakers voice – variations in intensity, rhythm, and prosodic shape – constitute the earliest temporally organized islands of coherence and coordination in an otherwise non-differentiated world of chaos, a "preverbal constellation" (Gutatti 2003: 69). Such affective experiences serve as the earliest points of reference between which relationships of significance can be inferred and remembered. As time goes by, the child will increasingly experience the difference between events that it may enact itself (encoded as motor schemata) and events that are beyond the limits of its own immediate volition.

The experience of being the agent of certain affectively coherent events but not of others is crucial for the emergence of a sense of self and, by extension, a sense of music. According to developmental psychologist Daniel Stern (1985), human subjectivity can be explained as emerging along a route of an increasingly articulated sense of self. Stern speaks of "the sense of an emergent self", "the sense of a core self", "the sense of a subjective self", and "the sense of a verbal self". These different senses of self emerge during different phases in early life, from about two

months of age to two years of age when the child starts to acquire spoken language. The verbal sense of self then adds to a narrated self at about three to four years of age, when the child starts to articulate a self-reflexive identity.

The emergence of the various senses of self is accomplished through the necessary interaction with others. Infants interact vocally, gesturally, and bodily with other people in their immediate environment, for example, to seek attention when hungry or in a playful mood (Beebe & Lachmann 1988; Jaffe, et al. 2001; Trevarthen 2002). These interactions are felt by the interlocutors as temporal feelings – as affect. We feel in and with our bodies the action and behaviour both of our own conduct and that of our interlocutors, the latter of which we observe with our senses. For example, a caregiver's interaction will not be a strict imitation or a mirroring of the child's vocalizations. By responding with a slightly different vocalization, the child senses that the response is not directed towards the observable specifics of its behaviour, but towards the feeling, the affective experience. The child comes to sense something like “*I* have an affective experience that *You* respond to with a similarly affective-laden behaviour, because *You* have noticed the affective experience that *I* have”. Stern calls this “affect attunement”, and the properties attuned to are variations in intensity, timing, rhythm, and shape (ibid. 138ff. i.e., the protomusical specifics pointed out above). As a result, the child becomes able to ascribe subjective properties such as affective experiences, emotions, and intentionality both to itself and to others.

An important point is that a person's sense of self emerges together with the ability to sense an “other” (Stern 1985: 70 n.1). Stern names the sense of a core self a “self versus other”, which, as it increasingly comes to acknowledge this other, turns into a “self with other” (ibid: 69, 100). In other words, our emerging sense of a “core self” necessarily involves a simultaneous emergence of a “core other”, against and with which our “selves” are articulated. Likewise, a sense of being a “subjective self” emerges in relation to our sense of there being a “subjective other”. Stern's notion of affect attunement thus amounts to more than the dialogical interaction between two protagonists. Affect attunement is the dialectic and self-estranging process by which “*I*” sense my own subjective experiences through the simultaneous identification of “*your*” subjective experiences, a process that Felix Guattari has described as a “trans-subjective” dialectic (Guattari op. cit: 6). The sense of a subjective other self thus involves the distinction between the physical stimulus (e.g., the vocalizations, the protomusical sounds) and the affective experiences of both oneself and that of the other. In Stern's case, it is a matter of coming to sense that both “*I*” and “*You*” have similar affective experiences, affective experiences that are not identical with our observable behavioural (physical) interaction. This process continues through life – the phases outlined by Stern recurring separately or together in ever new formations and accentuations in our encounters with others.

Now, our suggestion is that music functions in similar ways as this process of social interaction and identification. Experiencing music thus involves the non-verbal ascription to something other – the variations in rhythm, timing, intensity, and shape of sound – qualities in response to one's own affective reactions. Both my affective reactions and the qualities I project in response are something different from the material sounds as well as the physical interaction (singing, playing) that brings the sounds to my ears. Neither my experience nor that which my experience is “of” (and which it is somehow similar to) is reducible to the observable singing, dancing, or playing behaviour in a “live” situation, i.e. the observable causes of the affective experience (the protomusicality of the child's communicative abilities attests to this dialectic; the roots of music are pre-cognitive and emergent). Nevertheless, the material sounds brought about by physical interaction are necessary for there to be anything to affectively attune to. The sounding stimulus is the necessary but insufficient substrate for music – a temporally unfolding substrate to which we attune and on which we subsequently project the aesthetic qualities that transfigure sound into the culturally specified music of our collective memories.

Just as the sense of being a self requires the simultaneous sense of there being at least one other, the opposite is equally true: for there to be an “other”, a subjective other, for there to be a “You”, there has to be an “I”. And a similar trans-subjective dialectic, we claim, holds for music. For there to be music with aesthetic qualities of whatever cultural kind, there has to be a listener for whom the ascription of these qualities are part of the sense-making of the affective experiences that the attunement has brought about. We mentioned above examples of communicative memory in which the singer or player attunes to the listener, and perhaps children's songs sung together is the paradigm example of this phenomenon (wherein the participants take turns as listeners as well as performers). On the other extreme is solitary listening to mass-mediated music where there can be no such attunement whatsoever. In mass-mediated contexts, we hear music *as if* it attuned to us when the music either corresponds to or contradicts our own (present or remembered) moods or feelings or when the music seems to articulate entirely new ways of feeling. The music seems to attune to our feelings, it seems to attune with us. But literally it does not. Music in such cases is only dialogical in an imagined sense, and likewise so in its attuning capacity.

In any case, it is the listener that ultimately creates the music, whereby in the same moment the listener is dialectically affirmed as a listener to music. Music, in its “as-if-ness”, rather *urges* the listener to ascribe subjective feelings or other aesthetic qualities to it (cf. Levinson 1982; Maus 1989; Walton 1994), and the same holds for more “objective” metaphors, such as a melody “moving” in a tonal “space” (cf. Scruton 1983). But this urge in music is a bodily-derived projection by the

listener (cf. Johnson 2007), as are any aesthetic – “musical” or “extra-musical” – qualities ascribed to it (i.e., this bodily projected urge is an outward sign of attunement on the part of the listener). That the phenomenon is not exclusively Western is indicated by, for instance, the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea, who speak of their music as a characteristic “lifting up over sound”, which is only possible for a song that has become “hard” (Feld, 1981), and the Tiv of Nigeria and Cameroon, who conceive of composition as “a quick subtraction after slow addition”. This phrase (a translation of a single Tiv term) reflects a zero-sum view of life and may also characterize catching fish, withdrawing from a bank, digging a well, and a miscarriage (Keil, 1979).

This brings us back to the coded phrases and units (musemes) mentioned at the beginning of this section, as well as the more or less extensive plots to which they may add up (e.g., Newcomb 1992). Not only do these codes require language to the extent that they are “superordinate categories” of sound (see Volgsten 2006; 2012; and Stone 1981 for a possible non-Western example) but they are also culture specific and socially constructed. The culture specific codes of musical meaning lend themselves to verbal narration and as such coded phrases partake as powerful units in communicative and cultural memories, what we have described as the narrated content of collective memory. An important aspect of music’s impact in many cultures is thus its affective articulation of verbal content. More specifically and importantly, music affectively articulates each culture’s specific verbal content. Music turns verbally coded content into felt experience (cf. Massumi 2003), and this felt experience that music affords is not just some external stimulus or other. Affective attunement to music *engages* the listener in a reciprocal bond unfolding in time. Music is something we affectively engage ourselves with in a process that corresponds intimately with basic human identification processes – including all of Stern’s stages, from a sense of an “emergent self” to the narrated sense of a “verbal self”. Turn down the music and you simultaneously reject (for good or bad) a vital part of yourself, your personal and collective identity. This view, to which we will turn in the next section, is expressed by one of our Kurdish interviewees: “the music actuates feelings, just like in a relationship”.

### **“We will always keep our heads up high and dance ...”**

To exemplify the theoretical outline in the previous section, we will now refer to interviews made with members of the Kurdish cultural association *Komciwan* in Stockholm. In the autumn of 2014 and the spring of 2015, one of the authors conducted fieldwork within this cultural association as a part of the interdisciplinary research project *Music, Identity, and Multiculture*. The project examines the function and meaning of music for participants in ethnic-based associations

in three cities in Sweden. Semi-structured interviews were held in Swedish with leaders, musicians, and other individuals engaged in their associations. In the case of *Komciwan*, the fieldwork also comprised video recordings, participating in rehearsals, dance courses for youth, and events and festivities organized by the association (e.g., a fund raiser with Kurdish artists to collect funds for supplies for people in Kurdistan suffering from the current war) (Pripp, Lidskog & Westvall, forthcoming)<sup>4</sup>.

The first Kurdish refugees arrived in Sweden in the early 1970s. During the following decades, Kurds from all parts of Kurdistan have migrated to Sweden and other countries around the globe to escape from oppressive regimes. Today between 60 000 and 70 000 Kurds from different parts of Kurdistan live in Sweden (Khayati 2012: 6; Khayati & Dahlstedt 2014: 57-58). Since the 1980s, Sweden has also been an important site for cultural and political activities within Kurdish transnational communities (Alinia et al. 2014: 53). Moreover, the extensive organization of Kurdish issues among Kurds in Sweden has helped mobilize ethnic solidarity among Kurds in Kurdistan (Khayati 2012).

*Komciwan* was established in the 1990s as a Kurdish cultural association for children and youth living in the greater Stockholm area. It is also represented in several other countries where Kurds have settled. The Swedish branch defines itself as un-political and un-religious. The association embraces Kurdish culture in a broad sense, picking up expressions from different parts of Kurdistan. The activities consist of courses mainly for children and young people in Kurdish dancing and traditional instruments. The members also give performances at festivals and at other formal and informal gatherings. A lot of the created expressions could be labelled as culturally hybrid; the young leaders mix traditional and contemporary Kurdish music with music and dance expressions from Swedish and global mainstream culture.

Although *Komciwan* is a cultural association rooted in Stockholm, its activities are influenced by Kurdistan and other countries where Kurds originate, Swedish society, and the Kurdish transnational diaspora community (Alinia et al. 2014: 53-54). These three contexts were also present when the interviewees – the dance leaders Dilda, Evîn, and Rojîn, all in their early 20s and second generation born Swedes – were talking about themselves as Kurds and of the meaning of Kurdish dance and music. As says one of the interviewees, Evîn, music is a way of turning setbacks into positive experiences. And her friends agree. “Through all the hardships we [Kurds] have gone through”, says Dilda, “we dance anyway”. “Yes, Kurds have used dance to express their feelings”, adds Rojîn, “they even sing when sad [...]. Its not that we dance because people have died, certainly not, we same time celebrate those people there in Kurdistan, so they get a strength too”.

The situation in their parents’ native Kurdistan is a recurring topic in these

interviews. In the context of the present article, their narratives answer the more general question about music's role as cultural memory and the way memory and identity is affectively shaped through music. Answers come freely and spontaneously. As Rojîn puts it: "the Kurdish music not just expresses how we feel, after all we want to dance to it too, it affects us in a way". The sounds heard affect and are attuned to bodily movement, coded by the schemata of specific dances, both of which in turn are named and woven into narratives of individual and collective identity (i.e., "I", "we", and "them").

The results of the interviews reveal certain patterns. The way music affects the informants is not random even though the answers collected also reveal individual differences. For all the interviewees, the music helped them create a link to their Kurdish past – their relatives' and especially their parents' past. In other words, music is a means to collective remembering, as aspects of cultural memory blend with and form into more or less individual communicative memories. To each interviewee, the sound of Kurdish music seems to have been present during most of their childhood, at a pre-verbal and sometimes even pre-subjective level of affect. Dilda says that she hears Kurdish music in the background in every childhood memory and Evîn remembers how the Kurdish music always was in the background whenever the family had guests or when mom cleaned:

You recognize the songs and you recognize the instruments and it is a feeling of security. Maybe you don't recognize the artist, but you recognize the music as such, the way the music is put together, the moments – it's got a red thread in it. And a feeling of security [...] for when you were sad, mom and dad always put on the music and then you became happy again. (Evîn)

These kinds of childhood memories, connected to feelings of security and "attachment to home" (Evîn), were also important for their parents: "This is childhood for dad too", as Rojîn says. But there are aspects of the Kurdish past that do not so easily translate into positive feelings. There may be episodes in the past that one does not want to or cannot speak about. Although the music can help to "get rid of all the horrible there is" (Dilda), it can also be a way to grasp the untold experiences that one's parents have gone through. So when Rojîn says "I think the music has affected my parents in a way that I want to understand", this can be interpreted as a wish to understand her parents' lived experiences via the mediation of common musical experiences. That is, as common affective experiences to which each party may nevertheless have a different connection in terms of reception, attunement, and verbal grasp. Rojîn reveals this tension in the following quotation:

My dad was a soldier, so he had fled from Turkey. Mom arrived first in Sweden and my dad came after that. My dad had been in different cities, different mountains [...] and he sings to himself every now and then [...] it's a bit more sad music, so to speak. Then he has, he has other types of songs, little more dance, little more joy. But we didn't grow up with those. It was a bit more the sad [...] that was dad. [...] I think his songs say a lot, maybe how it is to live as a Kurd [...] in Turkey. I think dad and almost all Kurds can identify with such a situation, but I also think my dad became extra affected because he had some sort of longing also for the home country, so he put on these songs when he was in Sweden. (Rojîn)

Rojîn tells how her dad is unable to recount what “strong things” and “strong stuff” he had to go through and how these experiences made him vulnerable, experiences that now affect her too. She doesn't want to talk about what her father has told her because she does not want others to feel this pain even though her re-telling would be second or third hand recollections.

It is silence. They [my parents] keep it within themselves and it is also that it is something they cannot explain, sort of. And it is all the same in a way I want to understand. I know I will never be able to, I will never want to experience it, will hopefully not have to experience it, but I still want to try to understand the way it has been, why it is like it is, is there anything we can change [...]. (Rojîn)

In this context, music becomes a mediator or translator of lived experiences that are difficult or impossible to talk about. Music serves as the affective commons to which the parties can relate differently and individually, as described above, while verbal specification may be left unvoiced. As such, music becomes a link backwards in history, to a time and place that would otherwise be concealed or lost to memory.

For the interviewees music is also important in other ways such as for the relations among young Kurds in the diaspora, both in Sweden and elsewhere. When asked what *Komciwan* has meant to them, both Evîn and Dilda recount how they grew up and went to school in neighbourhoods with few Kurds, dominated by ethnic Swedes:

I was the only Kurd in high school [...] and I hardly had any Kurdish friends back then [...] And then I came here and everyone listens to the same music [...] and it woke everything up. It wasn't only me that felt that way.

Many who are here [at *Komciwan*] are also, I mean those that I'm closest with here, also have very strong bonds both to the Kurdish and to the Swedish culture, since we are born here, most of us have grown up here. We have very similar thoughts about so much. Values and everything, so one has such a big community here. [...] It's the people here. I enjoy coming here. (Dilda)

Discovering that other youth have listened to similar music during their childhoods elicits an affective bond that would not have been prompted in the same way, it seems, had it stayed with the mere knowledge of their similar backgrounds. The affective bond itself is enabled by the fact that, on the one hand, there is already a sharing of an affective core (the early fragmented music memories), which the newcomer to the group has not yet articulated either on a subjective or on a verbal level (an articulation that is openly welcomed in the *Komciwan* setting), and, on the other hand, the explicit knowledge that one has a specific ethnic background and all the unanswered questions that this knowledge might imply. However, things are not always as easy as the previously mentioned example indicates:

For if I look at my Kurdish friends from Iraq, for instance, what they listen to, their songs are a bit different. I notice that I don't really like them [their songs]. The music has a different arrangement, it's a bit different, they usually don't speak the same dialect as we do and then you cannot connect to it. And [they use] different instruments, mostly. So I think I like Kurdish music from my mom and dad's parts [of Kurdistan]. (Evîn)

By the same token that music can open doors, it may close them, or at any rate leave them untouched, the affect remaining more or less un-attuned to. In such cases, any identification process at the subjective level becomes limited. However, a contrary example of opening doors is described by Rojîn in the following account of a school camp in Germany for Kurdish youth of the diaspora:

We got together in Germany for a winter camp; we discussed the Kurdish issue, what is important for Kurdish youth in Europe. And there we talked, we talked Swedish with each other, but they talked English and German, so it became a bit strange since we were all a bunch of Kurds gathered, we were just Kurds and still we almost never talked Kurdish with each other. (Rojîn)

But where language excluded, music and dance invited:

As much as I remember we all could dance, that was what brought us together, that we all could dance. It wasn't that we from Stockholm held hands; we mixed. I thought it was fun, but also that we learned from each other. They knew dances that we didn't know. [...] And we taught them dances from us. [...] so without us being aware of it, there was a bonding. We bonded that we are Kurdish youth from Europe. [...] That brought us together. (Rojin)

Again, the bond is affective, although the impetus and motivation to attune to the music and to each other may have been for many the explicit knowledge of a shared ethnic origin (articulated in terms of various verbal narratives), rather than de facto shared affective memories. Unsurprisingly, when it comes to contact with other youth in the diaspora, the Internet is the main locus of contact. Dilda talks about YouTube as a source of music, initially serving for her as a site to encounter those affectively familiar but unknown songs from childhood, then increasingly used as a source of contact with contemporary acts articulating contemporary issues for Kurdish youth in the diaspora.

[...] [In] recent years, I have noticed there has come a lot of music also with [...] Kurds born abroad that have become artists. They write a lot of songs that are about, well you know [...] where am I at home? Am I at home in Sweden, for instance, or in Kurdistan? [...] [O]ne gets a strange feeling when listening to such music. It feels like I am the one who is saying this. [...] There are some rappers, both Kurdish and in Swedish, that I've heard. [...] There's a very good song that's new. Its two guys called Mohammed Ali. One of them is Kurd and the other, I don't really know what country he's from. It's some country in Africa. The tune is called "Fifty Nations" [*Femtio länder*] about what it is like to be born in Sweden but how it is like to go back to your home country [...] one is a bit strange there too. (Dilda)

Not feeling entirely or exclusively at home either in one's "new" or "old" home country is a common experience among migrants, a feeling the second or third generation in diaspora inherits (Pripp 2008). In these circumstances, sharing the same traditional music may create affective bonds and feelings of togetherness, but singing or rapping about common experiences enables new sounds, rhythms, and melodies to take on similar roles, potentially extending the bonds to groups and individuals with other backgrounds and experiences.

Whereas the above tells about music's role in the shaping of collective identities (on the family and friend level and for unfamiliar youth with similar backgrounds at home and abroad), music is central also to the articulation of identity on the personal level, in the process of personal identification. In addition to the Kurdish music the interviewees were exposed to during childhood, the interviewees listened to Western popular music. Rojîn grew up listening to the Back Street Boys and Spice Girls, and Evîn grew up listening to Metallica. This musical background was subsequently added to by the interviewees through more or less self-conscious explorations of their Kurdish musical heritage. For Evîn, the process was initiated by the sudden awareness that the metaphors in Kurdish songs carry concealed messages – “the hidden contents of the music”. For Dilda, this experience seems to have been more of a continuous development. The emerging experience is that of having a culturally mixed identity: “I have taken bits from different parts, you know” Dilda expresses. “One must have the urge to explore it in order to get to know oneself, one's country, culture and identity”, Evîn says and adds “but also to be able to combine them so that, I am after all both a proud Swede and a proud Kurd”. All three interviewees emphasize the importance of the cultural dimension for shaping identity and developing feelings of belonging and togetherness. Dilda says that “It's a feeling that you get in the body”, and her friends agree:

To take part of Kurdish culture, the language, traditions, music, dance – that is to me more Kurdish than politics. [. . .] What we have left is our dance and our music, and [...] the instruments make us feel. (Rojîn)

I don't like anything political in dance and song. For me, it's very much about solidarity, you shouldn't say anything that makes somebody else feel excluded. [. . .] Sex, religion, nationality, skin colour, nothing matters to me. [...] You've got to screen out everything else and sort of listen to the drum. (Evîn)

## Concluding remarks

Music fulfils many functions in its service of collective memory. Negative experiences and memories of negative events may turn into positive feelings and empowering strength, a function Kurdish music mentioned by the interviewees shares with musical expressions of many other cultures (see, e.g., Daynes 2010: 69ff., Güran 2014, 46ff.; Nakamura 2014; Pripp & Kamara 2010; Regis 1999). We have also seen how music may serve as a means to understand and relate to those negative experiences that one's close relatives or friends may not be able to re-

count verbally. Enhancing these functions is music's ability to form and articulate personal and collective identities, inviting as well as distancing out-groups (cf. DeNora 1999; Frith 1996; Hesmondhalgh 2008). This, we want to emphasize, is a function that works on both a historical level, between generations, and on a trans-geographical level, in this case connecting and bonding both with other Kurdish youth in the diaspora around the globe and with (using different music) non-Kurdish youth in one's local (Swedish) community. The three interviewees emphasised that cultural expressions such as music are what lie at the heart of the identification processes in question rather than politics or religion.

In these examples, the type of collective memory employed would seem to be mainly communicative. The absence of formalized and canonized repertoires of music seems to distance it from cultural memory. (As such the use of music that the interviewees in this case display is in accord with the verbally-centred memory functions at work in the Kurdish online communities explored by Nikunen, 2013). However, the canonized phenomena around which cultural memory resonates might as well be the *ways* songs are sung, and the particular sounds of the instruments used, as any repertoire of fixed works. And to the extent that ritual can be explained, at least in part, as activities "in which the direct partners to a social interaction, and those observing it, share a mutual belief in the descriptive and prescriptive validity of the communication's symbolic contents and accept the authenticity of one another's intention" (Alexander 2004: 527), there are aspects of cultural memory at work here too. Feelings of security, bonding, and togetherness are evoked against the backdrop of a more or less explicitly formulated idea of a common nationality of long-standing history and of a nation state with marked geographical borders virtually within reach in the nearest future. And to the extent that the attempts at consecrating and canonizing traditions such as that of the *Dengbêj* (Scalbert-Yücel 2009; Schäfers 2015) might prove successful, music will quite obviously have a place in the cultural memory of many Kurds. Some readers may at this point rightly react against our neglect of the traditional Kurdish dance types practiced by the interviewees. However, our question here focuses on the role of music as a means *for* and *as* content of collective memory and how the sounds of music relate to verbally narrated content.

In the informants' reports above, we see music as content of personal communicative memories, as memories of specific music being played in individual pasts, during childhood, at home, at parties. Similarly, music may be the content of cultural memory with respect to style, genre, sound, and repertoire. However, music cannot tell about past events since it obviously lacks the denotative powers of verbal language. Instead, music may become the content of verbal description and narrativization. This too may occur both in instances of communicative memory and of cultural memory, each feeding into the other, the teaching of Kurdish

music tradition at *Komciwan* being an example of verbal conceptualization in the service of cultural memory construction.

Nevertheless, music's real force in all this lies not in it being some kind of archival resource for storage and retrieval of representations of the more or less distant past, but as an affective mediator between listeners (in which we also include musicians and composers). At *Komciwan*, we found examples of music's mediating affect at all levels – i.e., emergent, core, subjective, and verbal – as suggested by our adaption of Stern's model. Not only is music thus something that the listener can display as a sign of identification, music also turns out to be a necessary means for identification at both personal and collective level. The way music functions as an *affective mediator* is beautifully described by one of the informants as a way of relating to the same music her father used to listen to when in a sad or melancholic mood, the latter assumedly as a way for the father to affectively relate to those of his own personal experiences in the past that are too painful to talk about, perhaps even to conceptualize. The experiences mediated by music need not be of such traumatic kind, of course, which the examples of peer bonding illustrate, although the underlying principle is the same.

But why should music be particularly apt for such affective mediation? Couldn't just any artefact function this way? As the above interviews confirm and our theoretical outline explains, music is more than just "a container of temporal structures of past circumstances" (DeNora 1999: 49). Music is more than a trigger of individual associations. In most instances, music, we dare say, cannot be replaced by a Proustian madeleine cake. The reason for this is the social engagement involved in the affective attunement that musical sounds afford. As music is more than a stimulus to which we react and more than an emotive association that we make (emotive associations tend to be transitory, see Petty & Cacioppo 1981), music engages us in a dialectic process that at once establishes the sounds heard as music and ourselves as listening subjects. Music employs every trick of its trade, from the simplest intonations and rhythms, and sounds of voices and instruments, via coded phrases and melodies, to the more or less elaborate verbal discourses and narratives (the latter of which relate to and thus become exemplified by the music). Even when music is mass mediated and listening solitary, as listeners we often have reason to believe that others feel about the music in similar ways as we do ourselves. And to the extent this is so, music serves as an affective mediator by means of temporally extended attunement (cf. Massumi 2003). Affect attunement may extend temporally over generations as well as geographically over continents, turning the sounding music to signs of individual and collective identities that we cherish as if the music were an irreducible part of our uttermost selves.

Now this is perhaps the point at which we should become cautious. Whereas the affective attunement to music may help us see ourselves in others, it may li-

kewise shield us from others and ostracize those who are not mirrored similarly, whose music uses different sounds, melodies, phrases, and timings than the ones we usually attune to. But as the self-estranging dialectic of affect attunement shows, one cannot do without the other. The interviewees desire to keep doors open, to be inclusive, is an admirable ethics worthy of respect. Perhaps it is their double backgrounds – being both Swedish and Kurdish – that enables them to adapt to the fundamental condition of attunement (musical or otherwise) – that of always being a stranger to oneself.

**Ulrik Volgsten** is professor in Musicology at Örebro University. His research is concerned with musical communication in different media. In addition to the fields of cognitive science and the psychology of music, an important focus of his research has been on the conceptual history of Western music (composer, work, and listener) and musical aesthetics. Volgsten is presently involved in the ethnographic project Music Identity and Multiculture, a project that examines the identity functions of music for participants in ethnic-based associations in Sweden. Email: [ulrik.volgsten@oru.se](mailto:ulrik.volgsten@oru.se)

**Oscar Pripp** is associate professor in Ethnology at Uppsala University. His work has focused on entrepreneurship, civil society, and the cultural sector and issues such as migration, ethnic relations, and everyday racism. In recent years, Pripp has been involved in research about West African dance and drumming in Sweden and how cultural expressions find new hybrid forms and meanings. He is also involved in the project Music, Identity, and Multiculture. Email: [oscar.pripp@etnologi.uu.se](mailto:oscar.pripp@etnologi.uu.se)

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Rather than keeping to a distinction such as Alan Merriam's between "uses and functions" (Merriam 1964, 209ff), "function" is used in an indiscriminate way throughout this article (sometimes replaced by "role"), relying on context for comprehensibility.

<sup>2</sup>To the extent that music partakes in historical, mythical, or fictional narration, Western history may provide examples, from the earliest mediaeval masses to various Operas and musicals. However, in such examples music is but a component together with verbal language and dramatic action. It is the verbally narrated that determines and specifies the content of the cultural memories that musical drama as such may convey.

<sup>3</sup>In this section the pronouns “we” and “our” do not refer to the authors but to listeners in an inclusive trans-cultural sense.

<sup>4</sup>The three individual interviews used as examples in this article were conducted by Pripp in 2014 on November 16 (Dilda), November 23 (Rojin), and November 16 and 23 (Evin). Analysis and translation from the original Swedish transcriptions were made by Volgsten. In addition, a focus group interview was made by Pripp, Volgsten, and Maria Westvall on 12 April 2015.

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