

Migrants, Swedes and the unchanging practice of music: discursive representations in Swedish newspapers

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Introduction

We outsiders are our own nation¹

The refugee who came into the warmth of the symphony²

The musical will help migrants to become a part of society³

Music can change the world⁴

The quotes are headlines from major Swedish newspapers. The way they are formulated is neither unique nor remarkable, but commonplace. As such the quotes are not likely to raise any eyebrows. They are rather likely to be confirmative of prevailing ‘truths’ about both migrants and music in Sweden – ‘truths’ implying that migrants are in precarious social positions and that music is an answer to such problems. However, given that media are not transparent windows on reality, but partake in making the world meaningful and graspable, it is relevant to ask how such ‘truths’ are constructed. This is the focus of the present study, in which newspaper articles about migrants, Swedes and music are scrutinized and analysed.

Discrimination of persons seen as foreigners is a common problem in many societies. It often takes the form of excluding social structures, relations and processes and is many times motivated with reference to commonly accepted norms and values (Castles, De Haas and Miller, 2014; Darvishpour and Westin, 2015). The distinction and separation of the ‘normal’ and the ‘different’ relies on ambiguous but cohesive conceptions about, for instance, cultural, national, religious and ethnic belongings. The consequence is subordination of and limited social access for those identified as different, often migrants (Behtoui and Jonsson, 2013).⁵ It can therefore be assumed that being a migrant may affect one’s societal participative preconditions in a negative way.⁶

Aesthetic and cultural activities are important for diasporas and migrants. They are a way to preserve and develop traditions and construct and maintain identities and group cohesion (Volgsten, 2018; Volgsten and Pripp, 2016; Waligórska, 2013). However, possibilities for partaking in aesthetic practices are often limited for migrants due to limited competence among event producers, promoters and curators to judge the merits and quality of foreign cultural expressions (Feiler, 2010; Martiniello, 2015; Pripp, 2006; Sievers, 2014; Ålander, 2020), if not for outright exoticist or racist reasons (Sernhede, 2018).

¹ Vi outsiders är vår egen nation (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 2018-01-07).

² Flyktingen som fick komma in i symfonivärmen (*Sydsvenskan*, 2016-10-21).

³ Musikalen ska hjälpa nyanlända in i samhället (*Dagens Nyheter*, 2015-05-27).

⁴ Musiken kan förändra världen (*Dagens Nyheter*, 2016-08-29).

⁵ For an extended discussion about the academic term ‘migrant’, see Kivisto and Faist (2010, pp. 49-54).

⁶ The term ‘participation’ refers here broadly to all three dimensions suggested by Dahlgren (2019), since aesthetic practices encompass both socio-cultural, civic and political participative practices.

Moreover, excluding structures, relations and processes are often formed in and by the media (Brune, 2015; Strömbäck, Andersson and Nedlund, 2017). Since almost every area of aesthetic production, distribution and use is affected by the media (Fornäs, 2011), the latter's influence is comprehensive.

In spite of what one can assume is a common obstacle when it comes to aesthetic and cultural practices among migrants and their relations to the media, research about such relations is sparse. And rather than looking at particular types of aesthetic expression, research on migrant participation has focused on cultural practices in general (for exceptions, see Westvall, Lidskog and Pripp, 2018; Ålander, in progress). To reduce this research gap, this investigation inquires the possibilities and limitations for migrants to participate in music practices. More specifically, it looks at how media representations, in this case daily newspaper coverage (news articles, editorials, interviews, concert reviews, feature articles), through their discursive constructions may affect possibilities and limitations for migrants' participation in such practices. As such this inquiry also hopes to contribute to a change in the conditions for participation.

Media, migration and music

News media has for a long time been one of the most important public sources of information about politics and society (Shehata and Strömbäck, 2014). It can therefore exert considerable influence over which issues people think are important (Nabi and Oliver, 2009; Shehata, 2015), including such pertaining to culture and aesthetics (Riegert and Roosvall, 2017).

Research shows connections between media portrayals related to race and ethnicity and the valuation of the competences of associated individuals and groups (Mastro, 2009). A recent study of Swedish national newspapers shows that 'the news media coverage and framing of immigration is characterized by a strong focus on refugee immigration and that negative frames are more common than positive frames' (Strömbäck, Andersson and Nedlund, 2017, p. VIII). The study focuses on news reports, but similar results have also been found in studies of editorials (Bolin, Hinnfors and Strömbäck, 2016).⁷

Music and musicians are common topics in the media (Toynbee, 2000), and medial presence is important for artists' career development (Schmutz et al., 2010). During a musician's career, the influence of the press varies. For lower-profile musicians trying to take professional steps ahead, the role of the music critic is particularly important as the latter often serves as a gatekeeper to the audience (Brennan, 2006; see also: Jones, 2002; Mills, 2012).

Contrarily, exposure also enables migrants and minority groups to make their voices heard and express their interests (Bleich, Bloemraad and de Graauw, 2015). However, research on how media represents both music *and* migration – and how such construction and conceptualization may affect social and aesthetic practices – is more or less wanting. In dealing with this combined issue, the present inquiry can be seen as pioneering.

Theory: identities, practices and fantasmatic logics

In our everyday social activities and practices, we follow more or less explicit and more or less comprehensive 'maps' of the terrain we call 'reality'.⁸ Who we think we are, what we want to do and what we believe the world to be like is to a considerable extent mapped in advance. The question asked in this inquiry is how daily newspapers map this terrain. Do such media

⁷ Studies that include newspapers and migration in a Swedish context are few but three examples of more extensive studies are Brune (2004), Hultén (2006) and Petersson (2006).

⁸ The issue of the reality of 'reality', whether there is anything 'outside the text', *et cetera* (Derrida, quoted in Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 4; cf. also Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007, p. 278), is beyond the scope of this article.

contribute to the shaping and withholding of certain patterns of social activity and interaction, in this case patterns affecting the possibility for migrants to partake in musical activities and practices?

A different word for these maps is *discourse*. Various discourses map the world, they identify subjects and objects in it, sometimes in accord with each other, sometimes in contradiction. As the case of this study, a group of articles in a group of daily newspapers may constitute discourse. In addition, a report, a review, or an interview, may each be understood as a discourse *about* discourse – for instance a technical, a political, or an everyday-life discourse (cf. Carpentier, 2011; Dahlberg and Phelan, 2011; Dahlgren, 2019; Phelan, 2014; Poster, 1995). As theoretical constructs, discourses lend themselves to systematic analysis, and various types of discourse analysis have accordingly been useful as methods in media research.

According to the particular approach applied in this inquiry, initially developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985/2001; Laclau, 1990; 1996; 2005),⁹ discourses can be described as specific systems through which subjects and objects obtain meaning and identity by being related to each other in different ways. ‘The Swede’ becomes a meaningful signifier to identify with by being related to what it is not, for instance the ‘migrant’, and vice versa. This also means that identities are not essentially tied to subjects, ‘but subjects will try to identify with identities’ (Sjöstedt-Landén, 2011a, p. 539). By consequence, since the systemic relations of discourse are open to alteration and change as result of differing and conflicting social interests, meaning and identity are never entirely stable and fixed, but ‘radically contingent’ (Laclau, 1990, pp. 19, 26). This, in turn, accounts for agency and action in the theory: ‘will has no place of constitution external to the structure [the discursive system of relations] but is the result of the failure of the structure to constitute itself’ (Laclau, 1996, p. 92).

Equipped with this notion of agency as issuing from the lack of an absolute foundation for meaning and identity (the latter being radically contingent), it becomes possible to investigate the ways various identities of subjects and objects relate to social practices, and how such formations relate to changes in social order. A *social* practice, according to the theory, encompasses ‘the ongoing, routinized forms of human and societal reproduction’ (Glynos and Howarth, 2007, p. 104). By contrast, a *political* practice ‘struggles ... to challenge and transform the existing norms’ (Glynos and Howarth, 2007, p. 105) – or it comprises activities to the contrary, striving to maintain a threatened status quo. A change in social order may thus be understood as when a social practice is contested by a political practice, leading to the institution of a new social order.

The motivating force behind action, that which imputes agency to a subject, is the experience of lack or unfulfillment that results when identities and meaningful frames of reference are upset or questioned (as they may easily be because of their radical contingency). Doings and actions thus aim to reinstate, vanquish or transform disrupted relations and positions, to satisfy one’s interests, and to restore dislocated self-identity (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 10). However, when subjects are unable to attain or reinstate desired identities, due to the actions and practices of others, the result is ‘antagonism’ (Howarth, 2000, p. 105).

Antagonistic relations posit subjects in conflict with each other, motivating both sides to struggle for their own interests at the expense of the opposite group. Whether antagonistic or not, for social and political practices to gain and retain long-term force and momentum – and this will prove to be of utmost significance for the present inquiry – they are guided by fantasies and imaginaries. These fantasies and imaginaries are not random concoctions but can be

⁹ The ‘discourse theoretical analysis’ approach (DTA) differs from ‘critical discourse analysis’ (CDA) approach, which is more common in media research. On the differences, see Carpentier and De Cleen (2007). The approach is notably supplemented with the notion of *fantasmatic logics*, as developed by Jason Glynos and David Howarth (2007).

described in terms of ‘fantasmatic logics’ (Glynos and Howarth, 2007, p. 147), which, when identified with, enable subjects to attach to particular visions ‘not only [of] past and present, but also in the form of *futures*’ (Sjöstedt-Landén, 2011b, p. 287).

Now, in asking how the media may discursively shape or withhold social interaction in particular musical practices, this inquiry investigates how such practices are represented. It investigates how these representations relate to different identities available to the subjects who partake in the practices, and which subjects are assigned to which identities. To what extent are subjects’ identities threatened or dislocated, to what extent do the identities imply the capability of the subjects to act on their own behalf: are they active or passive, do they need help, *et cetera*? The point of applying the discourse theoretical approach is thus not only that media’s discursive representations may serve as some kind of role models, ‘passively expressing or reflecting social phenomena’, but that media discourses function ‘as specific machineries that produce, reproduce and transform social phenomena’ (Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007, p. 274; cf. Volgsten, 2010). By laying bare conditions of participation, and making them known, the participants of the practices may constructively grapple with the conditions. Equally important are the particular representations of the social practice in question, namely the playing of music in professional settings and participating in music events in Sweden. In the end the analysis will reveal a certain peculiarity in the specific imaginary, the fantasmatic logic that influences its musical practices as well as the subject positions inevitably allotted to the ‘migrant’ and the ‘migrant’ musician. As a central node in the discursive formation, the notion of ‘music’ turns out to be assigned with mythical powers that transform it into a narrative object of desirable value.

Sampling, coding and analysis

In this study, newspaper articles are analysed to find out how the meaning of music and migration – with special emphasis on the ‘migrant’ – is constructed. The choice to analyse daily newspapers, instead of, for example, non-fiction magazines or social media, is due to their availability and the possibility to clearly delimit the empirical data.

The newspapers – *Aftonbladet*, *Dagens Nyheter*, *Expressen*, *Göteborgs-Posten*, *Sydsvenskan* and *Svenska Dagbladet* – are selected based on circulation and regional location. The chosen time frame spans from 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2018. The circulation in total is 6 663 000 copies per day, including both printed and online articles (Kantar Sifo, 2019). Two of the newspapers, *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen*, are tabloids and the remaining four are broadsheets. *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet* are national newspapers based in the capital Stockholm, while *Göteborgs-Posten* and *Sydsvenskan* are regional papers associated with the second and third largest cities in Sweden, Göteborg and Malmö. For access to digital versions of the full issues, the database *Mediearkivet Retriever* is used.

In line with the aim of the study, the focus of the search for articles is on topics such as ‘music’ and ‘migration’ (understood in a broad sense). Of relevance for the present inquiry are previous research findings showing that what may be called a ‘migrant background’ at times makes a crucial difference between the possibility to participate or not in cultural and aesthetic practices (Ålander, in progress; Feiler, 2010; Hara, 2017; Martiniello, 2015; Pripp, 2006; Sievers, 2014). Accordingly, the search string used requires any of the following truncated keywords: ethnic*, immigr*, migr*, multicultur*, newly arrived, and refugee* – notions which are all closely associated with migration and migrants in Swedish.¹⁰ In addition, to delimit the quantity of results, the keyword music* is required at least twice in each article. The search result is a total of 1006 articles.

¹⁰ In Swedish: etni*, mångkultur*, nyanländ*, invandr*, immigr*, and flykting*.

Once the articles are selected, a purposive sampling is implemented in correlation with the aim of the study (Bryman, 2012). Hence, a guiding question posed to each article during the first reading and selection is: does this article say something about migrants and music in a Swedish context? Articles that do are kept, while articles about foreign artists are excluded, as are music reviews if they refer to artists outside Sweden (event calendars are also excluded, as well as articles about migrants in other countries). This yields 232 articles which are selected for a second scrutiny in which a distinction is made between articles that primarily focus on both, rather than either of, music and migrants.

The final result is a corpus of 106 articles, which consists of news articles, editorials, interviews, concert reviews, and feature articles.¹¹ Following the selection procedure, coding is performed using the software NVivo, where both quantitative and qualitative categories and themes are created (all classification is based entirely on information provided in the articles and is used to elaborate empirical patterns and characteristics, rather than function as analytical starting points). Thematic coding is then applied to sort the material in accordance with the research question's main focus – 'music', 'migration' and 'music and migration'. The themes are present in all articles to a varying extent, which means that the coding occasionally overlaps.

In colloquial Swedish, occurring frequently in the daily papers, the 'migrant' (*invandraren*) is an ambiguous identity marker often associated with the alien, the worrying and the problematic. Significantly, it is constructed as the opposite of 'the Swede', which is associated with the familiar, the untroubled and irreproachable norm (Brune, 2015; Darvishpour and Westin, 2015; Haavisto and Petersson, 2013).

In the analysis, we use the term 'migrant' to refer to representations in the newspapers of those who have immigrated, or have parents who have immigrated or are refugees, some of whom explicitly identify themselves as 'migrants', some of whom do not. The term 'Swede', on the contrary, refers both to those explicitly defined as 'Swedes', and those who do not match the term 'migrant' (the term 'Swede' is not included in the search string, as the construction of this identity is not the concern of the analysis).

The analysis focuses on the discursive fixation of meaning. More specifically, it focuses on how the agency of the 'migrant' is represented in the context of music practices and by what fantasmatic logic this agency may be directed. By so doing, it aims to show how the media discourse in question maps reality, and thus potentially affects the social and political practices in question.

The plaintive migrant – 'I have escaped war. War is also in Sweden'¹²

A first observation is that in the dailies the 'migrant' is regularly connected to two types of expression which can be described as *gratitude* and *grievance*. Notably, gratitude is far less common and varied than expressions of grievance. The rather few occurrences of gratitude include utterances by both 'migrants' and 'Swedes'. 'Migrants', primarily refugees, praise Sweden as a wonderful country, as welcoming, safe and democratic, whereas 'Swedes' are presented as caring for or working with what can be called integration-related matters (mostly described as successful), for instance in educational settings or as cultural event organizers.

These commendations stand in contrast to migrants' descriptions of their previous lives abroad, of war, escape, social disintegration and persecution. Such utterances will not, however, be considered here, as they concern contexts other than Sweden. Instead, the focus is on

¹¹ See appendix for a full listing of the newspaper articles.

¹² 'Jag har flytt från krig. Krig finns i Sverige också.' (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 2016-01-03)

expressions of grievance pertaining to a Swedish context, including critical comments on both *personal* and *societal* levels.

The personally oriented grievances focus on problematic life circumstances, on deprivation and decay of social relations and conditions. Criticism is aimed at a rather vaguely described antagonist called ‘the government’, ‘the society’ or ‘Sweden’. The Swedish government is, for example, repeatedly criticized for its radical shift in migration policies during the so-called migration crisis in 2015, and for the treatment of the refugees that followed.

Refugees tell of the anxiety experienced while waiting for immigration authorities to decide on asylum applications. Other utterances of grievance concern ending up in poor areas, allegedly neglected by the government, whereas second generation migrants express concern with their multiple ethnic identities and not feeling entirely ‘at home’ anywhere.

It was different when I came to Sweden in 1987. At that time, Africans, Indians, Serbs could enter society. [...] Today, integration is poor. We see a lot of intellectuals coming from Syria, people who really want to work. But the jobs do not exist.¹³

As a young man, Jason searched in vain for an unambiguous identity: ‘I was never American, never Swedish, never white, nor black. I was the no-man’s land in the world’.¹⁴

In so far as these concerns are claimed to be at least partly the fault of society, they point to a societal level of grievance.

Moving from personal to societal grievances, there is repeated mentioning in the dailies of a shift in Swedish politics to the worse, claimed to cause a more excluding and racist society. Racism and ethnic discrimination are regarded as growing societal problems by both ‘migrants’ and ‘Swedes’. This problem is often mentioned with reference to an increased influence and growth of nationalist and right-wing politics. Whereas the Sweden Democratic Party (SD) is explicitly mentioned only a few times, implicit criticism and commentaries are more frequent. By contrast, the Swedish government (led by the Social Democratic party [SAP] during the period analysed) is simultaneously criticized for having a too unrestricted immigration policy. On a few occasions there is reference to a demand among ‘Swedes’ for a restriction and limitation of immigration and for stricter and stronger requirements of assimilation of migrants.

Whether migrants’ grievances concern the personal or the societal, the analysis confirms the picture of previous research according to which the ‘migrant’ is often associated with the alien, the worrying and the problematic – not least in its relation to the ‘Swede’. With which musical practices, then, are migrants associated?

‘Music’ as social practice – ‘With music as salvation’¹⁵

Musical practices have to take place somewhere if they are to happen. Not all settings are specified in the articles, notably since music listening is often mobile. However, when the localities of the music practices are described, they are mostly located in urban areas (rather than rural). Common types of practices are concerts, charity events and integration projects. Among genres mentioned, hip-hop is the most frequent, followed by pop and traditional musics.

¹³ ‘Det var annorlunda när jag kom till Sverige 1987. På den tiden kunde afrikaner, indier, serber komma in i samhället. Det fanns helt andra möjligheter att få arbete. I dag är integrationen dålig. Vi ser väldigt många intellektuella komma från Syrien, människor som verkligen vill arbeta. Men jobben finns inte.’ (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 2016-07-10)

¹⁴ ‘Som ung sökte Jason förgäves efter en entydig identitet: “Jag var aldrig amerikan, aldrig svensk, aldrig vit men heller aldrig svart. Jag var ingenmanslandet i världen”.’ (*Sydsvenskan*, 2018-10-07)

¹⁵ ‘Med musiken som räddning’ (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 2014-10-12).

In the analysed articles, ‘music’ turns out to have rather powerful qualities. It is repeatedly described as capable of affecting social relations in either of two ways, which can be described as *means* and *catalyst*.¹⁶

As a means, ‘music’ is used to achieve an intended goal, for example to learn how to speak Swedish by singing lyrics in Swedish. Music can also be used as a means to evoke emotions, boost self-esteem, affect lifestyle change, and as a means for therapy. In addition to functioning as means for individual self-technologies, it may also be used for societal purposes, such as the preservation of culture.

They do not speak the same language, but this does not matter, nor that they have played for such a short time. For me, music is a feeling, and we want to use music as a tool for integration.¹⁷

‘Music’ as catalyst refers instead to expressions indicating music’s ability to function as an autonomous transformative element of social practices, such as when singing in a choir is assumed to lead to social and cultural integration. Explicit examples are rare and seem to refer more to a belief in music than to concrete examples of its (assumed) actual power.¹⁸

For me, music has always been linked to a desire for a better and more peaceful world, it’s not just entertainment. [...] my passion for music is associated with people who want to use their art to change and unite.¹⁹

Music and choir singing can be a way to show the way out of hopelessness, loneliness and segregation. I have also noticed that music has a unique ability to comfort and inspire people.²⁰

The importance and powers ascribed to ‘music’ are significant, however, and many personal and societal improvements are said to be the result of musical practices. The overall conclusion is that music is described either as a direct means for practical tasks or as an indirect catalyst that may ignite and fuel changes in social relations and practices.

Migrant and music – ‘I’ll occupy all the space that wasn’t meant for me’²¹

So far, the analysis has dealt with music and migrants as two separate aspects of the media discourse. However, their full significance will only lend itself to scrutiny if the two – music *and* ‘migrant’ – are taken together.

In the dailies many migrants mention how their backgrounds affect their experiences of social acceptance. For many, the experience of being socially accepted is relative to being identified as a non-immigrant ‘Swede’ or not. However, this often results in a split identity and a feeling of not belonging anywhere.

¹⁶ Roughly corresponding to Alan Merriam’s (1964) classical distinction between ‘uses’ and ‘functions’ (for a critical discussion, see Nettl, 2015).

¹⁷ ‘De talar inte samma språk men det spelar ingen roll, inte heller att de spelat så kort tid. För mig är musik en känsla och vi vill använda musik som ett verktyg för integration.’ (*Göteborgs-Posten*, 2016-06-15)

¹⁸ For a discussion of similar attitudes in music research, see Hesmondhalgh (2008).

¹⁹ ‘För mig har musik alltid kopplats till en önskan om en bättre och fredligare värld, den är inte bara underhållning. [...] min passion för musik är förknippad med folk som vill använda sin konst till att förändra och förena.’ (*Sydsvenskan*, 2017-12-15)

²⁰ ‘Musik och körsång kan vara ett sätt att visa vägen ut ur hopplöshet, ensamhet och segregation. Jag har också märkt att musik har en unik förmåga att trösta och inspirera människor.’ (*Dagens Nyheter*, 2016-08-29)

²¹ ‘Jag ska ta all plats som inte var menad för mig’ (*Dagens Nyheter*, 2016-03-06).

In the title track ‘Suedi’, he talks about the exclusion, or rather the betweenness, the feeling of not feeling at home anywhere. About the brick wall he crashed into when being called Swedish at ‘home’ in Gambia.²²

Since the ‘migrant’ and the ‘Swede’ identities are constructed in distinction to each other, they are hard for a subject to simultaneously maintain without experiencing major identificational conflicts. A different but equally problematic type of identificational conflict is the confusion of the musician identity and that of being a migrant, for some so closely related that the two become hard to distinguish. Add to this a feeling of being reduced to a stereotype, and some sense that they have become representatives of this or that identity against their own will.²³

An exhausted exhalation over never being allowed to relax. Over having to climb those barricades again and again and being forced to stand up for their rights, as a woman, as a second-generation immigrant, as a lesbian. Another interview. One more song. You become like a broken tape recorder [...] I should not have to talk about this all the time, [to] feel that I have to because others do not dare or do not care.²⁴

But not everyone experiences the mixing of identities as a burden (whether musician or other participant of the practices). On the contrary, they experience the blending of identities as acceptable, making a point of it by utilising the ‘migrant’ identity as a possibility to reach out to others that share the same experience. For the musician, the professional identity may even be seen as a possibility to change the overall meaning of the ‘migrant’ identity, while using music as the means. It may also be seen as a possibility to address topics such as racism, segregation, criminality, and the feeling of non-belonging or lack of social acceptance.

The EP ‘Suedi’ is a generational novel that gives voice to those whom not everyone considers to be Swedes.²⁵

It [is] clear that she gives voice to her fans, that they feel seen and strengthened by her presence.²⁶

Being Somali, black, Muslim, woman and from Rinkeby makes me a voice for many.²⁷

Another issue brought up by migrant musicians is the treatment of them and their music in relation to locality. They argue that their music and possibilities to perform are hidden away and relegated to ‘migrant’ suburbs and small venues. A response to this treatment is the mentioned utilization of the ‘migrant’ identity, but the response is also manifested through the creation and organisation of music events, the purpose of which is to cherish cultural diversity and multiculturalism, for instance by featuring migrant artists. Organisers of these venues and events also make statements about societal problems, in addition to illuminating migrant artists’ problematic participative conditions (cf. Ålander, 2020).

²² ‘I titellåten “Suedi” berättar han om utanförskapet, eller snarare mellanförskapet, känslan av att inte känna sig hemma någonstans. Om den tegelvägg han gick in i när han åkte ‘hem’ till Gambia, men där kallades svensk.’ (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 2016-01-03)

²³ A striking example of stereotyping is that, with no exception in the material, hip-hop is mentioned as a primary genre in articles featuring ‘migrants’, whereas Rock music only occurs in articles about ‘Swedes’.

²⁴ ‘En utmattad utandning över att aldrig få slappna av. Över att om och om igen behöva klättra upp på de där barrikaderna och tvingas stå upp för sin rätt, som kvinna, som andra generationens invandrare, som lesbisk. En till intervju. En till låt. Man blir som en trasig bandspelare [...] Jag ska inte behöva prata om det här hela tiden, känna att jag måste för att andra inte vågar eller inte bryr sig.’ (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 2015-08-02)

²⁵ ‘Ep:n “Suedi” är en generationsroman som ger röst åt dem som inte alla vill betrakta som svenskar.’ (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 2016-01-03)

²⁶ ‘Det [är] tydligt att hon ger röst åt sina fans, att de känner sig sedda och stärkta av hennes närvaro.’ (*Göteborgs-Posten*, 2018-06-10)

²⁷ ‘Att vara somalier, svart, muslim, kvinna och från Rinkeby gör mig till en röst för många.’ (*Dagens Nyheter*, 2016-04-21)

In sum, the analysis shows that the ‘migrant’ identity changes when taken together with representations of music practices. Or so it seems. Rather than being passive, the ‘migrant’ may now seem to become active in addressing and handling problematic social relations and phenomena (often from the stage, cf. Ålander, in progress). However, the issue of participative conditions remains out of reach.

Music and migrant – ‘The rapper who crosses the bridge’²⁸

Thoughts about the possibility to achieve societal change through music are repeatedly expressed in the articles. A recurring theme is *cohesion*, referring to how people with different backgrounds can unite. Cohesion is obviously a rare bird, since very few concrete examples are mentioned. Instead, it is lack of cohesion that catches attention. The lack of societal cohesion is commonly addressed in articles where disintegration of communities is discussed, usually in relation to segregation. One way to tackle the societal issue at a personal level is through musical participation. Some address experiences of everyday suburban life in their lyrics, which listeners with similar background can identify with.

Just a couple of weeks after the music video was released, it had over a million views on YouTube. [...] – I realized that, shit, there are people everywhere who relate to the community that exists here, a place that is not so privileged. They got to see themselves, though in a completely different world [...] But that was not the intention from the beginning, I just wanted to heal my own area.²⁹

Others organize festivities such as concerts or music festivals aiming to unite participants and audiences. Statements about the possibility to overcome ethnic differences through joint participation in music practices appear frequently.

Participation in projects incorporating both ‘Swedes’ and ‘migrants’ is described in the articles as ways of initiating relational broadening. The basic idea is that when migrants and Swedes jointly participate in certain music-related activities, such as choirs and other group activities (commonly intended for newly arrived migrants and refugees), the migrants integrate quicker. The activities are typically called ‘integration projects’ and are frequently linked to other possibilities of personal development, most commonly to language learning and broadening of social relations.

The integration choir [...] has not only led to friendships and new networks. Several of the members have gotten jobs and housing through singing. [...] The really important thing is the rehearsals every Wednesday at the refugee camp, that’s where things happen: the participants learn Swedish, we notice how bridges are built between different nationalities and religions and in addition, locals and companies come there, school classes also participate and sing. [...] This is actually integration that really works.³⁰

Integration-related topics are further accompanied by ideas about ‘multiculturalism’, particularly when participants or cultural artifacts and expressions are linked with diverse national or ethnic identities within a practice.

²⁸ ‘Rapparen som går över bron’ (*Göteborgs-Posten*, 2016-01-22).

²⁹ ‘Bara ett par veckor efter att musikvideon släppts hade den över en miljon visningar på Youtube. [...] – Jag insåg att shit, det finns människor överallt som relaterar till gemenskapen som finns här, på en plats som inte är så privilegierad. De fick se sig själva, fast i en helt annan värld [...] Men det var inte meningen från början, jag ville bara läka mitt eget område.’ (*Dagens Nyheter*, 2018-06-19)

³⁰ ‘Integrationskören [...] har inte bara lett till vänskap och nya nätverk. Flera av medlemmarna har fått jobb och bostäder genom sjungandet. [...] Det verkligen viktiga är repetitionerna varje onsdag på föreläggningen, det är där det händer saker: deltagarna lär sig svenska, vi märker hur broar byggs mellan olika nationaliteter och religioner och dessutom kommer lokalbor och företag dit, skolklasser också som är med och sjunger, [...] Det här är faktiskt integration som fungerar på riktigt.’ (*Dagens Nyheter*, 2015-12-24)

The notion of ‘cultural unification’ illustrates how cultural differences are conceived of in the daily newspaper discourse. There are many accounts of activities about which the overall idea signals that mutual participative activity weakens or even erases cultural differences and antagonistic relations, thereby paving the way to a better society – or at least improved social relations. The articles thus imply that cultural differences are problematic and need to be overcome. The creation of multicultural music events and fundraising galas or concerts are recurring practices in which ‘cultural unification’ is practised. Other examples are various projects that incorporate migrant musicians giving concerts for newly arrived migrants, intended and presented as a way to experience Swedish culture. Most of these ‘aiding’ projects aimed at unification are initiated by Swedes. On the few occasions in the articles when migrants bring up the topic, the way to help in the unification process is rather to be a role model than to present an aesthetic content.

Musical practices: social or political?

Partaking in musical practices as a professional musician with a migrant background in Sweden is constrained by various factors. However, these are only rarely mentioned in the newspaper coverage. The question, therefore, is if this same coverage, this particular media discourse, adds to the problem: Do the Swedish dailies articulate a discourse that constrains the possibility for migrants to partake in musical practices? If so, how can the daily newspaper discourse summarized above be shown to do so?

The answer resulting from this analysis draws on the discourse theoretical distinction between social and political practices (Glynos and Howarth, 2007), and on the notion of fantasmatic logic that inspires practices and provides them with a sense of direction of action. Whereas social practice refers to ongoing and routinized practices of everyday life, political practice refers to manifest challenges to norms of the social (practices that posit actors as antagonists depending on whether they question or defend the challenged norms). It will be argued that the discursive representations of the dailies constrain the possibility for migrants to partake in musical practices in at least two ways, which will be labelled *Music as non-political practice* and *Music as myth of salvation*.

Music as non-political practice

The analysed newspaper articles are instances of a media discourse that represents subjects and the social relations between them, as well as these subjects’ views on personal and societal matters related to musical practices. Most obvious are the migrants’ expressions of grievances. These concern feelings of being deprived of social relations, of not feeling at home at any place or with any identity, and of not feeling connected with society – that is, feelings that are easy for most readers to empathize with. Grievances are expressions of states of mind that may motivate action depending on how available discourses and imaginaries afford alternatives.

Far less common are grievances that concern possibilities for partaking in aesthetic practices. This is remarkable given previous research according to which constrained participation possibilities is a serious issue (see, for example, Ålander, in progress; Feiler, 2010; Martiniello, 2015; Pripp, 2006; Sernhede, 2018; Sievers, 2014). Moreover, when brought up in the newspaper articles, it is presented as a personal rather than a societal issue.

To the extent that grievances concern societal issues it is in terms of Sweden becoming a more divided, excluding and racist society, and in terms of the increase of nationalist and right-wing politics. Considering the issue of musical practice participation for anyone with a migrant background, articulation of an antagonist, identified with either the Swedish government (or ‘the state’) or the nationalist party The Sweden Democrats (the only explicitly mentioned antagonist), quite obviously points in a direction where the political does not primarily, perhaps

not even faintly, concern participation in musical practices, the reason quite simply being that neither of these would-be antagonists (the state, the right-wing nationalists) take any stance, whether implicit or explicit, on the issue of music practices. The latter do take a stance against immigration and to some extent against migrants as well, but as said, their main agenda as expressed in the articles does not concern music practices.

A further hindrance in the articulation of an antagonist position – a position which would enable a music practice to become political – is that, while the targets of the ‘migrant’s’ expressed grievance are the government and ‘the state’, these are also the obvious antagonists of the right-wing nationalists. And according to the principle that ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’, any clear-cut articulation of antagonist positions is lost.

This should come as no surprise, since, as already noticed, the issue of participatory constraints is only rarely a focused topic in the articles. The important observation is rather that the active, agency-attributed subject positions articulated in the media discourse (as shown above) pertain to personal rather than political activities – even when the ends are societal. The ‘migrant’ organizes concerts and festivals in the suburb. The ‘migrant’ also takes an active part as musician in the music practices, the latter of which are not described in terms of limitation or constraint. According to the discourse, music is not a political practice and the need of a political music practice seems to be a non-issue. In short, in an otherwise hostile world, music is a peaceful, that is, non-political, social practice.

Music as myth of salvation

Music is not only a means in this media discourse, in its function as a catalyst it is a force of mythical proportions. In the articles, no other practice than music is clearly represented that can solve the problems of the plaintive migrant.

The grievances of the ‘migrant’ concern both personal and societal matters. Personal-oriented grievances concern life circumstances, from private matters such as confused identities, to anxiety of living in precarious suburbs, to the experienced frustration when waiting for asylum decisions. On the contrary, societal grievances mainly concern the lack of cohesion and the perceived disintegration of society.

Given these grievances there is a remarkable disparity between the articles that make up the discourse. On the one hand there is the articulation of a professional ‘musician’ identity with the potential to change the overall meaning of the ‘migrant’ identity. This change is assumedly accomplished by the means of music through a cherishing of cultural diversity and multiculturalism. Exactly what the outcome of the musical practices would be in such cases remains unclear in the articles that represent this approach. However, the answer is abundantly clear in the remainder of the material. Here the issue is the lack of societal cohesion, and the primary attribute of music – music’s discursive identity *par excellence* – is its capacity to restore societal balance and dislocation.

Concerts and festivals are organized to unite participants and audiences, on both individual and collective levels. Playing, dancing and listening to music together potentially erase cultural differences and possible antagonisms, and long-time or second-generation migrants are held up as role models for newcomers, thus ‘aiding’ the latter in the process of becoming integrated. By a subtle twist, the active ‘migrant’ is thus turned into a passive recipient of integration support. The ‘migrant’, musician or not, needs music’s help in the ongoing process to overcome cultural ‘differences’.

So how can this alteration of the discursive meaning of the ‘migrant’ identity be explained? When there is no mention of music, the ‘migrant’ is represented as passive and in need of helping hands (in line with previous research). However, when represented in connection with music, the ‘migrant’ suddenly becomes active, capable and independent. Or so it may seem. The answer to the question of the altered migrant identity lies in the ‘music’. ‘Music’ is assigned

more or less the same kind of power in all articles: Music does you good, it does everyone and the entire society good through its integrating and redeeming powers. Last but not least, it determines the leeway of the migrant musician.

Logics, myths and fantasies: the unchanging practice of music

Playing music is a social practice. In the discourse of the Swedish dailies there is a certain logic to the social dimension in which the 'migrants' music is played. According to this social logic a good society is characterized by cohesion and consensus, it is non-confrontational and conflict-free, it embraces everyone and its members are well-integrated. No one rocks the boat. This, for instance, is the significance of the story of the grateful refugee who praises the new country as welcoming, safe and democratic. But why such a logic? It does not correspond to the grievances of the 'migrant', and one may reasonably doubt if it is of any relevance at all for the 'migrant'. A likely answer to why the news media represents a social sphere conforming to such a logic is simply that its presence is aimed at the readers of the newspapers. And the majority of the readers of the six major dailies in Sweden are in all likelihood 'Swedes', rather than 'migrants'.

Feeding this social logic, in that it reinforces the subjects' belief in it (especially in times of incertitude), is a fantasmatic logic of 'music'. This fantasmatic logic is in accord with an age-old Western imaginary by which music has more or less magic powers. From the myth of Orpheus, via the qualms of St. Augustine, and the 19th-century Romantics, today's media has inherited a fantasy about music as a healing force, potential or real. Mood-regulating self-technologies by means of digital streaming have not changed this idea about music, rather the opposite (cf. Volgsten, 2021). In its discursive incarnation in the dailies, music is the treasured object that only a heroic harbinger can deliver. Music is salvation and the harbinger a creator of musical events. The recipient of salvation is characterized by what she has not. She lacks not only the redeeming integration that music brings about, but also the power to seize it. The recipient, the non-integrated outsider, the 'migrant', is passive, a patient (cf. Greimas, 1987).

The consequences for the 'migrants' possibilities to participate in music practices lie in the effect the media discourse may have on the readers of the newspapers, namely what can be assumed to be the 'Swedish' part of the audience. To begin with, the implication of the musical practice never becoming political, never articulating an antagonism to be waged, is that it is the 'migrant' who is the problem. However, the 'migrant' is not articulated as an antagonist to the Swede, rather the 'migrant' is shown to be in need, and the rescuer is the good 'Swede', the saviour of the non-conformed migrant. Exactly what integration is or consists in (that is, what music is supposed to 'do') remains unknown, except that it leads to unification and, by consequence, to a cohesive and good society. By consequence it is not the society of 'Swedes' that needs to be changed (by music), it is the non-integrated 'migrant'.

And there is no way out of this situation. In the end it is the fantasmatic logic that prevails and defines the discourse. As long as music is about the assimilation of disparate practitioners or audiences – which the fantasmatic logic of music as salvation dictates – the musical practices will by implication presuppose someone to assimilate, which brings forth a rather constraining subject position to identify with for any migrant, to say the least. The acknowledged problem throughout the discourse is a lack of integration and assimilation, which however does not lead to a political practice of change, but to a mythic ritual, the musical integration ritual that will eventually turn subjects into proper and well-integrated citizens. But can assimilation ever be attained? Will music change anything according to this discourse? Whether the 'migrant' and the 'Swede' are culturally or ethnically defined, the aberrancy will remain the migrant-background. In either case a background is forever inscribed on the migrated's body and as such it can never be washed away, not even by music.

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Appendix: Full list of included newspaper articles, sorted by newspaper title and publication date.

Aftonbladet

- 2016-01-07, Barbro lär ut svenska med sång
- 2016-07-08, Mer folkdans till förorten
- 2016-07-20, Ingen vill spela på Sverigedemokraternas fest
- 2016-12-14, Löfven: Nu är klockan uppe i 88 000:-
- 2017-04-21, Han startade musikskola – för ensamkommande
- 2017-05-20, Ibrahim vann – skänker en del av pengarna till skolan i Boden
- 2017-11-10, Det är jag, katten & robotgräsklipparen

Dagens Nyheter

- 2014-04-04, Jag tvingas att vara politisk
- 2014-06-02, Den svenska hiphopens matriark
- 2014-06-15, Jag var extremt naiv

2014-08-01, Folkmusik med politiskt budskap
2014-10-14, Mamma dansar i himlen när hon hör mig sjunga
2014-10-28, Jag vill inte göra karriär
2014-12-14, Den leende nationalismen
2015-04-10, Ambitiöst projekt. Naser Razzazi höjdpunkt i spretig artiststafett
2015-04-17, Folkdräkt för alla
2015-05-27, Musikalen ska hjälpa nyanlända in i samhället
2015-09-10, Skolmöten i Alafors skapar snabbt ny bild av nyanlända
2015-11-29, Hans ord om utanförskap går rakt in
2015-12-04, Husby är en plats med oändligt mycket kraft
2015-12-24, Rosmari & Jonas Hagström. 'Detta är integration som fungerar på riktigt'
2016-03-05, Flyktingbarn skriver om sin längtan efter mamma
2016-03-06, Jag ska ta all plats som inte var menad för mig
2016-04-21, Jag vet att jag är här för att stanna
2016-06-14, Den här skivan var skitjobbig att göra
2016-07-21, Svenskarna blir mer som oss syrier
2016-08-29, Musiken kan förändra världen
2016-09-03, Nazisten som bytte sida
2016-12-23, Bollywoodoperan lever vidare i Strömstad
2017-05-11, Fröken Frej utan filter
2017-11-09, Utlevande verk. Hiphopkulturen som stark uttrycksventil
2017-12-15, Selam får Sverige att gunga
2017-12-16, Körmedlemmarna blev de första vännerna i mitt nya liv
2018-06-19, Jag vill göra somalier stolta över sina rötter
2018-08-27, Bröt språkbarriären med musik
2018-09-05, Gullviva, mandelblom, kattfot och blå viol - olé!
2018-09-18, Örjan Englund's låt blev en hit bland högerpopulister
2018-10-19, Svensk hiphop är det finaste vi har

Expressen

2014-11-21, Jag har burit på det här
2014-12-13, Ledare mot sin vilja
2015-01-14, Lyckligt möte
2015-07-21, Av glädje bygger man musik...
2016-01-04, Sveriges värsta skolmördare
2016-10-22, 10 minuter & 37 sekunder av grymfasa: De lurade den svartmaskerade döden - men livet blir aldrig detsamma
2017-05-07, Ibrahims svåra tid under succén
2017-11-05, Flyktingarna var aldrig en del av problemet, det var bara vi

Göteborgs-Posten

2014-02-15, Bestämd
2014-09-13, SDU spelar med Kent
2014-10-27, Intimare version som vågar mer
2014-11-27, Hans röst bar ända till Sverige
2015-02-16, Missionär för världsmusiken

- 2015-04-24, Tung musik om Europas gränser
2015-09-28, Musikal ska ge nyanlända i Ale en bra start
2015-10-18, Från klarhet till klarhet
2015-10-22, GWO ger konsert för flyktingar
2015-10-30, Gränslös musikfest
2015-11-02, Festival illegal tillbaka
2015-11-02, Festival som lyfter fram olika musikkulturer
2015-11-22, Sex band på scen under kvällens stödkonsert
2016-01-22, Rapparen som går över bron
2016-04-11, De 'pinsamma kändisarna' är vår livlina
2016-06-15, Unga möten i musiken
2016-07-16, Musik på slottet lyfter minoriteter
2016-11-02, Planeta vill bjuda in dig till festival
2016-11-03, Ett eko av flyktingkrisen, Kyrkomusik: Nytt requiem uruppförs i Hagakyrkan
2017-02-19, Nu vill Ron ge tillbaka
2017-03-15, Eldfesten lyste upp Heden
2017-03-17, Barnen berättar om rädsla och flykt
2017-05-04, En kväll för jämställdheten
2017-06-20, Han vill vara fri och stark i sitt nya land
2017-07-23, Håkan vägrar att bli självgod
2017-09-10, Ojämnt om samtidens speglingar
2017-10-27, Burundis musikprofil glömmer inte sitt land
2017-11-12, Verkligheten är groteskare än Grotesco
2018-01-13, Släpper album i väntan på asyl
2018-06-10, Mer revolution än musik

Svenska Dagbladet

- 2014-05-10, Splittrat Husby blickar framåt
2014-07-06, DJ Dokusåpa
2014-10-12, Hiphopeliten hyllar honom som genrens svenska fader
2014-10-12, Med musiken som räddning
2015-08-02, En utmattad utandning
2016-01-03, Erik Lundin: Jag har flytt från krig. Krig finns i Sverige också
2016-03-21, Fika ska öppna väg till svenska språket
2016-07-10, Mest av allt saknar jag hans jidder
2017-07-11, Sting skänker bort prispengar
2018-01-07, Vi outsiders är vår egen nation

Sydsvenskan

- 2014-03-04, HALLÅ DÄR, Är stan full av genier?
2014-06-01, På Kulturskolan möts livets trådar
2014-10-20, Malmömusiker i ny dokumentärfilm
2015-05-15, En plats i solen
2015-08-04, Musikfilm får premiär i Malmö
2015-10-15, Musik för flyktingar
2015-11-02, Hur kom flyktinggalan till?

2016-05-13, Vad är Sounds of Exile?
2016-10-21, Flyktingen som fick komma in i symfonivärmen
2016-12-02, Vi mår bra om vi lär känna varandra
2016-12-04, Jag är i Sverige för att jag hatar kriget
2016-12-18, Gästen som blev en dotter
2017-04-02, Musiker vädjar för artist som ska utvisas
2017-10-22, Berättelser om flykt ska öka förståelsen
2017-12-15, Eric Bibb vill förena med musik
2018-02-21, Här skolas framtidens artister
2018-05-14, Krigsskadade unga sjunger sig ur psykiska trauman
2018-05-20, Texterna är viktiga för mig – jag böjer mig aldrig
2018-10-07, Allt ljus på Jason
2018-11-09, Christian Kjellvander kom inte undan politiken

Abstract

Traditional news media is one of the most important sources of information on contemporary society. Media has the power to affect public opinion and alter identities, which in the long run may affect social norms, practices and participative conditions. In traditional news media research, migration is an established topic while music is not. Their combination is lacking in both media and music research. In this study 106 newspaper articles from six major Swedish newspapers, published over a period of five years, are analysed through a discourse theoretical perspective. The discursive representation of ‘migrants’ in the investigated media confirms the picture provided in previous research, according to which the ‘migrant’ is often associated with the alien, the worrying and the problematic – not least in its relation to the ‘Swede’. More surprising is that while ‘music’ is repeatedly described as capable of affecting social relations and processes, it does not lead to a political practice of change. Instead ‘music’ becomes a mythic ritual, according to which subjects turn into conforming and well-integrated citizens.

Keywords

music; migration; news media; discourse theory; Laclau; logics approach, fantasmatic logic

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