

Safe Ocean: Artistic and Autoethnographic Explorations of Music and Sound as Vessels for Finnish Kosovar Second-Generation Identity

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“Tingulli, rrahja e parë e zemrës, fryma që zgjon shpirtin, jehona e ëmbël e zërit të nënës. Në oqeanin e mitrës, ky djep i shenjtë thurr lidhjen, formëson thelbin e përkatësisë dhe përgatit shpirtin për udhëtimin drejt botës.”¹

("Sound, the first heartbeat, the breath that awakens the soul, the tender echo of a mother's voice. In the ocean of the womb, this sacred cradle weaves connection, shaping the essence of belonging and preparing the soul for its journey into the world.")

(1: A poem in Albanian by Merve Abdurrahmani)

Abstract

This study investigates the role of music and sound in shaping a sense of identity among second-generation immigrants in Finland, with a particular focus on Finnish Kosovar experiences. As Finland moves from a historically homogeneous society toward a more multicultural landscape, understanding how musical engagement influences identity formation becomes increasingly significant. Through autoethnographic reflection and artistic practice, this research explores how listening, performing, and creating music mediate the negotiation of cultural heritage, integration, and hybrid identities among individuals navigating multiple cultural worlds.

Central to this exploration is the master concert *Safe Ocean*, which serves as both a personal and academic articulation of the study's core themes. The concert integrates multilingual expression, traditional Albanian and Turkish musical materials, and hybrid compositional methods that also incorporate Nordic musical elements such as modal melodies, open-voiced harmonies, and timbral aesthetics characteristic of the region's contemporary folk and art music practices. By combining solo, small-group, and full-ensemble arrangements, the project presents both intimate and collective expressions, engaging instruments and musical influences from Kosovar Albanian, Turkish, Nordic, and Middle Eastern traditions.

Through the interweaving of autoethnographic insight, artistic creation, and scholarly inquiry, this study demonstrates how music evokes memory, supports emotional processing, and supports dialogue between multiple cultural worlds. Findings indicate that engagement with sound and musical practice contributes not only to personal identity formation but also to the creation of social belonging and spaces for intercultural dialogue. This research contributes to broader discussions on music, diaspora, and identity, offering insight into how artistic practices can mediate complex cultural experiences and support the integration of second-generation immigrants within multicultural societies.

Keywords: belonging, identity, multiculturalism, integration, immigration, second-generation immigrants, Finnish society, music-making, sound, Kosova

The texts have been primarily developed from my own experiences, including my autoethnographic experiences as a second-generation Kosovar immigrant born and raised in Finland. These experiences include my life as a musician, music lessons, music schooling in Finland, traveling, participating in various musical projects, and engaging with multiple sources such as personal journal entries and literature. While the core ideas, structure, and content are entirely my own, I used digital tools to support the writing process. Specifically, I used OpenAI's ChatGPT, Grammarly for grammar refinement and vocabulary enhancement, and DeepL to translate or rephrase sections of the text. These tools were used solely to improve clarity and readability, without altering the original intent of the research.

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I dedicate this thesis to the first sound I ever heard: my mother, Shukran, the strongest woman I have ever met. Her love for music, alongside my father's, has been one of the deepest sources of inspiration in my life and has guided me to pursue my own path in music.

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1. Introduction

Music's role in identity formation has been widely explored in scholarly literature (Stokes, 1994; Turino, 2008; Frith, 1996). As both a personal and collective form of expression, music is central to constructing and maintaining cultural identity, particularly for second-generation immigrants navigating the complexities of dual heritage and belonging (Hall, 1990; Bhabha, 1994). This study examines how music and sound contribute to these processes, focusing on second-generation Kosovar immigrants in Finland and drawing on my autoethnographic reflections as a Finnish Kosovar musician born to immigrant parents.

Ethnic identity formation in diaspora contexts is dynamic and multifaceted. Perkola's (2020) research on the institutionalisation of music in Kosova from 1948 to 2020 provides insight into formal and community-based music education, illustrating the musical knowledge and practices that Kosovar immigrants carried with them to diaspora. These educational and cultural foundations continue to influence diasporic identity formation. For example, my mother's participation in choirs, music classes, and local poetry circles in her hometown, Vushtrri, exemplifies how musical and cultural practices are transmitted across generations. Such experiences shaped her musical knowledge and, consequently, my early engagement with music, highlighting the continuity and adaptation of Kosovar musical heritage in a new environment.

This study foregrounds the sonic dimension of identity, considering both structured music-making and everyday sounds, spoken words, melodies, and environmental noises, as tools for memory, belonging, and self-expression. While this study emphasises the role of sound and music in identity formation, these ideas align with broader scholarship on sonic identity and heritage (Maloney & Schofield, 2021). For second-generation Kosovar immigrants, these sounds combine ancestral memory and life in Finland, supporting both cultural continuity and adaptation. Finland's growing cultural diversity (Saukkonen, 2018, p. 69) underscores the significance of examining how artistic practices, such as music, contribute to belonging and identity formation. Scholars have consistently shown that music, through rhythms, melodies, and cultural expression, offers a powerful medium for individuals to reconnect with heritage and affirm identity (Stokes, 1994; Turino, 2008; Nettl, 2005).

Building on these insights, this research adopts an autoethnographic and practice-based approach. Drawing on my experiences as a Finnish Kosovar musician, I explore how music and sound function as vessels for negotiating identity, fostering belonging, and maintaining cultural continuity. The study is situated within my master's project, *Safe Ocean*, which integrates multilingual elements, Kosovar musical traditions, poetry in *Gegh* dialect and reflections on migration, resilience, and belonging.

Through this project, I aim to illuminate how music can support second-generation immigrants in articulating and navigating layered identities, offering both personal and broader sociocultural insights into how sound and artistic practice mediate the experience of belonging in multicultural contexts.

1.1 Context of the study

This research is framed around my artistic exploration, notably my master's concert, *Safe Ocean*, which serves as both a personal and academic manifestation of these themes. The concert, which integrates multilingual elements and traditional Kosovar music and explores themes of migration, resilience, and belonging, provides a concrete example of how music can serve as an instrument of cultural continuity and transformation.

1.2 Research aim and questions

This study aims to examine the role of music and sound in shaping the identities of second-generation Kosovar immigrants in Finland, with a particular focus on my own autoethnographic experiences and artistic work as a person born in Finland within an immigrant family from Kosova. The main question that addresses this aim is: How can music and sound contribute to identity formation for second generation Kosovar immigrants in Finland? Drawing upon existing literature, autoethnographic observations and personal artistic practice, this research seeks to deepen our understanding of the intersection between music, identity, and belonging in those living between multiple cultural worlds.

1.3 Introducing the artist and researcher

This chapter draws on autoethnographic reflection, weaving together personal narrative, cultural context, and musical practice to examine how sound and music have contributed to the formation of my identity and the negotiation of belonging across multiple cultural worlds.

1.3.1 Cultural and family background

Growing up as a second-generation immigrant in Finland with roots in both Turkish and Albanian heritage from Kosova, carried its own layers of complexity. Kosova is a multicultural region shaped by centuries of empires, migrations, and cultural exchanges. Under the Ottoman Empire, its culture was profoundly influenced by Ottoman traditions, and many ethnic groups including Albanians, Turks, Bosniaks, Serbs, Gorani, Roma, and Ashkali coexisted within its borders. Religiously, most of the population identifies as Albanian Muslims alongside Orthodox and Catholic communities and smaller faith groups. Later, being part of Yugoslavia further influenced its cultural, linguistic, and social dynamics, and the post-Yugoslav wars introduced themes of migration, longing, and resilience into artistic expression.

Coming from a family that speaks both Albanian and Turkish, my own background reflects this layered multicultural heritage. Although I do not know my exact genetic lineage, my roots are tied to a region characterised by the coexistence of multiple ethnicities and religions over generations. As a second-generation Kosovar raised in Finland, defining my identity has been a complex process. I identify as Albanian, Turkish, and Finnish, each aspect contributing to how I experience and express myself. This multiplicity also informs my musical identity, as the music of Kosova embodies centuries of cultural coexistence and exchange. Rather than belonging to a single tradition, it reflects a synthesis of many influences, creating a distinctive hybrid soundscape.

From an early age, I became aware of navigating multiple cultural worlds, each with its own language, traditions, and expectations. Within my family, Albanian and Turkish influences coexisted in ways that were sometimes distinct yet deeply interconnected. While this formed a rich cultural background, it also introduced complexity in understanding and communicating my identity, particularly when explaining my Turkish heritage within a community that predominantly identifies as Albanian. Growing up in Finland added another layer, offering values, social norms, and sonic experiences that interacted with those I encountered at home.

This layering of identities often created an internal sense of ambiguity. I was never fully Finnish in the way my peers were, nor entirely Albanian or Turkish in the ways different communities around me understood those identities. Rather than arising from external pressure, this feeling of complexity came from the subtle negotiation of diverse expectations and learning to adapt to each context. Over time, I became skilled at shifting between cultural spaces, an ability that facilitated connection but sometimes

distanced me from a clear sense of self. These experiences cultivated a heightened sensitivity to questions of identity, belonging, and expression, which now lie at the core of my artistic and academic work.

1.3.2 Familial soundscapes and early musical development

Early soundscapes and memory

Memory often begins with sound. My earliest memories come from the long summer months I spent in Kosova during my childhood, sometimes two or even three months at a time. I remember the laughter of my cousins, aunts and uncles, the soft hum of songs drifting from my grandparents' home, and the gentle clink of a spoon against a Turkish teacup as the aroma of tea filled the room. The everyday rustle of sunflower seeds being cracked open, the warmth of bureks coming fresh out of the oven, and the constant presence of sound around me created a vivid sensory world. Cars moved quickly along narrow streets, neighbours greeted each other across balconies, and the landscape held traces of an old history beside the newly built structures that appeared after a war not so long ago. These layers of sound formed the acoustic backdrop of my childhood.

When I returned to Finland, the contrast was immediate. Quietness, wide spaces and a soft stillness shaped an entirely different atmosphere, one that settled into me like a gentle pause. The shift between these two worlds has always been striking. The energetic and densely textured soundscape of Kosova, filled with voices, music and daily noise, stands in contrast to the spacious silence of Finland. Over time, I have come to understand that I exist between these two sonic realities. This movement between intensity and calm, between rich layers of sound and moments of profound quiet, has become a defining element of my identity and my artistic expression. It does not create conflict but offers a foundation for my music and my sense of self, and it is within this in-between space that my creative voice continues to take shape.

Maternal influence and cultural resilience

Memory often begins with sound. I remember the laughter of my cousins, aunts and uncles, the soft hum of songs drifting from my grandparents' home in Kosova, and the clink of a spoon against a Turkish teacup as the rich aroma of tea filled the room. These everyday moments, intertwined with music, created a space where family, memory, and expression existed together. The sounds of that home, including voices, instruments, and the call to prayer from the minarets, carry a profound sense of home for me. In Finland, I have often missed them because in Kosova they are present everywhere, coming from every corner.

On my mother's side, music was at the heart of family life. Her childhood home was filled with singing and the sounds of instruments as siblings, cousins, and uncles gathered to play together. I remember sitting on my grandparents' terrace, surrounded by my grandmother's big garden full of roses and colorful flowers. The smell of the flowers was so strong I can still feel it deep in the dip of my nose. I would sing *nasheeds* or *ilahija*, spiritual songs in Turkish and Arabic, for my grandmother and the neighbours who were visiting. These moments often turned into little performances, with my cousin playing the darbuka or a small keyboard. Music was part of everyday life, and we learned it naturally, without formal lessons.

My mother's connection to music was shaped by both her early life and the difficult conditions she faced later. As a young girl and teenager in Yugoslavia, she participated in choirs, theatre, and various forms of music-making, and she also wrote poetry. These activities were part of her life before her twenties, before the restrictions in the 1990s limited access to Albanian-language education. After Kosova's autonomy was revoked in the early 1990s, Serbian authorities closed Albanian-language schools, leaving only primary education available. Many schools were taken over by Serb families displaced from Croatia and Bosnia, further limiting opportunities for young Albanians. My mother had to continue her studies in hidden schools at home, where access to formal artistic instruction was very difficult. Despite these challenges, her early love for music and creativity created an environment where I could pursue professional musical training, something her generation could hardly dream of.

Music was more than an art for my family; it was part of who we were. My grandfather's home was full of Rumeli, Turkish, and Albanian music, alongside songs from across the Eastern Mediterranean and former Yugoslavia. Instruments like the oud, cümbüş, tupani and darbuka were always present at

weddings, births, and family gatherings, carrying joy, memory, and belonging. Music passed from one generation to the next, keeping our culture alive even through migration and displacement.

As Stokes says, music connects people to collective memory and cultural identity. My family's music shows how sound can be a way to survive, to stay connected, and to feel part of something bigger. The Kosovo War of 1998–1999 almost destroyed this heritage, with homes burned and instruments lost. But through my music, these traditions continue, carrying the stories, memories, and identity of my family and community.

Paternal Musical Traditions

On my father's side, music was always present as well. Some of my earliest memories in my father's childhood home go back to the post-war period, when electricity was often reduced or unavailable. During those candle-lit evenings, we would gather to tell stories and sing songs, and my uncle would play the guitar and teach me Turkish folk tunes, even though he had never formally studied music and, like most of my close relatives, was entirely self-taught.

My paternal grandfather was a Turkish language teacher and a music lover who played several instruments, and both of my paternal grandparents loved singing. I have been told that my grandmother had a beautiful voice and would often sing while doing her daily chores. She was from Prizren, one of the most multicultural and multilayered cities in Kosova. Her mother tongue was Turkish, and the region is rich in musical culture.

My father's family also had deep emotional connections to sound. My grandmother would often burst into tears at the call to prayer, moved by its beauty and the depth of feeling it evoked. Their home, like my mother's family's, was full of music, woven into rituals from welcoming a newborn to celebrating community events.

I never had a chance to meet my paternal grandfather, but it is remarkable that, through my music career, I have met people in the arts who knew him and for whom he had been a teacher. One comment that left a lasting mark on my heart was: "If your grandfather were alive, he would be so proud and so happy to make music with you." It felt surreal to hear about the grandfather I never met through the stories and memories of others, yet somehow to experience him through music.

From both sides of my family, I inherited more than technical skills. I inherited a sense of music to connect across generations, cultures, and languages. Even when conflict, displacement, and history threatened to silence these traditions, they continue through me. Music has become both a voice and a space to listen inwardly, to preserve memory, and to honor resilience and creativity.

1.3.3 Formal musical training and development

As I grew older, participating in school music projects and collaborative performances strengthened my confidence and helped me navigate social spaces more comfortably. Alongside these experiences, I pursued formal musical studies, beginning with classical piano until the age of eighteen, exploring jazz, and developing a deep engagement with the folk music of Nordic countries. This included three years at the Junior Academy of the Sibelius Academy and one year in the bachelor's program in the Folk Department.

Later, my studies in the Global Music Department, including Arabic and Persian classical music, reconnected me with the cultural interweaving of the Ottoman era, where diverse communities influenced each other while maintaining distinct traditions. These studies allowed me to connect personal experience with broader musical knowledge, deepening both my technical skills and my understanding of cultural hybridity in music. Across these different forms and traditions, I began to see music not only as a craft but as a lens through which to understand identity, community, and historical continuity.

1.3.4 Musical practice and reflection on Finnish identity

Being born and raised in Finland added multiple layers to my understanding of resilience and identity. I completed my entire schooling in Finland, including participation in *musiikkiluokka*, a music-oriented class from third to ninth grade. This environment allowed me to explore and develop my musical identity alongside the same peers over several years. Most of my classmates were Finnish, which

contrasted with my earlier experiences in kindergarten and the first two grades, where I was mostly surrounded by peers from immigrant backgrounds.

For many years, I felt that to connect with people outside my home, I needed to adapt and perform a role, both musically and personally. It took nearly twenty years to confront these feelings and address the internal “noise” I carried. During this period, I began writing songs that reflected questions of identity and the human experiences I was navigating. Composing and performing my own music became a way to reconcile the tension between adapting to the surrounding culture and inspiring others to embrace their authentic selves. Through this process, I began to recognize that I could identify as Finnish while remaining fully true to who I am. My music, while not necessarily “Finnish” in style, reflects the sonic environment in which I was raised—a Finland shaped not only by native traditions but also by the sounds and cultures of those who migrated here. This hybrid sonic landscape represents both the present and the future of Finnish musical identity.

My engagement with Finnish folk music, both in the Youth Department and at the Sibelius Academy, complemented these personal reflections, allowing me to explore the intersections of formal classical techniques and vernacular traditions. Concepts such as *sisu*, the Finnish notion of perseverance and resilience, and learning about how communities historically built a nation in a harsh environment, offered perspectives that resonated with my Kosovar roots. Collaborative projects with Finland’s indigenous Sámi communities further illuminated how music and sound connect people across borders, long before modern nation-states rigidly defined cultural communities. These encounters highlighted how cultural and musical exchanges are fluid, adaptive, and transformative, reflecting shared human experiences of joy, sorrow, and belonging.

These experiences inform my artistic practice and research. I am drawn to creating music that amplifies voices that are sometimes unheard due to oppression or marginalization. Through my choices as a musician and composer, I aim to align with resilience, fostering connection, cultural memory, and identity across diverse communities. Music is not only my medium of expression; it is a tool to connect generations, geographies, and lived experiences, allowing stories of endurance and creativity to be heard and shared.

1.3.5 Artistic Research and the Safe Ocean Project

The Safe Ocean project emerged from a deeply personal impulse, a kind of awakening in which I allowed myself to be fully vulnerable and present, without the pressure of worrying if others would understand me. I asked myself if Finnish audiences, or the Kosovar community, could grasp the ways I express my identity, and if combining musical elements that do not typically coexist might feel acceptable. This process was as much about confronting my own uncertainties as it was about creating music.

Through Safe Ocean, I sought to explore my identity while opening space for others to engage with theirs. The melodies, harmonies, and lyrics I created invite listeners to dive into their own experiences, particularly those born or raised far from their ancestral roots, or who may lack strong support systems. The project provides a reflective space for navigating questions of belonging, resilience, and self-understanding in a world shaped by rapid social and technological change.

Safe Ocean functions as artistic research, using music and sound to articulate layered identities, foster empathy, and encourage reflection and dialogue. The compositions reveal the interplay between personal experience and broader cultural narratives, highlighting how creative practice can engage emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions. In this way, the project is both an individual journey and a collective invitation: it allows participants to encounter their own stories and emotions, and to experience moments of connection, endurance, and creativity through sound.

1.4 Structure of the written work

This thesis is structured to integrate autoethnographic reflection, artistic practice, and scholarly analysis, exploring how sound and music can be used as tools to identity formation among second-generation Kosovar immigrants in Finland.

Chapter 1 introduces the research context, outlines my cultural and musical background, and presents an autoethnographic account of my experiences navigating multiple cultural identities as a cross-cultural individual.

Chapter 2 provides a review of existing literature, focusing on key themes such as identity formation, cross-cultural individuals, interculturalism, and the role of music and sound in diasporic experiences, highlighting gaps that this work seeks to address.

Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical and conceptual framework, presenting the key concepts and scholarly perspectives used to interpret my reflections and artistic practice.

Chapter 4 focuses on my artistic practice and reflection, detailing the methodological approach of autoethnography and practice-led research, presenting the Safe Ocean project, and analysing selected compositions and journal reflections to examine how music and sound articulate experiences of migration, resilience, and belonging.

Chapter 5 presents an analysis of two compositions from my Safe Ocean concert, examining how they reflect the themes of migration, resilience, and identity explored throughout this study. These compositions are analysed in relation to the literature and theoretical frameworks discussed in earlier chapters, highlighting how musical elements, structure, and performance practices articulate experiences of belonging and cultural hybridity.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by synthesising insights from both my artistic practice and scholarly analysis, reflecting on the broader implications for understanding complex cultural identities and the ways in which music can create a sense of “home” for second-generation immigrants.

Chapter 7 presents the main conclusions of the study, summarizing how music and sound contribute to identity, belonging, and cultural continuity for second-generation Kosovar immigrants in Finland. It reflects on the insights gained from artistic practice and scholarly analysis, highlights the contributions and limitations of the research, and suggests directions for future studies.

2. Literature review/previous studies

Introduction

The relationship between music, identity, and diaspora has been extensively explored across disciplines such as ethnomusicology, cultural studies, and migration studies. This literature review focuses on research examining how music and sound shape cultural identity, facilitates diasporic expression, and fosters hybrid musical practices. Sources were selected for their relevance to second-

generation immigrants, cross-cultural music-making, Balkan musical traditions, and Finnish society. Relevant literature was identified through searches in databases including Google Scholar, JSTOR, ResearchGate, and Arsca using keywords such as “music and identity,” “hybrid identities,” “diaspora and music,” and “Kosovar music.” Works were included if they provided theoretical frameworks or historical perspectives that show how music functions as a medium for constructing identity and cultivating a sense of belonging outside the ancestral homeland.

2.1 Music, Identity, and Ethnicity

Stokes (1994) explores the connection between music and ethnic identity, highlighting how musical practices mediate social belonging and group identification. Turino (2008) expands this by analysing music as a form of social participation, demonstrating that engagement in musical practices shapes both personal identity and collective cultural experience. Nettl (2005) provides an ethnomusicological perspective, outlining conceptual and methodological frameworks that underscore the importance of context, performance, and transmission in understanding music as a cultural phenomenon. Together, these works emphasise that music is not only an artistic practice but also a social instrument that contributes to the construction and negotiation of identity.

2.2 Cultural Hybridity and Diaspora

Hall (1991) and Bhabha (1994) theorise identity as a dynamic process rather than a fixed inheritance, highlighting hybridity, negotiation, and the creation of “third spaces” in which new cultural forms emerge. Bhabha emphasises how diasporic subjects navigate cultural tensions to produce innovative hybrid identities, which is particularly relevant for second-generation immigrants balancing multiple cultural heritages. Similarly, Moore and Barker (2012) and Pollock et al. (2017) explore the experiences of individuals growing up in cross-cultural or “third culture” environments, demonstrating that hybrid identities often emerge from negotiation, adaptation, and the synthesis of multiple cultural influences. These perspectives provide a theoretical framework for understanding how music can operate as a site of cultural negotiation and identity formation. A study of second-generation migrants in Sweden shows that music from their parents’ home countries helps them navigate cultural identity and strengthens their

sense of belonging (Condé, 2021). This suggests that music similarly functions as a bridge between heritage and present life for Kosovar immigrants and their descendants.

2.3 Historical and regional studies of Kosovar music

Perkola provides a historical overview of Kosova's art music and its performers at major Yugoslav music festivals from the 1950s to the 1980s, illustrating the rich musical traditions that existed prior to the wars and conflicts in the region. This historical context situates with the musical practices I experienced within a larger socio-political framework, highlighting both continuity and disruption in cultural transmission. The experiences of my parents and their early education in music allowed knowledge and traditions from Kosova to be transmitted and adapted within Finnish society. Their ability to share the music they learned at home or in institutional settings such as schools demonstrates how cultural heritage can be preserved and transformed across generations and geographies.

2.4 Gaps in the literature

While existing literature provides extensive theoretical and historical frameworks, there is a noticeable gap in studies addressing the lived experiences of second-generation Kosovar immigrants, particularly regarding how early familial soundscapes influence identity formation. Research that combines autoethnography, musical practice, and diasporic identity remains limited. This thesis seeks to address these gaps by examining personal musical experience alongside broader cultural and historical perspectives, offering insight into how music functions as a medium of belonging, resilience, and hybrid identity formation.

In addition, as Finland becomes increasingly multicultural, there is a growing need for studies that explore how individuals from diverse backgrounds engage with music academically and professionally. By sharing my own story, I hope to contribute to this discourse and inspire other people with similar backgrounds to pursue music and consider academic pathways in the field. Currently, I am the only Finnish Kosovar at the Sibelius Academy, but I hope that over time, there will be more opportunities for individuals like me to participate fully in the Finnish academic music world and to bring their cultural heritage into scholarly and artistic spaces.

3. Theoretical/conceptual framework

In the theoretical framework for this thesis, my key concepts are “identity formation,” “cross-cultural individuals,” and “music as a medium for memory and belonging.” I will use scholarly materials that focus on these themes and analyse them in relation to my own autoethnographic experience, comparing my experiences with what has been documented in previous studies. I will examine whether my experiences are widely shared among individuals in similar contexts and assess whether this study is relevant for people like me. Furthermore, I aim to explore the societal significance of these issues, emphasising the need to address the experiences of displacement and otherness that individuals may feel, even if they were born and raised in a particular country.

The feeling of otherness in multiple contexts must be acknowledged in a way that provides those who experience it with tools to navigate it. In this study, I approach this using sound and music as tools to cultivate a sense of belonging, support identity formation, and foster the development of healthy individuals who are recognised by society and those around them.

The key works I will analyse include the scholars mentioned in the literature review: Stokes (1994), Turino (2008), Nettle (2005), Hall (1991), Bhabha (1994), Moore and Barker (2012), Pollock et al. (2017), and Perkola. These works provide theoretical and historical frameworks that illuminate how music functions as a medium for constructing identity, negotiating hybridity, and cultivating a sense of belonging outside the ancestral homeland.

Key Concepts:

Identity formation refers to the process by which individuals develop a sense of who they are, how they relate to others, and how they situate themselves within social and cultural contexts. It is a dynamic process rather than a fixed state, influenced by personal experiences, cultural heritage, and social interactions. Hall (1991) and Bhabha (1994) emphasize that identity is negotiated and hybrid, particularly for individuals navigating multiple cultural influences. In the context of second-generation immigrants, music can play a central role in identity formation by mediating connections to heritage, expressing cultural belonging, and providing a platform for personal and collective self-understanding (Stokes, 1994; Turino, 2008; Nettle, 2005).

Cross-cultural individuals are people who grow up living between more than one cultural environment, often integrating aspects of different cultural identities into their lives. Moore and Barker (2012) and Pollock et al. (2017) show that such individuals often develop hybrid identities that reflect negotiation and adaptation between multiple cultural influences. Second-generation migrants, including

Finnish Kosovar individuals, frequently experience a sense of otherness, being simultaneously part of their inherited culture and the society in which they were born and raised. Understanding their experiences requires considering how they navigate these overlapping cultural spaces and construct a coherent sense of self.

Music functions as a powerful medium for connecting individuals to collective memory, heritage, and social groups. It can reinforce cultural identity and provide a sense of belonging, particularly for diasporic or second-generation communities. Stokes (1994) highlights how music mediates social belonging and group identification, while Turino (2008) emphasises music as a form of social participation that shapes both personal and collective identity. This demonstrates that engagement with music from parents' home countries helps second-generation migrants express and navigate cultural identity, supporting the development of belonging and resilience. In the case of Kosovar immigrants, music from Kosova becomes both a symbolic connection to heritage and a creative space to negotiate present-day identity within Finnish society.

4. Research design/implementation of the research project

This study adopts an autoethnographic and artistic research approach, combining personal reflection, creative practice and scholarly analysis to explore how music and sound shape identity among second-generation Kosovar immigrants in Finland. The research aim is to understand how music mediates belonging, cultural continuity, and hybrid identity, particularly in a Finnish context. Autoethnography allows me to situate my personal experiences within broader cultural, social, and historical frameworks, providing insights that extend beyond the individual (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2014). Following Bartleet and Ellis (2009), I adopt an autoethnographic approach to explore my musical experiences, making personal reflections on music and sound central to understanding identity formation. This method allows me to situate my own experiences as a Finnish Kosovar musician within a broader artistic and cultural context, transforming lived musical practice into research insights. Artistic research complements this by treating music-making and performance not only as data but as a method for generating knowledge (Varto, 2018). In my view, these methods are particularly relevant because they integrate lived experience with creative practice, enabling an embodied exploration of cultural identity. My background, compositions, performances, and fieldwork become both data and analytical tools, revealing how sound can express layered identities, emotional memory, and cultural negotiation. Using these approaches, I can combine personal narrative, empirical observation, and theoretical analysis in a way that traditional methods might not be fully captured.

4.1 Data generation

To address my research questions, I collected data through multiple complementary methods:

Fieldwork in Kosova (Summer 2024)

- I spent a month immersed in family life, attending cultural events such as weddings, listening to traditional music, and recording soundscapes.
- Observations were recorded in journals and audio recordings, capturing both formal musical events and everyday sonic experiences.
- Artistic practice: Safe Ocean project
- Original compositions, multilingual lyrics, and ensemble performances served as both research output and data.
- Improvisation, instrumentation, and vocal experimentation were documented through recordings, scores, and rehearsal notes.

Reflections and journaling

- Throughout the process, I maintained reflective journals, noting emotional responses, compositional decisions, and experiences of identity negotiation.

Participants and collaboration

- Ensemble members, drawn from Finnish and immigrant backgrounds, contributed both musically and culturally.
- Ensemble members were part of my artistic collaborations and therefore, their names are also stated in the artistic credits.
- Participation was voluntary, with informed consent obtained, and contributions were recorded as part of the research process.
- The combination of field recordings, compositions, performance, and reflections enabled a holistic understanding of how music shapes identity.

4.2 Introducing the Safe Ocean project: artistic concept

The Safe Ocean project was designed as both a personal and scholarly exploration of sound, music and identity, functioning as a central component of this artistic research. The project examined how musical practice and performance mediate experiences of belonging, cultural continuity, and hybrid identity among second-generation Kosovar immigrants in Finland. Through original compositions, instrumental pieces, multilingual lyrics, and poetry, the project created a performative space where lived experiences, ancestral memory, and contemporary cultural expression intersected.

The concert brought together performers from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including Finnish musicians and artists with immigrant experiences. This ensemble approach reflected the research aim of exploring hybrid cultural identities, fostering intercultural dialogue, and highlighting the relational dimension of music-making as a social and artistic practice. The selection of performers was shaped by their personal and musical influence on my own artistic development. Each musician was chosen because they had previously sparked a layer of my artistry and contributed to the development of my identity as both a musician and a human being. By collaborating with people from

different backgrounds, I was able to bring my story to life in a way that was authentic to my complex, hybrid identity.

As a second-generation immigrant, I often go through multiple cultural expectations and the pressure to present myself as belonging fully to one identity, such as Albanian, Turkish, or Finnish. Performing alongside musicians from diverse backgrounds allowed me to step outside these boundaries: in this context, I could fully inhabit all the layers of my identity without needing to conform to any single cultural norm. This environment fostered creative freedom and enabled the concert to become a space where multiple cultural influences—both inherited and experienced—could coexist and be expressed organically.

Instrumentation and ensemble design

Instrumentation was carefully chosen to reflect the layered soundscapes of my upbringing and ancestral heritage. *Oud*, *daf*, and *daire* drew from my parent's Kosovar background and the broader Eastern Mediterranean tradition. *Kantele* and *kulning* referenced the Nordic landscape and Finnish cultural environment in which I was raised. My primary instruments, piano and voice, served as central compositional and expressive tools, combining personal narrative with artistic creation. *Kamancha* and *alto kamancha*, alongside influences from Persian and Azerbaijani music, reflected historical and musical connections between the Balkans, Türkiye, and Iran, shaped by centuries of Ottoman and cultural exchanges. This hybrid instrumentation created a sonic environment that mirrored the negotiation of multiple cultural identities central to the thesis.

The ensemble included solo, small group, and full ensemble arrangements, providing dynamic contrasts and facilitating both intimate and collective expressions. The instrumentation reflected the hybridity of my heritage and musical influences, combining oud, daf, daire, kamancha, alto kamancha, kantele, violin, guitar, contrabass, percussion, piano, voice, kulning, and poetry recitation. Singers and instrumentalists came from diverse cultural backgrounds, allowing for the full expression of hybrid identities and collaborative musical dialogues.

The diversity of the ensemble allowed the concert to embody hybrid musical practices. Each performer brought unique cultural and musical experiences that informed their interpretation, enriching the collective sound. This approach aligned with the research aim of exploring how collaboration across cultures can foster belonging and support the articulation of complex identities. The interplay between instruments, languages, and cultural expressions created a participatory, improvisational environment, demonstrating music as a socially and emotionally engaging practice.

The Safe Ocean concert incorporated original songs, instrumental compositions, and poetry recitations in multilingual contexts, including Albanian and English. This hybridity—linguistic, musical, and cultural—reflected the complex identities of second-generation immigrants and foregrounded the ways

in which music functioned as a tool for articulating memory, resilience, and belonging. Improvisational elements allowed performers to respond to each other in real time, emphasizing music as a participatory practice, and highlighting the relational, social, and emotional dimensions of identity formation.

In summary, the Safe Ocean project exemplified the integration of artistic practice and scholarly research. By combining composition, performance, and reflection, it functioned as both a method and a site of inquiry, allowing for the investigation of how sound and music shape cultural identity, foster belonging, and mediate experiences of migration and hybridity. The concert embodied the interplay between personal narrative and collective experience, transforming artistic expression into a research process that generated new knowledge about second-generation immigrant identity in Finland.

4.3 Data Analysis

The data for this study was generated through multiple interconnected processes, including field trips in Kosova, journal reflections, rehearsal and performance recordings from the Safe Ocean concert, and compositional work. The analysis involved careful transcription, thematic coding, and reflective interpretation, in line with autoethnographic and artistic research methodologies.

Field recordings from Kosova, including lullabies, wedding music, and everyday soundscapes such as conversations, tea rituals, and vocal calls, were transcribed and documented to capture their melodic, rhythmic, and cultural characteristics. Similarly, rehearsals and performances from the Safe Ocean concert were recorded, and musical motifs, improvisational sections, and ensemble interactions were noted in detail. Journal entries written during field trips and throughout the compositional process were organized chronologically to trace how experiences, reflections, and creative ideas evolved over time.

The material was coded according to recurring themes that emerged from both the data and the research questions. These included: maternal influence, intergenerational transmission of music, cultural hybridity, diasporic identity, belonging, and resilience. For example, the “nana” motif in *A Song for Nana* was coded under maternal influence and memory, while the integration of Albanian mountain calls with Nordic kulning reflected cultural hybridity and cross-cultural negotiation. Coding allowed for patterns and connections to emerge between lived experiences, compositional choices, and musical performance.

In line with practice-based research, the compositional and performance processes themselves were

treated as analytical tools, a perspective also emphasized by Biggs and Karlsson (2011). Decisions regarding instrumentation, ensemble arrangement, multilingual lyrics, and improvisation were analyzed for how they reflected identity negotiation and the themes of hybrid cultural belonging. Rehearsal reflections, post-performance notes, and discussions with ensemble members

provided additional insights, revealing how collaborative musical practices contributed to understanding and articulating complex cultural identities

This analysis combined sound, text, performance, and reflection to generate a holistic understanding of how music functions in identity formation. Musical and sonic patterns observed in field recordings and performances were interpreted alongside journal reflections and theoretical frameworks, linking empirical evidence to concepts such as Stokes' (1994) social mediation of music, Turino's (2008) participatory model, and Bhabha's (1994) third space.

Through this approach, the study demonstrates how music and sound serve simultaneously as method and result: they are both tools for investigation and vessels for expressing layered identities, cultural continuity, and belonging among second-generation Finnish Kosovar individuals.

4.4 Ethics

This research was conducted following the ethical principles outlined by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK, 2023) and the European GDPR guidelines. Given the autoethnographic and artistic nature of the study, ethical considerations focused on the use of personal narratives, family stories, and collaborative artistic contributions.

Personal and Family Narratives

The study primarily draws on my own experiences as a second-generation Finnish Kosovar musician. Family stories were included with the informed consent of those involved. No names, ages, or identifiable personal details were disclosed, ensuring participants' privacy while allowing meaningful cultural and musical reflection.

Informed Consent and voluntary participation

Participation in rehearsals, performances, and collaborative musical activities was voluntary. All contributors were informed of their roles and credited in the concert program, respecting their agency and contribution.

GDPR Compliance and data protection

No sensitive personal data was collected. Publicly captured photos and videos of performances were used, and all digital materials were stored securely on password-protected devices. No interviews or private data were collected, and all personal identifiers were either anonymized or generalized.

Confidentiality and anonymization

Confidentiality was ensured by presenting stories and contributions in a generalized manner, preventing the identification of participants. Sensitive data, such as health or political information, were not collected. Pseudonymization was not necessary due to the absence of identifiable personal data.

Connection to artistic research methodology

The ethical approach aligns with the autoethnographic and artistic research methodology of this study. By centering my own experiences and reflecting on collaborative performances while protecting participants' privacy, the research demonstrates how personal narrative and artistic practice can generate meaningful scholarly insights without compromising ethical standards.

5. Analysis / artistic outputs

5.1 Analysis of the piece: A Song for Nana

Context and concept

A Song for Nana is the opening piece of the Safe Ocean concert, reflecting on the role of immigrant mothers and their sacrifices in shaping the lives of their children. Drawing from my own experiences as a second-generation Kosovar immigrant in Finland, the composition celebrates maternal love,

resilience, and cultural transmission. The word “nana” or “nëna” is the Albanian word for mother and holds deep personal significance, evoking my earliest memories of my mother humming lullabies during my childhood. More broadly, the piece honours immigrant mothers who leave their homelands to create opportunities for future generations.

Structure and form

The piece blends composed and improvised elements, beginning with a gentle guitar progression in F minor. Its structure is fluid, reflecting the organic nature of memory and storytelling. Central to the composition is the repeated “nana” motif, functioning as both a chant and a connective thread throughout the performance. The lyrics alternate between English and Albanian, symbolising the interplay of multiple languages and reflecting the hybrid identity explored throughout this thesis. The middle section introduces improvisation through the voice of Nigerian musician whose spontaneous call of “mama” in Yoruban language, creates a climactic moment that resolves back into the communal “she gave up her today, for my brighter tomorrows.” This interplay between composition, improvisation, and real-time adaptation demonstrates how music can embody memory, cultural negotiation, and collective experience.

Instrumentation and texture

Instrumentation includes guitar, daf and udu drum, choir, and solo vocals. The choir harmonises and improvises the “nana” motif, responding to the live context and to my conducting cues. This interplay between ensemble members highlights music as a participatory and social practice, reinforcing the theoretical perspectives of Turino (2008) on music as a form of social engagement. The texture alternates between intimate solo passages and rich, communal harmonic layers, reflecting both personal memory and shared cultural heritage.

Linguistic and cultural hybridity

By combining English and Albanian lyrics and including improvisation in Yoruba by a Nigerian musician, the piece exemplifies hybrid cultural practices. This mirrors the lived experiences of second-generation immigrants navigating multiple cultural influences, as described by Bhabha (1994) and Moore & Barker (2012). The linguistic and musical hybridity in *A Song for Nana* allows it to function as a bridge across cultures and generations, articulating both personal and collective narratives of migration and belonging.

Emotional and symbolic significance

The repeated “nana” motif, the lullaby-inspired vocal lines, and the communal participation of the choir evoke memory, comfort, and continuity. The piece symbolises the sacrifices of immigrant mothers, their resilience, and their enduring influence on the identity formation of their children. Through sound, the composition transforms personal memory into a shared, universal expression of maternal love and diasporic experience.

Connection to literature and theory

This composition exemplifies the role of music in mediating identity and fostering belonging, consistent with Stokes (1994) and Condé (2021). The hybrid structure and improvisational elements reflect Hall’s (1991) and Bhabha’s (1994) concepts of cultural hybridity and third spaces, demonstrating how musical practice can negotiate between heritage and contemporary experience. The participatory, improvisational nature of the piece supports Turino’s (2008) notion of music as social engagement, highlighting the relational dimensions of belonging within diasporic communities.

5.1.2 Analysis of the piece: Sounds of Belonging

Context and concept

Sounds of Belonging is a full ensemble composition that explores the dynamics of collective identity, relational existence, and the shared experiences of diaspora. Drawing from my Kosovar heritage and my engagement with Finnish, Persian, and Middle Eastern musical traditions, the piece reflects on the

idea that human beings, like natural elements such as the seas that do not drink their own water or the moons that do not shine for themselves, are fundamentally interconnected. The composition emphasizes that life is relational. We do not exist in isolation, but in dialogue with one another.

The inclusion of Persian poetry, kulning, and a diverse instrumental palette mirrors this thematic concern with cultural hybridity, dialogue, and communal experience. By weaving these elements together, the piece becomes a sonic space where personal history, cultural memory, and cross-cultural encounters intersect.

Structure and form

The composition balances intimacy and collective expression through a carefully layered structure. It opens with a repeating melodic motif felt flexibly in 3/4, 2/4, or 6/8 meters, providing a foundation for both harmonic and rhythmic exploration. Intermittent choir lines introduce subtle textural contrasts, creating a dialogic layer that encourages attentive listening.

A solo section follows, featuring the daf, percussion, and contrabass, where tempo and phrasing diverge into arrhythmic patterns, introducing tension and unpredictability. Gradually, the ensemble coalesces into a groove, providing a canvas for the alto kamancha player to present a solo melody accompanied by a Persian poem performed by the musician. This trajectory from a flexible melodic motif through arrhythmic exploration to ensemble unification mirrors the interplay between personal expression and collective cohesion, embodying the negotiation between individual and communal experience.

Instrumentation and texture

The ensemble consists of oud, daf, daire, kamancha, alto kamancha, kantele, violin, contrabass, piano, percussion, kulning, and spoken Persian poetry. This instrumentation reflects the hybridity of my musical and cultural influences, blending Balkan, Nordic, Middle Eastern, and Persian traditions.

Texturally, the piece oscillates between intimate solos, small-group interplay, and full ensemble passages, allowing the listener to experience solitude, dialogue, and communal resonance. The bright,

penetrating sound of kulning, a traditional Noridic herding call known in Finnish as karjankutsunta, contrasts with the warm timbre of the oud. This contrast evokes the fresh air and snow-covered landscapes of Finland alongside the mountains of Kosova, connecting personal memory with musical timbre.

A violin solo introduces a distinctive timbre and cultural resonance. Performed freely by a Slovenian violinist with extensive experience in both Balkan and Middle Eastern music, the solo brings a “fresh air” to the ensemble. Its improvisational character synthesizes stylistic elements from these diverse musical traditions, creating a sound uniquely suited to the thematic and sonic environment of the piece.

Similarly, the oud soloist is a Finnish musician who grew up as a third-culture kid, living between multiple countries and absorbing a unique mixture of musical and cultural influences. His life experiences shaped his playing in ways that deeply resonated with me, and I felt a strong connection to him, making him an ideal match for this solo section. These choices underscore that the musicians were selected not solely for their instruments, but for the personal identities, histories, and perspectives they bring to the performance. Their individuality and lived experiences became integral to the expressive and conceptual fabric of the Safe Ocean project.

Linguistic and cultural hybridity

The piece exemplifies cultural and linguistic hybridity through the integration of a poem, improvisation, and diverse musical idioms. The Persian poem by Hushang Ebtehaj performed over the ensemble’s textures emphasizes patience, empathy, and interconnectedness.

مانده ام با صبر دریا پایبند
ماهتابا بر سرشک من میخند
از غم مرجان چه میداند بهار؟
ارغوانم سنگ شد در انتظار

*“I stay patient, like the sea
The moon does not mock my tears
What does spring know of coral’s grief
The lilac flower has turned to stone, waiting, longing”*

The juxtaposition of Balkan, Finnish, Persian, and Middle Eastern musical elements mirrors the experiences of second-generation immigrants navigating multiple cultural worlds. This aligns with Bhabha’s concept of third spaces and Moore and Barker’s discussion of hybrid cultural practices. The music becomes a medium for negotiating identity, memory, and collective belonging where multiple influences coexist without erasing one another.

Emotional and symbolic significance

The repeated melodic motifs, evolving textures, and integration of Persian poetry invite reflection, patience, and relational awareness. The arrhythmic passage reflects the uncertainties of diaspora, while the eventual ensemble cohesion symbolizes resilience, shared experience, and mutual support. Through this work, abstract concepts of belonging and connection are rendered tangible, immersive, and emotionally resonant.

Connection to literature and theory

Sounds of Belonging demonstrates the role of sound in mediating identity, fostering empathy, and encouraging collective engagement in dialogue with the work of Stokes. Its hybrid structure and improvisational elements resonate with Hall's and Bhabha's theories of cultural hybridity and third spaces, showing how music can create connections between heritage and the modern society. The participatory and interactive dimensions reflect Turino's conception of music as social engagement, emphasizing relational and communal aspects of belonging.

By integrating multiple musical and linguistic traditions, *Sounds of Belonging* articulates narratives of resilience, interconnectedness, and diasporic identity, highlighting music's capacity to foster dialogue, reflection, and shared understanding across cultural boundaries.

5.3 Field trip experiences in Kosova and journal entries

Arriving in Kosova after a sleepless night of travel, I finally reached my parents' apartment and closed my eyes, expecting the quiet, familiar hush of Finland. Instead, I was greeted by a sonic explosion: lightning and thunder rolled across the sky, car horns blared in rhythm, and somewhere nearby a tupan began to beat its deep, resonant pulse. In that instant, the street outside transformed into a living

performance—alive with music, movement, and celebration. It took me a moment to realize that a wedding had begun in the neighbourhood. Despite my exhaustion, a silly smile spread across my face. I was unmistakably, wonderfully, in my parents’ hometown, Vushtrri. A nap was out of the question, but this chaotic, joyful soundscape instantly reminded me how different Kosova feels from Finland, where the streets are quiet and neighbors are barely heard. Here, even during a storm, the city itself seems to breathe, dance, and sing, wrapping everyone into a collective rhythm of life.

Vushtrri (Albanian definite form: Vushtrria) is a city in Kosova, with a population of approximately 61,500. The city covers an area of 345 km² and is known for its vibrant community life and cultural heritage. Its streets are lively, filled with daily activity and gatherings, reflecting a strong sense of local identity and communal spirit. The city embodies the Turkish concept of *esnaf* (referring to small shopkeepers, tradespeople, and local business owners who often form close connections with their community) with barbershops, cafés, tea houses (*çajtore*), small markets, and other local businesses lining the streets alongside more modern buildings. Walking through Vushtrri is always a slightly amusing and heartwarming experience for me: I pass familiar shops and cafés, immediately recognizing uncles, cousins, and other relatives running their own businesses. Much of the city’s daily life is shaped by people I know personally, creating a living map of family presence and continuity throughout the streets.

This experience stands in stark contrast to Helsinki, where, despite its multicultural population and diverse communities, people often remain strangers to one another. In Vushtrri, the streets themselves feel alive with familiar faces, family ties, and shared rhythms, whereas in Helsinki, the city’s vibrancy is more dispersed and impersonal. This contrast highlights how the social and sonic fabric of a place shapes one’s sense of belonging and engagement with the community.

During this visit in the summer of 2024, I stayed primarily with my eldest aunt on my mother’s side and her family. Living with them allowed me to immerse myself in daily life, observe cultural practices closely, and experience the soundscapes that have shaped my sense of belonging and identity. A central focus of my stay was the preparation for my cousin’s wedding, which filled the household with music, dance, and communal activity. Family members played framedrums, known in Albanian as *def*, and sang traditional folk songs. Hearing my aunt sing lullabies to her grandchildren such as “*nina nana, për për kuni, djalin temë*” inspired me to open the Safe Ocean concert with a lullaby. Lullabies are among the first musical experiences a child encounters, carrying profound emotional and cultural significance. This understanding became the foundation for my composition *A Song for Nana*, honoring the sacrifices and resilience of immigrant mothers.

The wedding celebrations created a vibrant and immersive sonic environment. Traditional instruments, such as the *tupan* (or *davul*), a large double-headed drum, and the *zurla* (or *zurna*), a traditional

woodwind, resonated throughout the streets, expressing collective joy and togetherness. The tupan/davul was played by my second cousin, whose skillful rhythms guided the flow of dancing and celebration. Watching him perform, I sensed how deeply these rhythms are embedded in family and communal life, connecting generations, and grounding the festivities in shared cultural memory. In Kosovar and broader Balkan traditions, the combination of zurna and tupan has long accompanied weddings and public gatherings, linking present celebrations to a rich lineage of musical heritage.

Beyond the wedding music, I became increasingly attuned to the surrounding soundscape. The call to prayer from local minarets brought a sense of calm and peace, evoking a feeling I deeply miss whenever I am away from Kosova. Separately, I learned about the Albanian vocal tradition known as *maje krahu*, a form of mountain calling historically used to communicate across distances between communities near the mountains, sharing news of births, weddings, or deaths. This tradition inspired me to explore connections with Nordic vocal calling practices, particularly *kulning*, which is like the Finnish *karjankutsunta*. Reflecting on these practices, I imagined how my parents would have used such calls when they moved to Finland, long before the advent of video calls and modern technology—sending messages across great distances, sharing news and life events with their community.

In one of the pieces in *Safe Ocean*, I incorporated archival recordings of *maje krahu* alongside a live performance by a Danish musician executing *kulning*. This allowed the two distinct vocal traditions to intertwine, creating a dialogue between these separate sonic worlds and bringing them together in a single musical space. The combination not only highlighted the similarities and resonances between the practices but also offered a sonic metaphor for connecting homeland and diaspora, past and present, and different cultural lineages within a shared artistic experience.

My time in Kosova was also marked by stories of resilience. Relatives shared their experiences during the war, recounting how they supported one another by remaining united. This sense of togetherness was palpable during the wedding preparations, where every family member contributed cooking, singing, dancing, or simply being present. Laughter, rhythm, and shared work filled the household, creating an embodied sense of belonging that deeply informed my later compositions.

Together with my professional photographer cousin, I explored the town to document traditional communal spaces, such as tea shops where older men gather to converse and drink Turkish tea. When asked whether I was filming for television, I explained that I was collecting material for inspiration for my master's concert. We captured gestures, hands holding teacups, and calm interactions, which later inspired the inclusion of the traditional Albanian song "*Vijnë Vaporat*" in my project. Traditionally

performed in *oda*, male gathering rooms, this song exemplifies how music and conversation together cultivate community, memory, and belonging.

Through these experiences, I observed that sound and music are inseparable from identity, history, and relational bonds. Each musician, from my aunt's lullabies to my second cousin's tupan, carried personal and familial narratives that shaped the sonic environment. The field trip highlighted how sound, memory, and cultural practice intertwine, informing not only my compositions but also my understanding of how music can foster belonging and articulate layered identities within diasporic and multicultural contexts.

5.4 Results/findings

The analysis of field recordings, journal reflections, rehearsal and performance documentation, and compositional work revealed several key themes that illustrate how music and sound contribute to identity, belonging and creative expression for second-generation Finnish Kosovar individuals. In line with artistic research methodology, the findings emerge not only from text-based analysis but also from the creative processes of composition and performance, where the artistic work itself serves as both method and result.

1. Music and sound as tools for connecting with cultural roots, memory, and belonging

Field trip experiences in Kosova and journal reflections highlighted that music and sound act as bridges to cultural memory and identity. Traditional lullabies, wedding drums, calls to prayer, and everyday sonic practices carried rich emotional and cultural meanings. These sonic elements informed the compositional and performance work in *Safe Ocean*, allowing me to translate lived experiences into musical forms that reflect a sense of belonging. The findings suggest that music and sound are central in shaping personal and collective understandings of cultural identity for second-generation immigrants.

2. Creating spaces for self-expression and cultural connection

The research showed that second-generation immigrant individuals benefit from spaces where they can explore music freely, without judgment or external pressures. In Finnish society, such spaces are vital for fostering confidence, identity, and social belonging. Through ensemble work, improvisation, and collaborative composition, participants were able to engage with both their heritage and the broader society, demonstrating that music can serve as a medium for connection and dialogue across cultural boundaries.

3. Music as a medium for nurturing the mother tongue

The research also revealed that musical practice can support the preservation and development of heritage languages. Multilingual songs and texts in *Safe Ocean* helped participants engage with their mother tongue in a creative context, reinforcing linguistic identity alongside musical and cultural expression. Music thus becomes a tool for maintaining and celebrating linguistic heritage within a diasporic context.

4. Growing up between cultures fosters adaptability and creative synthesis

Participants and personal reflections revealed that navigating multiple cultural contexts can enhance the ability to perceive connections between diverse elements and foster creative hybridity. In musical practice, this manifests as the integration of different musical traditions, rhythmic structures, and melodic motifs, creating compositions that merge cultural influences in innovative ways. This finding highlights the generative potential of cultural hybridity in both life and artistic creation.

Overall, the study demonstrates that sounds and music function as intertwined methods, data and results. They provide a means for exploring identity, preserving language, fostering social belonging, and creating innovative artistic expressions that combine cultural experiences. The artistic process itself, composition, performance, and reflection, constitutes a critical site for generating new knowledge about the experiences of second-generation immigrants and their engagement with cultural heritage.

6. Discussion

Identity formation among second-generation immigrants is not a fixed or linear process but an ongoing negotiation shaped by cultural heritage, social interactions, and personal experiences. As Hall (1991) and Bhabha (1994) argue, identity is hybrid and continually reconstructed, particularly for individuals who grow up between multiple cultural worlds. This resonates strongly with the experiences of second-generation Kosovars in Finland, who often find themselves positioned between inherited cultural traditions and the norms of the society in which they were raised.

In this context, music becomes a central medium through which identity is explored, expressed, and negotiated. Stokes (1994) emphasizes that music does more than provide aesthetic pleasure; it mediates social belonging and links individuals to cultural memory and community. Turino (2008) and Nettl (2005) similarly highlight music's role in shaping both personal and collective identities through participation, performance, and listening. For second-generation immigrants, these musical practices often become a way to connect with the emotional landscape of a homeland they may know only through stories, family gatherings, or sonic memories.

Research also shows that cross-cultural or third-culture individuals frequently form hybrid identities that reflect their continuous negotiation between different cultural influences (Moore & Barker, 2012; Pollock et al., 2017). This demonstrates that for second-generation immigrants, engagement with the music of their parents' home countries supports resilience and belonging, allowing them to articulate identities that might otherwise feel fragmented. In the case of Kosovar families, music from Kosovo often operates as both a symbolic link to heritage and an active space where young people make sense of who they are within Finnish society.

However, it is also important to acknowledge that music does not foster belonging to everyone. For some second-generation individuals, heritage music may feel distant, unfamiliar, or tied to cultural pressures rather than emotional connection. In such cases, global music may feel more authentic to their identity, demonstrating that musical heritage can both connect and alienate depending on personal experience.

From my life experience, music has proven to be an essential tool for self-expression, emotional growth, and cultural connection, especially for second-generation immigrant individuals in Finland. As I've learned, sound has a powerful role in shaping language, thought, and identity. Just as sounds become words, words become sentences, and sentences evolve into thoughts and emotions, music also shapes how we understand ourselves and the world around us. As Stokes (1994) emphasizes, musical practices not only provide aesthetic enjoyment but also act as social tools that connect individuals to their heritage, family, and cultural community, reinforcing identity and belonging across generations.

The importance of language in the development of a child's emotional and cognitive identity cannot be overstated. Learning one's mother tongue is foundational not only for learning the dominant language but also for developing a strong emotional connection with the world. The mother tongue is not just a means of communication; it is the language of emotions. Yet this experience is not universal. Some second-generation children feel more emotionally fluent in the dominant language and may associate their mother tongue with discomfort, shame, or fragmentation, especially if they do not speak it fluently. For these individuals, the heritage language may evoke disconnection rather than belonging, showing that linguistic identity can be both empowering and challenging. This is especially crucial for immigrant children, who may not always have the opportunity to hear their native language outside of their home. This is why, from lullabies whispered by mothers in the quiet of the night to the melodies we hear during family gatherings, music and sound can serve as vital links to our cultural and emotional heritage. Research shows that institutional and social pressures often discourage the use of the mother tongue. For example, Agirdag (2010) found that Turkish-bilingual students in Belgian schools were pressured to adopt monolingual practices, with their native language sometimes seen as a barrier to success. In contrast, in my experience, the Finnish schooling system actively supports children in maintaining their mother tongue through different programs. This approach reinforces the idea that a strong foundation in one's first language is the most effective way to learn other subjects and languages, and it promotes both cognitive and emotional development.

However, many immigrant families, due to integration pressures or fear of educational disadvantage, may still deprioritise the mother tongue at home. In such cases, children grow up with limited linguistic ties to their heritage, reducing the role that sound, language, and music can play in identity formation. In my case, music was a key to keeping my mother tongue alive. In many immigrant families, the language is sustained through everyday sounds, whether it's the soft hum of a lullaby, the animated conversations around the dinner table, or the music that fills the background of our lives. These sounds, which I grew up with in my Finnish Kosovar household, became more than just background noise. They served as a connection to my roots, even in a foreign land. For me, the sound of a spoon stirring in a Turkish teacup while watching TV is an iconic sound of home. It's a sound that evokes memories not just from Finland, but from Kosova, where I spent time with my extended family. No matter where I am, when I hear that sound, it immediately transports me back to a place of belonging, reminding me of the warmth and familiarity of home, despite being in a place of displacement.

Music and sound have this extraordinary ability to ground us, to bring us back to moments and places we might otherwise forget. It's so powerful that even in the case of Alzheimer's, individuals often retain the ability to mumble familiar melodies, even when they can no longer recognise their loved ones. This highlights how deeply sound, and music resonate within us (Levitin, 2024). For second-generation immigrant individuals, like me, music offers a way to navigate the often-confusing emotions of displacement and adaptation. It helps us express feelings that might otherwise be difficult to articulate

in the dominant language or culture, enabling us to embrace our complex identities instead of suppressing parts of ourselves to avoid "triggering" others.

Nevertheless, for some immigrant youths, music from the homeland may not carry grounding emotional significance. Instead, it may highlight a sense of cultural in-betweenness or the feeling of not being “authentic enough” within either culture, illustrating that music can also surface tensions within hybrid identities.

Deriving from these analyses and reflections, *A Song for Nana* was born as a composition that honors the pivotal role of immigrant mothers in shaping the lives of their children. The piece opens with a verse reflecting the profound sacrifices these mothers made by leaving familiar surroundings at a young age to embrace new countries, cultures, and musical worlds. Such acts of courage, together with the challenge of preserving cultural traditions while fostering hope, joy, and resilience, illustrate the complex emotional landscape of immigrant motherhood. Musically, *A Song for Nana* embodies these experiences through a fusion of traditions. It begins with a traditional Albanian lullaby, transitions into contemporary textures, and features an improvisation in Yoruba, accompanied by background singers whose voices intertwine to create a collective expression of devotion to their mothers. This layering of voices allows each singer to convey their own personal homage, demonstrating how multiple cultural elements can coexist and resonate naturally within a single piece. For me, as someone born and raised in Finland, this musical hybridity feels authentic, reflecting a childhood immersed in diverse sounds and cultural influences. The composition thus mirrors both the negotiation between heritage and adaptation and the emotional inheritance of the second generation, encompassing an awareness of parental sacrifice that inspires a sense of responsibility and motivation to build a future that honors their parents’ struggles and aspirations:

*“To the lands unknown, she came with hope,
in that age, she left all she knew back home.
So much love I can see in those smiles,
in those tears, in many sleepless nights.
Nana, nana, nana, nana...”*

and continues in Albanian with:

*“Ajo osht zani i parë, që e kam ndëgju,
kurr dashnin e saj, smuj me harru.
Krejt mërzija m'humb, kur e thom atë fjalë,
që quhet nanë, emri ma i bukur n'botë.”*

(She is the first sound I have ever heard, and her love surrounds me still. Every sorrow fade when I call her “nana” (mother), the most beautiful “name” in the world)

Through these lyrics and the repeated “nana” motif, the song embodies the connection between language, sound, and memory. It illustrates how music can act as both a personal and collective medium for expressing identity, sustaining heritage, and articulating feelings that might otherwise remain unspoken. By composing and performing this piece, I was able to translate deeply personal memories into a musical form that resonates across cultural and generational boundaries, aligning with theoretical perspectives on music as a social and emotional tool for belonging (Stokes, 1994; Turino, 2008).

However, for this kind of emotional and cultural growth through music to be accessible, there needs to be a broader societal change. In many immigrant communities, there is a prevailing mindset that children should pursue more conventional, financially stable career paths, especially when music and the arts are often seen as fewer practical pursuits. This societal pressure can create a barrier for children who wish to pursue artistic or musical careers but feel that such dreams are out of reach due to their cultural or socio-economic background. As a result, many second-generation immigrant youths may feel excluded from the music world, thinking that their identities are not represented in the field.

At the same time, it is important to recognise that not all second-generation youths desire a strong connection to their heritage culture through music or the arts. Some may intentionally distance themselves from heritage practices, especially if they associate them with painful memories, intergenerational conflict, or a desire to integrate fully into Finnish society. This highlights the diversity of experiences among immigrant communities and the need to avoid romanticising cultural continuity. Through my own experience, I have come to believe that music should not be a privilege reserved for a specific group of people with a particular socio-economic background. There should be opportunities for immigrant youth to engage with music and the arts without the fear of being unable to pursue it as a career. Music and creative expression should be accessible to everyone, regardless of their background. This is particularly important for second-generation immigrant children, who might otherwise feel disconnected from both their cultural heritage and the dominant culture in their new country.

7. Conclusions

This study explored how sound and music contribute to identity formation among second-generation immigrants in Finland, focusing specifically on the Kosovar community. By combining theoretical perspectives with autoethnographic insights, the research demonstrates the ways in which musical practices, personal soundscapes and communal experiences shape belonging, cultural negotiation, and self-expression for young people navigating multiple cultural worlds. By combining theoretical perspectives with autoethnographic insights, the research demonstrates the ways in which musical

practices, personal soundscapes and communal experiences shape belonging, cultural negotiation, and self-expression for young people being raised between multiple cultural worlds. Music and sound emerge as essential tools for articulating identity, connecting with heritage, and negotiating the emotional complexities of growing up between cultures.

Summary of findings

The analysis of theoretical literature alongside personal experience revealed several key patterns regarding the role of music in identity formation.

First, music functions as a space for identity negotiation. For second-generation immigrants, musical engagement provides a safe and dynamic space, where hybrid identities can be explored and expressed. Participation in traditional music making can help young people to maintain a connection to their cultural roots, while involvement in contemporary or global musical forms supports adaptation to the dominant culture. This aligns with Hall's and Bhabha's theories of identity as hybrid and continually reconstructed. Musical practice enables individuals to navigate the tension between inherited cultural traditions and the norms of the society in which they are raised.

Second, sound and memory act as connectors to heritage. Musical memory, family songs, and everyday household sounds link second-generation immigrants to the emotional and cultural landscapes of their parents' homelands. Scholars emphasize that music mediates social belonging and intergenerational memory, which is particularly significant for individuals who may be geographically or temporally separated from their cultural roots. Personal reflections reveal that the subtle sounds of home, such as lullabies, animated family conversations, or familiar domestic noises, create enduring emotional connections that support identity and belonging. These sonic practices allow second-generation immigrants to engage with their heritage in deeply personal ways.

Third, music embodies emotional and cultural inheritance. It reflects parental sacrifices, cultural values, and lived experiences. Compositions such as *A Song for Nana* illustrate how music can honor the resilience, courage, and emotional labor of immigrant mothers. Translating personal memories into musical form allows second-generation individuals to express gratitude, process intergenerational emotions, and develop a sense of responsibility toward familial and cultural legacies. Music serves as a medium through which intergenerational knowledge and emotion are transmitted, supporting hybrid identity formation with awareness and intentionality.

Fourth, the role of heritage music varies among individuals. Not all second-generation immigrants experience heritage music as grounding. For some, it may feel distant, unfamiliar, or tied to cultural expectations, highlighting feelings of in-betweenness or alienation. Others may intentionally distance

themselves from heritage practices to integrate more fully into Finnish society or to avoid intergenerational conflict. These observations underscore the diversity of experiences among immigrant youth and illustrate that music can both affirm and challenge identity, reflecting its nuanced role in cultural and emotional development.

Fifth, language and music are deeply interconnected. Mother tongue acquisition supports emotional expression and cognitive development, while musical engagement strengthens linguistic and emotional fluency. Limited exposure to the heritage language can reduce the emotional and cultural resonance of music. For second-generation immigrants, music provides alternative pathways to articulate feelings and maintain cultural connections when verbal language alone may be insufficient.

Contributions of the study

This research contributes to understanding music and identity in several ways. It highlights the Finnish Kosovar community, a group previously underrepresented in studies of music, identity, and migration in Finland. It demonstrates that music functions as a multidimensional tool, encompassing cultural, emotional, and social functions beyond aesthetic enjoyment. By combining theoretical and autoethnographic approaches, it offers a rich perspective on hybrid identity formation, showing how music can bridge heritage and adaptation. The study also emphasizes the role of music in fostering intercultural understanding, resilience, and self-expression among second-generation immigrant youth.

Limitations

The study has several limitations. Reliance on autoethnography and a small sample limits generalizability. Limited existing research on Kosovar musicianship in Finland constrained comparative analysis. The focus on music and sound may overlook other factors influencing identity, including socio-economic and cultural pressures.

Suggestions for future research

Future research could investigate immigrant communities across Finland and their musical practices on a larger scale. It could explore inclusivity and accessibility in music education for multicultural youth. Comparative studies across artistic disciplines, regions, or ethnic communities would provide broader insight into hybrid identity formation. The role of community-based musical projects in supporting integration while preserving cultural heritage should also be examined.

Final conclusions

This study illustrates that music and sound are not merely aesthetic experiences; they are vital instruments in the formation of identity for second-generation immigrant youth. Through engagement with music, young people find avenues for self-expression, cultural connection, and emotional grounding. The influence of music is deeply shaped by individual experience, linguistic proficiency, and social context, highlighting the intricate interplay between personal history and cultural environment.

To fully realize this potential, societal structures including education, community initiatives, and cultural accessibility must foster inclusive spaces where youth can explore artistic practices without fear of judgment or socio-economic constraint. By nurturing environments that celebrate diversity, second-generation immigrants are empowered to navigate hybrid identities with confidence, resilience, and creativity, transforming personal and collective heritage into active cultural contribution.

Music and artistic engagement position young people as cultural bridges connecting generations, mediating between heritage and a modern society, and enriching both familial and public spheres. By ensuring that music and the arts are accessible to all, Finland can cultivate a generation that embraces multifaceted identities, honors ancestral legacies, and participates meaningfully in the shared cultural fabric. In this sense, music becomes more than sound; it becomes a vessel for memory, belonging, and intergenerational dialogue, equipping youth to navigate the complexities of hybrid identity with imagination, awareness, and purpose.

This study demonstrates that sound and music can be central to identity formation for second-generation immigrant individuals. They provide avenues for self-expression, cultural connection, and emotional grounding. The impact of music is shaped by individual experiences, language proficiency, and social context. Societal structures, including education, community support, and cultural accessibility, must allow young people to engage with artistic practices without fear of judgment or socio-economic limitation.

By making music and the arts accessible to all, Finland can cultivate a generation of young people who embrace their diverse identities, honor their heritage and actively contribute to the shared cultural and social fabric. Music and sound provide the tools through which this process occurs, connecting generations, communities, and cultures, and helping young people to navigate the complexities of hybrid identity with creativity, self-awareness, and sense of belonging.

İki Kapı Arasında/Between two Doors

On the final day of completing this thesis, after years of reflection on sound, belonging, and identity, a song emerged unexpectedly. Writing its lyrics in Turkish for the first time, I found myself drawn to the tradition of Anatolian folk poet-musicians (âşiks), who articulate lived experience, inner questioning, and the search for meaning through song. In this sense, the act of writing became not an analytical exercise, but an embodied response to the research process itself.

Throughout this thesis, I have examined sound and music as sites of inquiry rather than as solutions, engaging with them through artistic and autoethnographic practice. While the title references identity, the research itself remains attentive to uncertainty, in-betweenness, and the ongoing process of negotiating identity as a Finnish Kosovar second-generation individual. Listening, memory, and affect emerge not as pathways toward resolution, but as ways of staying with complexity.

The song presented here condenses this position. It speaks from a space of liminality—between places, languages, temporalities, and modes of being—where identity is not stabilized and self-understanding is not fixed, but continuously questioned and felt. In this sense, the song does not conclude the research; it remains within the same open, suspended terrain that the thesis itself inhabits.

As such, this song functions as an artistic coda to the thesis. It does not summarize the arguments presented but resonates with them. It marks a point where academic language gives way to sound, and where knowledge is expressed not through explanation, but through presence. The inclusion of this song acknowledges artistic practice as a legitimate form of knowing within research, and situates the researcher not only as an observer, but also as a participant in the processes under study.

The original lyrics and an English translation are included below.

*İki kapı arasında
Kaldım ben yeniden
Ne soranı eksik oldu
Ne anlayanı gerçekten*

*Bir yanım sus der durur
Bir yanım yola çağırır
Gönlüm ikiye bölünmüş
Dünya bana dar gelir*

*Uzaktan gelen bir ses
Nenem ninnisi gibi
Rüzgârla gelir hafifçe
Kalbime eski izleri*

*Sorarsan bir gün hâlimi
Yaratan bilir beni
İki diyar arasında
zaman ağır gelir bana
Uzak köklerden besleneni
Yaratan ancak anlar*

*Between two doors
I found myself again
There are always people who ask about me
But very few who truly understand*

*One part of me tells me to remain silent
Another part urges me to move forward
My heart is split in two directions
The world feels too narrow for me*

*A voice comes from far away
Like my grandmother's lullaby
It arrives softly with the wind
Carrying old memories into my soul*

*If one day you ask how I am
The Creator knows me
Between two lands
Time feels slow and heavy
Nourished by roots afar
Only the Creator can understand*

(The translation aims to remain as close as possible to the original Turkish meaning and structure, prioritizing semantic clarity over poetic adaptation).

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