

Sounding Diversity: Racialised Migrants, World Music, and Integration in Germany

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how racialised musicians navigate the professional world music scene in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), Germany. Drawing on ethnographic research with forced migrants and ethnic minorities, I argue that their musical careers are shaped by struggles over economic, social, and artistic value. Such value negotiations emerge at the intersection of market demands, state policies, and artistic practice. The field of world music in Germany simultaneously supports and marginalises these performers. The genre affords access to resources such as public funding and credentialing programmes, yet these same mechanisms can reproduce economic precarity and reinforce racialised non-belonging. I explore how musicians negotiate these tensions to advance their careers.

The analysis unfolds in three domains of value creation: freelance work, diversity programming, and professionalisation initiatives. I connect individual career paths to wider policy discourses, including migrant entrepreneurship, minimum artist fees, integration, and qualification recognition. This work demonstrates how struggles over value play out in everyday encounters between artists, institutions, and the state. The inquiry also extends reflexively to ethnographic practice itself. I reflect on the co-produced project Kurdish Women Musicians in Germany, which generated insights not only into diasporic music careers but also into the politics of knowledge production. By situating the field of world music within broader debates on race, migration, integration, and research, this dissertation shows how value-making practices shape belonging and citizenship for racialised artists in Germany.

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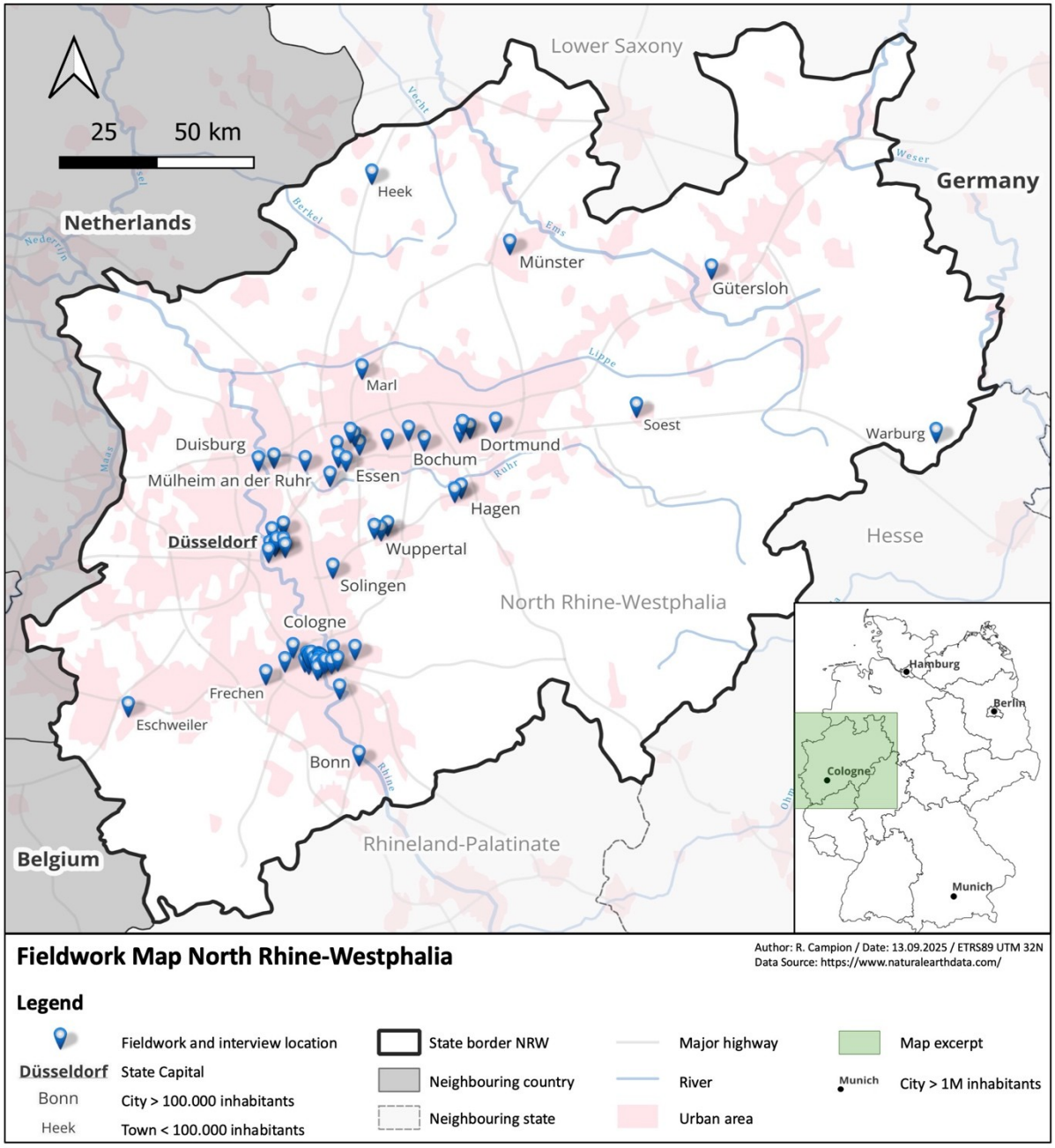
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Fieldwork map of North Rhine-Westphalia



Abbreviations

AfD - *Alternative für Deutschland* [Alternative for Germany]

PoC - People of colour

DMR - *Deutscher Musikrat* [German Music Council]

EU - European Union

GEMA - *Gesellschaft für musikalische Aufführungs- und mechanische Vervielfältigungsrechte* (German performance rights organisation)

GMK - *Globale Musik Köln e.V.* (advocacy association for world music in Cologne]

HfMTK - *Hochschule für Musik und Tanz Köln* [Cologne Conservatory for Music and Dance]

ICD - Intercultural dialogue

IFM - *Initiative Freie Musik Köln e.V.* (advocacy association for Cologne's independent music scene)

KS - *NRW Kultursekretariat* [NRW Culture Secretariat]

KSK - *Künstlersozialkasse* (artists' social insurance fund)

KMiD - *Kurdische Musikerinnen in Deutschland* [Kurdish Women Musicians in Germany]

LMA - *Landesmusikakademie NRW* [State Music Academy NRW]

LMR - *Landesmusikrat NRW* [State Music Council NRW]

LVdMS - *Landesverband der Musikschulen in NRW* [State Association of Music Schools in NRW]

MKW - *Ministerium für Kultur und Wissenschaft des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen* [Ministry for Culture and Science of North Rhine-Westphalia]

NRW - *Nordrhein-Westfalen* [North Rhine-Westphalia]

PEGIDA - *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* [Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West]

PKK - *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* [Kurdistan Workers' Party]

SWANA - Southwest Asia and North Africa

SW Asia - Southwest Asia

ZLG - *Zertifikatslehrgang Musikpädagogik Musiker*innen verschiedener Kulturen* [Certification Programme in Music Education for Musicians of Different Cultures]

Glossary[2]

Duldung - "Tolerated stay"; a precarious legal status for those whose deportation is temporarily suspended.

Eigenanteil - Clause common in public cultural funding in which grantees need to contribute 10% of total project costs themselves.

Einwanderungsland - "Country of immigration"

Freiberufler:in - Freelancer, independent contractor

Freie Musikszene - Independent music scene

Gelebte Vielfalt - "Lived diversity"

JobCenter - German unemployment office

Kulturstaat - German constitutional principle that frames the state as a guarantor and promoter of culture, education, and the arts.

Maqam (pl. maqamat) - A system of melodic modes used in Southwest Asian and North African musical traditions. Each maqam provides a set of pitches, characteristic motifs, and rules for melodic development, often conveying specific moods or emotional expressions.

Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund - "People with a migration background"; an official statistical category often used as a proxy for racialised people.

Multikulti - Colloquial reference to multicultural policies and perspectives.

Multikultikreis - Circuit of events and concerts with a pro-diversity stance

Multiplikatoren - "Multipliers"; people or institutions that disseminate knowledge.

Newroz (also Nowruz, Nawroz): The traditional new year festival observed by Kurdish, Persian, Afghan, and other communities across the Middle East and Central Asia

Raga - A melodic framework used in South Asian music that defines a set of notes, characteristic motifs, and rules for improvisation.

Veranstalter:in - Event organiser and/or promoter

Weltmusik - World music

[2] In this glossary I indicate gender-neutral forms of words using a colon. Compared to using only the masculine form (e.g. *Freiberufler*) or explicitly writing out both the masculine and feminine forms (*Freiberufler und Freiberuflerin*), the colon (or alternatively an asterisk or underscore) also includes non-binary and agender people.

List of interlocutors

List of individuals and institutional affiliations at the time of interviewing (indicates pseudonym)*

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Aras Omar
Arbab Klein
Aslîka Qadir
Astare Artner
Bassem Hawar
Behruz Hacker
Bellan Mustafa
Birgit Ellinghaus (alba KULTUR)
Bruno MC
Catu Diosis
Christine Brinkmann (NRW Parliament)
Deniz*
Dilovan*
Dîlan Top
Doris*
Emre*
Erdem Saraçoğlu
EviN
Fabakary Jobateh aka Papa Jo
Farhad*
Farid Gheysari
Fevronia
Frank Jablonski (NRW Parliament)
Gülcin
Güler Bulgurcu
Hasan Karadağ
Hayat Chaoui
Hevin Afrin (Kello)
Hindol Deb
Hossein*
Hovhannes Margaryan
Dr. Iva Krtalić (Westdeutscher Rundfunk Köln)
Javier*
Jérôme Jussef Lenzen
Julio Celis
Karim*
Kasem Eissa
Kazım Çalışgan (Katakomben Theater)
Kazım-Kamer Kalaycı
Kerem*
Kijan Ibrahim Xayat
Kioomars Musayyebi
Koray Berat Sarı
Laleh Joshani
Luis Ernesto Hormaza
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Ulaş Özağaç
Umut Piêra
Valentina Bellanova
Warda*
Yalda Abbasî
Yousef*
Zainab Lax
Ziad*

Ensembles

5000 Miles
Allerwelt Ensemble
Amira Sultana Ensemble
MN:WEN
Mondo Muziko
Orpheus XXI NRW
Transorient Orchestra
Words Beyond Borders (WBB)
You Shall Rise

Institutions

Globale Musik Cologne e.V.
Kulturamt Köln
Landesmusikakademie NRW
Landesmusikrat NRW
Landesverband der Musikschulen in NRW
Landtag NRW
Masala Movement e.V.
NRW Kultursekretariat Wuppertal
Timcheh e.V.



Figure 1: Sheyda's music academy opening concert. L-R: Samira Memarzadeh, Sheyda Ghavami, Valentina Bellanova

Chapter 1: Introduction

In May 2025, my friend and colleague Sheyda Ghavami opened her own music school in Cologne with a festive concert evening. In the weeks prior, Sheyda managed to turn a subterranean office space in Cologne's chic Belgian quarter into a bright and inviting music academy – a place where everyone can gather and make music together.

A small audience of friends gathered that Friday evening on folding chairs in front of the low stage, itself only constructed the week before using unvarnished lumber, black cloth, and a staple gun. After a multilingual introduction, Sheyda and two musician friends took to the stage. For forty minutes, Sheyda sang popular songs in Kurdish and Persian accompanied by harp and *ney*.[3] The gentle sounds of these instruments shimmered around Sheyda's full-bodied voice which echoed over the PA system. As she brought the microphone towards her, the audience could see the three words tattooed on her outer forearm – *Jin, Jîyan, Azadî*. Women, life, freedom.

Indeed, this evening was a celebration of all three of these words. Sheyda had arrived in Germany ten years previously as a refugee from Iran and has worked hard to make it as a professional musician. In that time she endured successive societal and personal crises, including the mainstreaming of far-right politics in Germany, the Covid-19 pandemic, heartbreak, health scares, and the reality that she would never see her parents or homeland again. As she noted on stage that evening, 'It has not been easy. I am proud of what I have accomplished here in Germany'.[4]

[3] An end-blown reed flute used in many music genres in Southwest Asia (SW Asia).
[4] To find out more about Sheyda's work and listen to her music, see her website www.sheydaghavami.com and Musikwelten NRW Profile: www.musikwelten-nrw.de/profil/sheyda-ghavami

An undertaking of this size does not happen alone, as Sheyda noted. In fact, many of her supporters over the years attended the concert that evening. Colleagues from a music education programme in Düsseldorf and her students living in Cologne clapped along to the music. An instructor from a continuing education programme she completed sat with me in the front row. Many musicians from her transcultural network applauded encouragingly and even brought out their instruments to join in the encore. Iranians, Kurds, Turks, Italians, Ukrainians, Germans, and one US-American (myself) gathered to support this venture, keen to see Sheyda and her music school succeed.

To understand the personal and communal meaning of this event, one should know Sheyda's story. Sheyda Ghavami was born into a Kurdish-Persian family in the city of Sanandaj, Iran in 1983. She grew up biculturally, speaking Soranî (also known as Central Kurdish) and Farsi at home, as well as learning music from both cultures. Her efforts to pursue Kurdish music seriously were hampered on multiple fronts by the Iranian regime; not only does it continue to restrict women's ability to make music in public spaces, but it also persecutes ethnic minorities and prohibits their cultural production.

Sheyda took matters into her own hands. After finishing school she crossed the border irregularly[5] to the autonomous Kurdish region of Iraq to study at the Conservatory in Erbil. There she spent three years training her voice and learning about different genres of Kurdish traditional music. Following her studies, she moved to Tehran and worked as a wedding dress designer, continuing her musical work in secret. There she became more politically active. She joined a Kurdish political

[5] I use the term 'irregular migration' to denote the crossing of borders outside of legal channels established by states. This is often referred to as 'illegal', 'unauthorised', or 'undocumented migration', although irregular migration does not always constitute breaking the law, nor does it negate migrants' right to protection under international law. 'Irregular migration' offers a more neutral formulation of this type of border-crossing.

party and wrote articles about women's rights in Iran, criticising the government openly. During this time she tattooed the phrase 'Jin, Jiyan, Azadî' on her forearm. The phrase originated in the Kurdish women's movement and has gained international prominence since 2022 following the murder of Jina Mahsa Amini at the hands of Iran's morality police.

The regime viewed Sheyda's political work unfavourably – with horrifying and life-altering consequences. At the age of 23, she was arrested for her political activism and thrown into what she called the 'black hole' of Iran's intelligence agency in Sanandaj. For three months she underwent interrogation and physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. She was then brought before the court in Baneh where a judge convicted her without legal representation. She was sent to the Saqqez women's prison where, as Sheyda put it, 'you could count the number of prisoners on one hand'. Sheyda was sentenced to spend seven years in these horrible conditions.

After four years and seven months, she and her family made the dangerous and difficult decision to try and free Sheyda from imprisonment. Her father requested a ten-day reprieve for Sheyda to be married. This was one of the few reasons for which imprisoned women could be granted bail, because, as Sheyda explained, in the eyes of the regime, 'when you're married, you can't be engaged in politics or feminism anymore'. In 2012 Sheyda was released to her family. She spent one day saying goodbye and on the second day, she left Iran behind for good.

She crossed irregularly into Turkey and made her way to Istanbul where she was later joined by another family member. They tried various ways to enter the EU but faced significant challenges. For one, they did not have any travel documents because the Iranian government makes it difficult for Kurds to obtain passports. Secondly, their funds were rapidly depleting, and as irregular

migrants in Turkey, they struggled to find work. Despite the challenges she faced in Turkey, Sheyda relished her newfound freedoms. She began to sing again and even recorded some new songs while in Istanbul.

One day Sheyda was subjected to a random identity check on the street by the police and imprisoned again. The Iranian government called for her immediate extradition. Within the prison, Sheyda received help from other Kurds to get in touch with Amnesty International. She managed to be released on the condition that she left Turkey immediately. Without a passport or the time to make an official asylum claim from within Turkey, only one option remained open to her: entering Europe via the dangerous Mediterranean route.

Within days of being released Sheyda found herself in an inflatable raft piloted by smugglers. Allegedly due to increased Frontex (European Border and Coast Guard Agency) presence in the Aegean Sea, the smugglers chose to enter via Italy, meaning a longer and riskier voyage for those on board. After eight days they saw the lights of Sicily. The passengers were thrown into the water far from the coastline. Few of them could swim. Against all odds, Sheyda made it to land, finally reaching the shores of Europe.

But her journey was far from over. Sheyda spent weeks avoiding police in the streets and on public transport as she made her way to Paris. There, she stayed with family members for some time before making the final leg of her journey to Germany. In December 2014, she arrived in Dortmund, North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) and applied for asylum. From there she was sent to the state of Saxony to wait for her asylum decision. She witnessed Dresden become a centre for the far-right organisation Pegida (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West) and their

weekly protests through the city which drew thousands of attendees. During her two years in Saxony Sheyda became politically engaged once again for women's and migrants' rights. She performed at multicultural festivals in Chemnitz and Dresden – singing openly on stage in public for the first time since leaving Kurdistan-Iraq.

However, Germany was not the safe haven she imagined. Twice she was attacked by far-right extremists in Dresden. After one performance, a man followed her to the tram stop and shattered a glass bottle on her head. She woke up in the hospital and decided then and there to leave the city as soon as she could. 18 months after arriving in Saxony she was granted asylum and the next day she left for NRW. Even though relocating within Germany violated the terms of her asylum status, she managed to get her case approved with the help of a social worker due to fears over her safety in Dresden. In 2016 she began settling into her new life in Cologne.

Sheyda has worked hard and flourished since then. In particular, she sought out all the educational opportunities afforded to her. She sped through her state-mandated language and integration courses, finishing the minimum requirement of B1 within her first year in Cologne.[6] She completed a school leaving certificate from night school in three years. She simultaneously worked to establish her music career through networking, completing continuing education programmes, and seeking out teaching and performing opportunities. Sheyda quickly managed to establish herself within Kurdish music circuits, receiving invitations from across Europe to perform at *Newroz* (Kurdish new year) concerts, political demonstrations, and music festivals. She has also become a known entity within many public cultural organisations in NRW. Sheyda regularly

[6] B1 refers to intermediate language skills according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, whose levels range from A1-C2.

receives state funding to lead workshops, conduct artistic research, and perform concerts. Building on all these hard-won professional successes in previous years, Sheyda has embarked on her ultimate dream: opening her own music school. After a year of sorting out the paperwork and financing, finding a location and furnishing the space, Sheyda opened her music academy in Cologne in May 2025.

In this brief biography, Sheyda Ghavami's life trajectory bears many hallmarks of the idealised integrated refugee in Europe. She is a woman who was persecuted by an Islamic regime for promoting gender equality. By receiving asylum in Germany, she is theoretically allowed to live freely. She has learned the native language, educated herself, and worked hard to live independently of state unemployment benefits. She dresses smartly and does not cover her hair. She pays for public transport and has plenty of German friends. She sings about freedom, criticises Islamic law, and promotes the ideals of Western, liberal democracies. With the help of a beneficent state, she received a loan to open up a small business. By all these measures, Sheyda's pathway in Europe should be a success story – both for her and Germany's refugee integration regime.

But below the surface, in day-to-day encounters with German society and the state, Sheyda's experiences of integration tell a very different story. When I took Sheyda aside at the music school opening to congratulate her on her success, she smiled, but with resignation in her eyes: 'Yeah, but I *had* to succeed, you know? What other choice did I have? I don't want to go back to the *Jobcenter* [unemployment office]'. This comment casts her achievements in a different light. These triumphs of self-initiative, picking-herself-up-by-the-bootstraps work may not solely be the result of her successful integration, but rather index a certain *failure* to become fully German. Despite all of

these efforts, Sheyda finds herself in the same precarious situation as when she arrived. In many ways the very processes designed to facilitate her entry into society in the end drew new boundaries of exclusion. While opportunities were made available for her to perform, she was often invited on the basis of some part of her identity – whether that was as a refugee, an Iranian, a Kurd, a woman, or a victim of state, gendered, and racial violence. Rarely was she wanted for her voice alone. And as the political landscape in Germany changes, she worries that these identity-based invitations might evaporate. If (or indeed when) that happens, Sheyda is not sure how she will pay the bills.

Sheyda's passion for making music is undeniable – yet the contexts in which she is forced to monetise it in a precarious, exoticised world music industry threaten to alienate her from her labour. Her journey to becoming a professional musician and opening her own music school is not a singular case. Sheyda's story, and those of many others profiled in this work, illustrate the possibilities and pitfalls of performing world music in Germany today.

This dissertation explores how racialised musicians navigate the world music scene in Germany. By racialised musicians I refer to artists whose racial markers have become salient features of their professional identity. Racialised musicians in the world music scene, many of whom arrived in Germany as forced migrants, must traverse multiple marginalisations in pursuit of their careers. I am interested in the contexts in which they work and the strategies they use.

The field of "world music" in Germany itself occupies a marginal position within the musical landscape.[7] It emerges as a site of contestation between market demands, state policies, and artistic impulses. These three forces bring the world music scene into existence; yet, their governing logics

[7] "World music" is a contested term not accepted by all of those who find themselves in this genre. I explore these discursive issues in section 2.1.1.

simultaneously push it to the periphery. This can be seen through the multiple precarities these musicians experience. As freelance workers, they struggle to find economic security in the gig economy. As racialised people and migrants, they are subject to precarious legal statuses and a state integration regime that produces non-citizens within Germany's borders (Partridge, 2012). And finally, as performers working in the country of Bach and Beethoven, world music artists struggle to gain institutional recognition and resources for their creative practice. As Sheyda's story illustrates, musicians in this genre must overcome various challenges to realise their goals of becoming working professionals.

And yet, in the face of these marginalising forces, racialised musicians develop innovative strategies to understand and mobilise these structures for their own benefit. I frame these interactions as struggles over *value*. This does not just include negotiating the economic value of one's work, but also its social and artistic value. Indeed, ethnographic studies of music are in a unique position to explore the question of value creation. Music is not only a field of cultural production with its own social norms (Bourdieu, 1993), but also a site for materialising broader societal values through performance (T. D. Taylor, 2024). In other words, understanding the underlying logics of a music scene might shine a light onto the surrounding socio-cultural context as well.

I argue that the world music scene in NRW offers such a lens. In contrast with studies that focus on national-level politics or large cosmopolitan cities, subnational regions offer sites for local politics in understudied geographic areas to be better understood. As I outline in section 2.3, NRW presents an ideal region to study world music based on its history of migration and public funding for culture. The different ways that musicians in NRW generate value for themselves and

their work in the local world music scene do not only reveal insights about the cultural industry; these strategies also engage with issues surrounding race, migration, economic precarity, and diversity in Germany more broadly.

In chapters three to five I analyse the strategies racialised and forced migrant musicians use across different domains to bring their careers forward. In each chapter, the analysis unfolds across three logics, First, I profile the policies and initiatives in NRW relevant to this population. I trace how they have evolved over the years with a focus on the language and policy levers they employ to address their target beneficiaries. Second, I am interested in how musicians develop an understanding of the structures that give rise to the world music scene. Such structures include state policies, such as those governing freelance work in the gig economy, diversity funding initiatives, and qualification programmes. Yet they also include situated social and value structures, including networks, systems of gift exchange, and how different forms of capital are converted and exchanged. Thirdly, I explore the ways in which these musicians influence such structures or manipulate them for their own ends. This analysis unfolds through a series of case studies of state-funded initiatives in NRW. Drawing on the critical evaluation of these policies which unfolds in these chapters, I developed my own policy recommendations for municipalities, Land NRW, and its associated cultural institutions (Campion, 2026).

Even the process of conducting ethnographic research can be analysed in terms of value creation, as I explore in chapter six. I reflect on the value generated in a research project I conducted with Sheyda in 2024 titled "Kurdish Women Musicians in Germany: Lifestories and Livelihoods" [*Kurdische Musikerinnen in Deutschland: Lebensgeschichten und Arbeitsbedingungen*]. Beyond

learning about the experiences of women musicians in the Kurdish diaspora, we also generated insights into the process of co-produced research. Here too we asked ourselves how the value of our actions emerged in different fields – in academic circles, German cultural and educational institutions, and in Kurdish political movements.

In the remainder of this chapter I present the foundations for how this research project unfolded. In section 1.1 I reflect on how this research topic emerged as well as my own role in the field. Section 1.2 outlines the methodology and ethical considerations made in working with racialised and forced migrant musicians. Section 1.3 gives an overview of the chapters.

1.1 Positionality statement

In March 2025, the Kültürklüngel Orkestar – a world music collective in which I have been playing trombone since moving to Bonn – had one of its biggest gigs ever. We were booked to open for the headliner act in one of the most beloved concert venues in the city. We rehearsed our setlist for months, honing in the harmonies, rehearsing transitions, and figuring out a way to squeeze 28 of us and our instruments onto the stage.

During the final rehearsal before the big day, Adrien* reviewed all the details for the gig, including arrival time, soundcheck procedure, and stage positioning: 'The booker from the festival told us that he can arrange for a stage extension, but it will cost more money than expected. He offered to cover those costs if we paid for our own dinner backstage'. Shrugs and murmurs of agreement passed through the room, but one person announced his discontent. 'No, that's not okay!', he

raised his voice over the din. ‘They agreed in the contract to pay for the pizza, so they should pay for the pizza! It’s not our fault they booked a larger band than could fit on the stage’.

We debated how to go about this deal. Our band is by no means a professional ensemble. But in this instance, we had been booked as one. The contract outlined provisions for food and drink, the number of guest tickets, which tech would be made available, and the artist fee paid to the group – although after it was divided by 28, our take-home sum was laughably small. Some defended the festival organiser, saying that he could hardly be expected to make extra accommodations for such a large ensemble.

The original dissenter was quick to reply with his own experience in the local scene: ‘It’s not about the pizza! [This event organiser] does shit like this every time I work with him. He’s always trying to cut corners at the last minute. It’s not about the pizza, it’s about the principles’. These comments sparked a spirited debate about professionalism and how we as a group located our own position within the local musical landscape. We eventually reached a consensus on how to move forward: Adrien would politely reject the offer and remind the organiser that our dinner was promised in the booking. That Saturday, we delivered one of the best concerts yet and celebrated in the green room afterwards with our contractually-stipulated pizza.

I share this story to illustrate my own experiences negotiating the world music scene here in NRW as a musician. Though I do not perform at a professional level, engaging in this practice through the Kültürklüngel Orkestar and other projects has shaped the way I relate to my interlocutors and these topics more broadly.

Such encounters have helped me on the path of self-reflexivity to understand what it means to be the person undertaking this research, a topic I expand on in chapter six. In an effort to move beyond simply listing lifeless markers of identity politics (Haschemi Yekani et al., 2022; Robertson, 2002) or even reinforcing such privileges through formulaic positionality statements (Gani & Khan, 2024), I will give a somewhat extended examination of my positionality in relation to this project. Through the framework outlined by Savin-Baden and Howell-Major (2013) and expanded upon by Holmes (2020), I will assess my relationship to the fieldsite and research topic, as well as how others related to me as an individual.

1.1.1 Relationship to the fieldsite and research topic

I first travelled to NRW in June 2017 during an undergraduate semester abroad at the Technical University in Dresden. At that point I had studied German for 18 months and was finally able to have basic conversations with strangers. I planned to apply for postgraduate programmes in Historical Musicology later that year, so I visited the region with an eye towards classical music landmarks – the Beethoven House in Bonn, the Robert and Clara Schumann museum and Tonhalle in Düsseldorf, and the Cologne Philharmonie to name a few.

Yet two discoveries during that semester in Dresden set me down the path towards this research topic. First, I found that Germany's music scene had more to offer beyond just Western art music, especially in the realm of contemporary global music practices. Second, I witnessed the country during the aftermath of 2015's "long summer of migration" and the rise of far-right politics, particularly in Dresden. I wanted to understand these debates more fully.

I came back to Bonn in August 2019 and February 2020, this time for research purposes. I conducted fieldwork on publicly funded music programmes aimed at refugees for my MPhil thesis. I was graciously welcomed at the House of Resources in Bonn and connected with a number of actors in this scene who became good friends and colleagues over the years.

The connections made during this visit to NRW laid the groundwork for my third sojourn in Bonn. During the 2020-21 academic year I was a German Chancellor Fellow funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and hosted at the Landesmusikrat NRW (LMR), or the State Music Council of NRW, in Düsseldorf. During my time there I conducted an impact evaluation of their funding programme for amateur music-making projects with refugees. For this research project, I interviewed many local actors and discussed the challenges they face in this musical landscape. To address this problem, I worked with the LMR to conceptualise and design Musikwelten NRW, an online networking platform for musicians, educators, and venues in NRW's 'diverse music scene'.[8] My fourth stay in NRW (still ongoing at the time of writing) began in August 2022. Following the first year of my DPhil, I relocated to Essen to conduct my DPhil fieldwork and in June 2023 I moved back to Bonn.

I outline my various stays in NRW in such detail to emphasise how the idea for this project and the necessary connections to realise it emerged over the course of many years. My previously-established networks to musicians and institutions facilitated my entry into the field when I returned for this project. Furthermore, I have also seen how it has evolved over time, through different so-called "crises"– of migration, Covid-19 lockdowns, global conflicts, and changes of government. My understanding of the German policy landscape and its so-called "post-migration"

[8] www.musikwelten-nrw.de

society grew alongside my language skills. Combined with a basic ability to speak Levantine Arabic, which I studied in Amman, Jordan in the summer of 2022, I felt able to integrate myself into this scene by the time I began my DPhil fieldwork.

My positionality as an outsider conducting research in Germany often puzzled people I talked to, who did not understand why a person who grew up in California and was studying in the UK would research a place in Germany that was not Berlin. Admittedly, my own musical and political interests drew me to these questions. I am intrigued by how German society is confronting its reality as a "super-diverse" country and how these people, whom I have come to know very well, are playing a role in this process.

Music facilitated my entry into this field. I am a classically-trained trombonist and pianist and have branched out into jazz and world music genres over the years. I learned music primarily through reading sheet music and have a robust understanding of Western music theory. Training my ears and memory to acquire new pieces aurally has been a hard-won skill I forced myself to learn when performing beyond the Western art music tradition. Another way I tried to expand my understanding of these musical practices at the centre of my research was through learning the *oud* – the short-necked lute common in music throughout Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA). Through learning this instrument I also broadened my understanding of the *maqam*[9] system and opened my ears to microtonality. As with my nascent Arabic language skills, a beginner's understanding of oud and maqam was not enough to engage in deep musical exchange

[9] A system of melodic modes used in SWANA musical traditions. Each maqam provides a set of pitches, characteristic motifs, and rules for melodic development, often conveying specific moods or emotional expressions.

in these modes. Nevertheless, I found that it facilitated connections with actors in the field and shaped how interlocutors viewed me and assessed my interest in their lives and culture.

1.1.2 How others perceived me

In 2020, a friend in NRW put me in touch with a local oud teacher to start lessons. All I knew about Karim* was that he studied in the tradition of acclaimed Iraqi oudist Munir Bashir and that he left Baghdad around the time of the US invasion. We had little contact before he arrived at my doorstep and handed me an instrument. As I opened the case I was struck by the enormous eagle embossed on the fingerboard. I panicked – did he think I was one of *those* US-Americans? I frantically tried to cobble together the words to say, 'don't worry, I didn't vote for Trump'. But before I could string this sentence together, Karim explained his choice for selecting this particular instrument for me. Apparently, he just thought I might like an oud with a pretty bird, since all he knew about me was that I was young and a woman.

Such encounters served as periodic reminders of the different ways people in the field perceived me and my role in this ecosystem. When I first began conducting research in NRW in 2019, I found it difficult to be taken seriously. I was a young woman from abroad whose German was riddled with grammatical errors. Although I am mostly white-presenting, this did not stop questions about where I was "really from", including such guesses as Kazakhstan, Iran, and Peru. In my early days of participant observation and conducting interviews, I suspect that people viewed me at best as a silent observer or a do-gooder – and at worst as a busybody or an eavesdropper.

Nevertheless, being a migrant myself helped me to connect with many of the musicians in the programmes. We bonded over difficulties with the German language and bureaucracy. Many

people spoke of "us" the migrants and "them" the Germans, aligning me with themselves in this division. I was wary not to push this kinship too far, as the conditions of our migration to Europe often could not be more different. I learned German while on scholarship at a cushy private university while they did so in state-mandated integration classes in under-funded *Volkshochschulen* [adult education centres]. Many of my interlocutors were battling the arduous and drawn-out asylum and temporary residency processes. In contrast, my residence status was afforded by various research positions and later through my marriage to a German citizen.

However upon reflection, I was able to collect immensely rich data during this stage when I felt that I was not taken very seriously. Many interlocutors were pleased that someone had taken an interest in their lives and experiences, and I was welcomed graciously into homes and rehearsal spaces. I only realised the extent of these privileges when the conditions changed. In April 2023, I took up a prestigious position at the University of Cologne in the Institute for European Ethnomusicology. I was asked to step into the Junior Professorship in Music and Migration for two semesters while the faculty performed a job search. Loopholes were found and reasons were invented to allow a foreigner without the right to work in Germany to step into a role for which she did not have the formal qualifications. As chapters five and seven will show, such exceptions illustrate the absurdity and inequality underlying Germany's bureaucratic systems.

In this position, I was granted more prestige and access to research funding than even most of my postdoctoral colleagues had. I set back out into the field with these resources, excited to put them towards making a positive impact in the careers of my interlocutors. What I did not foresee was how this position would change how others viewed me. Suddenly, people who had previously

ignored me began returning my calls. Policymakers and programme administrators asked me to advise them, produce reports, and join their boards and juries. I have since had two paid consultancies with public cultural institutions to produce policy papers (Campion, 2023; Campion & Gläßer, 2025), insights from which I include in this dissertation. Many musicians I had previously worked with got in touch to ask for teaching jobs. Most surprisingly, I noticed that interviewees were less forthcoming or gave accounts that did not always hold up under scrutiny. I began to wonder if people were telling me what I wanted to hear in case I could reward them with work or prominence later on. Whereas before, interlocutors seemed to not care about my findings, now people were concerned with the scribblings in my notebooks.

Information gleaned before and after this transformation features in this dissertation. While the stories might have been more frank before I became a known entity in the scene, the resources and connections afforded by my status allowed for more politically-engaged research. Most importantly, it facilitated the financial means to pursue the co-produced project with Sheyda. My position at the University of Cologne – which in the end lasted two years due to the drawn-out procedure of selecting a successor – allowed me to turn this research into practice-oriented knowledge creation. The results of this research will hopefully lead to some improvements in the professional lives of my interlocutors and similar people in Germany.

I have already applied some of the insights produced through this research into practice. During my DPhil I participated in twelve funding juries allocating a total of approximately 1,000,000 Euros in public money to music-making initiatives. Alongside two policy papers, I produced two magazine articles in German publications, joined the board of a world music advocacy organisation

in Cologne, and was twice asked to advise a member of the NRW parliament. Far from being the neutral third-party observer sitting in the corner, I have become politically engaged in this field, hopefully shaping it for the better. As my methodological positioning below makes clear, I have embraced producing knowledge from this perspective.

1.2 Methodology and ethical considerations

This section outlines the methods I used and the salient ethical considerations which arose in the project.

1.2.1 Fieldwork

I used a mixture of methods available in the ethnographer's toolbox. This study relies primarily on information shared in interviews or gleaned through participant observation. I conducted my fieldwork through a mixture of long-term engagement with select musicians and institutions as well as shorter encounters with an array of cultural actors. The people I spoke with ranged from amateur to professional musicians, event organisers and venue managers, promoters, sound technicians, audience members, music teachers, academics, policymakers, civil servants, advocacy groups, and NGO directors. The contexts for our discussions were similarly varied, from private living rooms and long car journeys, to rehearsal spaces and music schools, backstage after concerts, and even the NRW parliament building in Düsseldorf.

In terms of extended ethnographic engagement, I conducted participant observation in two contexts. First was with the *Landesmusikakademie NRW* (LMA) in their *Zertifikatslehrgang Musikpädagogik Musiker*innen verschiedener Kulturen* (ZLG). From September 2022-June 2023,

I attended this part-time continuing education course alongside the participants. The course constituted biweekly seminars at the *Hochschule für Musik und Tanz Köln* (HfMTK), three overnight retreats in the border town of Heek, and two workshops and concerts in Wuppertal. The second instance of extended participant observation (admittedly a much smaller scope) was in the *Dialog Projekt* funded by the *NRW Kultursekretariat* (KS). I sat in during the week-long intensive rehearsal period and attended two of the three resulting concerts.

A small survey that I designed and ran in January 2024 sought to complement these ethnographic insights with data on musicians' working conditions. This survey was conducted as part of the Think Tank Musical Diversity by the *Initiative Freie Musik Köln e.V.* (IFM) with Thomas Gläßer. We gathered anonymised responses from musicians active in the world music scene in Cologne about their sources of income, education, and personal background to understand the different profiles of professional musicians in the city. We offered the survey in six languages and advertised it across multiple channels. Insights from the 46 respondents are presented in chapter three.

The majority of the conversations and fieldnotes I made stemmed from singular encounters with individuals and ensembles. As is often the case in snowball interviewing, one contact would put me in touch with two more. Similarly, while at one interlocutor's concert, I would often meet three more musicians in the audience, all of whom had concerts they invited me to attend. While I worried that these individual connections would never amount to "proper" ethnographic fieldwork, eventually it seemed that I had reached a certain degree of saturation. At some point in my fieldwork, the people recommended to me were people I had already met and interviewed.

This surprised me given the geographic stretch of this project. I proposed to cover the entirety of NRW, a state of roughly 34,000 km^2. While many of the institutions with which I worked operate at a state-wide level, most of my fieldwork gravitated towards the population centres, in particular the cities along the Rhine and Ruhr rivers. This was because the musicians themselves tended to gather in these urban centres, as well as the venues and institutions serving them. A map outlining the locations where I collected data illustrates the extent to which I was able to traverse the entire state (see Fieldwork map of North Rhine-Westphalia~~, p. 10~~).

1.2.2 Activist anthropology and co-production

My increasing political engagement in this scene ran contrary to ideals of detached empirical data collection. Many scholars have long rejected this perspective, as 'anthropologists are inescapably implicated in the processes of culture-making in the art worlds that they study – whether they like it or not' (Winegar, 2006, p. 31). Indeed, integrating ourselves into these communities can offer an antidote to anthropology's extractivist nature. By continuing to engage with the political and social conditions of our interlocutors, we can work towards shared political goals (Speed, 2008). There are many approaches and labels for politically engaged anthropology, including activist-, action-, advocacy-, applied-, and public anthropology, as well as participant action research methods. All of these move beyond the ethical imperative to "do no harm" to also "do some good" (Fluehr-Lobban, 2006).

Yet even in some of these politically engaged modes of conducting anthropology, the discipline's inherent coloniality persists in how it defines meaning, relations, and knowledge production (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Decolonial approaches seek to displace Western hegemonic

perspectives and move away from scientific 'epistemicide' (de Sousa Santos, 2014). However, simply privileging 'subaltern voices' and acknowledging one's positionality does not address the ethnographer's assumed '"right" (and ability) to intellectually know, interpret, and represent others' (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008, p. 49). Until this dichotomy between knower and known is finally dismantled, anthropology may remain 'representative of all that is truly bad about research' (Smith, 1999, p. 11).

Ethnographers committed to decolonising the discipline have turned to co-production as a way forward. This approach demands more than just "giving back"; it must put the tools of knowledge-creation in the hands of those researched (Bejarano et al., 2019). Indeed, it recognises the power inherent in possessing research skills. Ethnography can be a tool of self-knowledge for the marginalised, a way to 'increase the stock of knowledge which they consider most vital to their survival as human beings and to their claims as citizens' (Appadurai, 2006, p. 168). Co-production also leads to better ethnographic data, 'emerging from the engaged and embodied participation of local collaborators in the research process' (Bejarano et al., 2019, p. 9).

Inspired by these ideas, I explored the possibility of engaging in co-produced research during my fieldwork. When Sheyda expressed interest in doing a project together with other musicians, I leapt at the chance to try these theories in practice. The results of this collaboration, as well as my extended methodological and ethical reflections on co-production, constitute chapters six and seven.

1.2.3 Ethical considerations in work with racialised and forced migrant musicians

Beyond the procedure of obtaining institutional approval, many anthropologists' critical ethical decisions are made during fieldwork's 'ethically important moments' (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Some of these moments which arose during fieldwork are integrated throughout the ethnography that follows. Here, I will detail some of the overarching issues relevant to my work with racialised musicians, in particular forced migrants.

Vulnerability

The Oxford ethical review board categorises refugees as 'vulnerable', a label that demands additional protection measures. Many institutions have such policies, even if definitions of vulnerability vary (Perry, 2011). If vulnerability denotes a higher risk for harm, then this term accurately describes many stakeholders in this project based on their legal and professional statuses in Germany.

Yet this designation is not without its problems. Categorising an entire population as vulnerable obscures their capacity for agency. 'Vulnerability' does not capture the ebb and flow of power and autonomy within intersectional collectives or even within individuals across different contexts (Gifford, 2013). Even if a population is at higher risk for harm, one could still question the purpose of this categorisation. Vulnerability is applied across disparate contexts to denote vastly different conditions, weakening its protective imperative (Perry, 2011). Vulnerabilities vary within a population based on the intersection of other identities (Seethaler, 2019). Furthermore, singling out individuals based on stereotypes and subjecting them to different procedures might inflict

more harm than good (Levine et al., 2004). The harms caused by labelling an entire population "vulnerable" can extend beyond the academic realm to humanitarian work and development (Turner, 2021).

A more productive approach could be to distinguish between types of vulnerability in specific contexts. Block et al. (2013) propose categories of vulnerability based on consent, risk, and justice which address institutional harm. The US Bioethics commission opts for more capacity-based distinctions, including cognitive, medical, economic, deferential, institutional, and social vulnerabilities (in Fluehr-Lobban, 2013). Assessing the interplay of different social factors facilitates harm reduction for not only forced migrants, but also those not traditionally categorised as vulnerable. Recognising that we all have moments of vulnerability not only lessens power differentials between stakeholder groups, but also reinforces forced migrants as equal co-researchers.

Informed Consent

Vulnerability is especially relevant in the consent process. Alongside general concerns with transparency in anthropology (Fluehr-Lobban, 2003), work with forced migrants demands additional measures to ensure interlocutors are fully-informed and participating voluntarily. Migrants have spent years navigating violent bureaucratic systems, so this consent process needs to differentiate itself from Germany's oppressive form-filling culture (Bauman, 2000; Graeber, 2015; Kratzer, 2021).

Indeed, written consent procedures may paradoxically compromise decolonisation efforts. The act of signing undermines any claims to equal collaboration; as the form-giver, the university

researcher establishes the terms on which the partnership is based. Such a unidirectional consent process not only harms the relationship, but may also fail to address relevant issues. If the potential risks and impact of the research are produced communally, then the information sheet and consent process will more accurately reflect the situation. This manifested in my research through the use of oral consent procedures, translations of information sheets into Turkish, Kurmancî, Arabic, Farsi, and German, and holding an informational meeting where prospective interlocutors could ask questions.

When using methods of co-production, the issue arises as to how fellow co-researchers should be treated in this process. Project members from the community in this framework are no longer interlocutors, but rather fellow researchers. To counteract this potential hypocrisy, collaborators should not sign the same consent form as participants, but rather need to engage with the same topics I have outlined here: principles of harm reduction, privacy, and ethical decision-making. Sheyda and I discussed these issues extensively during our project, a process I unpack in section 6.2.

At its core, informed consent is based upon transparency of the research and a stakeholder's capacity to voluntarily participate. An ideal consent procedure extends well after the ink has dried, continuing alongside the project's developments through frequent renewals of the promise, both among researchers and with knowledge-holders (AAA Code of Ethics, 2012).

Protecting Identities

As with the previous topics, protecting individuals' identities presents additional challenges in particular when working with forced migrants. A data breach or personal identifiers in the research output can lead to grave harms. Depending on the context from which interlocutors fled,

participation in this research could lead to punishment, imprisonment, violence, or death for themselves and family members. Within Germany, disclosure of behaviour perceived as aberrant by the state could jeopardise their legal status within the country. The benefits of focusing on subnational regions and local scenes also brings the obstacle of maintaining anonymity. The risk of exposing identities is higher in projects that work with a small and well-connected network of people, such as a local world music scene. On the one hand, agreeing to pseudonymise interlocutors' identities may engender more honest answers; on the other hand, stripping these narratives of their context may also misrepresent them.

Yet the pseudonymisation process does not always perpetuate fewer harms. Assigning new names to interlocutors mirrors the dehumanising and de-individualising governmental and media reports on forced migrants and racialised people. Excising markers of identity risks homogenising intersectional experiences, perpetuating the symbolic violence of depriving individuals of their identity. In this research specifically, many interlocutors found using their real names to be more beneficial for their career. In the music industry, even forced migrants in precarious legal situations still seek out opportunities for their name and work to circulate.

I have honoured the wishes of interlocutors in this work, naming or pseudonymising individual voices where desired. These decisions emerged through extended consent procedures that began at the time of the interviews, continued through the writing and editing processes, and will unfold during subsequent publications. Names with an asterisk (*) are pseudonyms. All other names identify the person in question. A list of all contributors presented on p. 13 reflects the ways in which they wished to be acknowledged.

1.3 Chapter outlines

Chapter one has not only outlined the underlying framework of this research – including author positionality, methodology, ethical considerations, and the central arguments of this dissertation – but also introduced Sheyda, a central protagonist throughout this work. In chapter two, I answer the question, "Why study racialised musicians in NRW through the lens of value?". To do so, I survey key terms in the field, introduce relevant concepts from theories of value in anthropology and cultural studies, and give a brief overview of NRW as a fieldsite.

In the four main body chapters, I analyse how racialised musicians in the world music scene navigate the production of value amidst the logics of the state and the market. I examine four prominent sites for value creation in the world music scene: freelance work, diversity discourses, professionalisation programmes, and ethnographic research. Each one is shaped by both state policy and market demands, which can produce surprising, unintentional, or even conflictual outcomes. In addition to critically analysing these policies, I evaluate their impact on racialised and forced migrant musicians.

Chapter three details experiences in the freelance world music scene. It investigates the extent to which these musicians' careers can be viewed through the lens of labour market integration and entrepreneurism. First I survey policies and literature on these topics in Germany. Then I look at the strategies these musicians in the world music scene use to scale up their work and "make it" as professionals. The ways in which they translate their actions into a capitalist space shows the extent to which they can generate economic value from their work. Such value is often couched in terms of freedom, which can hold dissonant meanings within the context of precarious employment. It

also illustrates the limits of what musicians are willing to do "just for the money". The many pathways migrants take into freelance work reveal insights about the values underpinning larger economic forces: legal and financial precarity, flexible capitalism, and the role of the state.

Chapter four unpacks discourses of diversity and how they manifest in NRW's public funding for world music. First I outline how discussions around the value of cultural diversity in the state have shifted over the years and unpack what and who exactly are the targets of diversity management. I look at how these orientations play out in two publicly-funded programmes for world music: the LMR's Music Projects for Refugees (later renamed Culturally and Inclusively Diverse Music Projects with Forced Migrant Musicians) and KS's Dialogue Project in the funding category Musical Cultures. By distinguishing between diversity of personnel, programme, and participants, this analysis shows the multiple motivations and underlying logics that coexist within the policy driver of "diversity".

Chapter five explores the impact of qualification recognition and continuing education programmes in creating a world music profession. I explore these efforts through the LMA's Certification Programme in Music Education for Musicians of Different Cultures (ZLG). This programme seeks to increase the cultural and social capital of world music practitioners to facilitate professional success as educators. However, as one of the few higher education certificates for world music in Germany, it has garnered quite a lot of attention for its potential to professionalise the world music scene. Tensions arise through the certification programme's dual imperatives: to improve the participants' position within the field of world music, but also to improve the field's position within the broader cultural-political sphere. I offer four readings of the ZLG: (1) a two-

way labour market integration initiative, (2) a one-way assimilation programme, (3) a mechanism for racialised musicians to gain recognition for their art, and (4) a tool for professionalising the world music scene.

Chapter six is more self-reflexive. It asks what role ethnographic research plays in creating value for the communities it studies. I introduce the co-produced project Kurdish Women Musicians in Germany (KMiD) in which Sheyda and I interviewed ten Kurdish women musicians working in Europe and produced a "song- and storybook" based on their lives and music. I reproduce excerpts from this book in English translation, including parts of Sheyda's memoir, sheet music transcriptions of songs shared by our interlocutors, and texts presenting insights from our interviews. The remainder of chapter six unpacks some of the salient challenges in co-production told through our experiences in the KMiD project.

Chapter seven weaves together insights from this dissertation through the question of citizenship and belonging for racialised musicians, returning one final time to Sheyda's experiences in Germany.



Figure 2: Laleh Joshani at Global Flash 2023 at the Odonien, Cologne (photo by Mara von Ungern-Sternberg)

Chapter 2: Setting the stage for world music in NRW

This chapter introduces concepts and theories on which this dissertation is based. In section 2.1 I explore the key terms used to engage with racialised musicians in Germany. I explore both categories of practice and analysis to justify my use of the terms 'world music' and 'racialised musicians'. In section 2.2 I outline relevant literature in anthropology and cultural studies that engage with theories of value. Section 2.3 introduces NRW as a fieldsite for exploring the relationship of value, world music, migration, and race.

2.1 Key terminology in work with racialised musicians

While developing the concept for the online platform Musikwelten NRW in 2021, I consulted a few key actors in the local world music scene for input about terminology. The five of us gathered online to discuss which terms would best address the website's target beneficiaries: those structurally marginalised in Germany's musical landscape based on their genre, cultural background, or both. The most commonly used (and contested) terms in this sphere are *Weltmusik* and *Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund* ["world music" and "people with a migration background"]. Both function as catch-all terms for music and people which are perceived to come from outside of Germany. While they serve to identify those who are disadvantaged in established structures, they can also reproduce these structures of exclusion. Such categories draw boundaries of belonging and non-belonging that I wanted to critically engage with before I reproduced them in this platform.

These musicians, pedagogues, and event organisers were largely in agreement, but not as I expected. They concurred that the genre of "world music" might be a necessary evil for those in the industry. Yet, they rejected the term "people with migration background" as a way to signal ethnic or cultural difference. These attitudes mirror larger societal and academic discussions happening in Germany today.

This dissertation primarily uses the framing of 'racialised musicians', or those whose racial markers are intertwined with their professional identity. Yet it is important to explore more commonly used terms (such as "migration background") to understand why race presents a better paradigm through which to understand the experiences of this population. In this section, I will unpack some of the key concepts for this dissertation through my own process of coming to understand the terminology of racial and cultural difference in Germany. I do so by distinguishing between categories of practice and analysis, comparing official terms and how they are understood in everyday usage (Brubaker, 2013). Critical engagement with both categories allowed me to ask who benefits from this term, and for what purposes they are used (Harder & Nowicka, 2023).

2.1.1 World music as a de facto category of practice

While the people I consulted were not opposed to the term "world music", they nevertheless saw its limitations. The genre has come under scrutiny for its inherently Eurocentric, neocolonial grounding. The category itself is a fiction invented by record labels in the 1980s to market music from the Global South (Peres da Silva, 2017; Sweers, 2023). This industry extracts resources from around the world to create profit for mostly white cultural producers in Western Europe and Anglo-American markets. Such flows reveal world music's underlying neocolonial core (Feld,

2000). As many of my interlocutors shared with me, they felt forced into the genre of world music based on their countries of origin, genre of music, and racialised ethnicity in the German music industry (Silverstein & Sprengel, 2021). Indeed, the market for world music plays a role in the racialisation of these musicians (Carstensen-Egwuom, 2011; Haynes, 2005, 2012; Hernandez, 2012; Kheshti, 2015; Nissen, 2022), as well as research on the industry in ethnomusicology and cultural studies (Ramstedt & Laine, 2025). Many musicians recognise this troubled legacy and often reject the term (Burkhalter, 2010; Irscheid, 2023b, 2023a).

Surprisingly, given this intense critique of "world music", the cultural producers who I consulted have embraced the term to some degree. They located its value in providing more structural power for many smaller scenes within the country (Ellinghaus, 2007, 2017). In comparison with the resources and institutional representation afforded to classical music and jazz (and more recently, popular music), world music genres occupy a marginal position within Germany's cultural-political landscape. So while the musicians might not feel an aesthetic affinity with one another, many of them nevertheless have cultivated a cross-genre political solidarity under this problematised label.

Within this context I use this controversial umbrella term as a category of practice – albeit critically. Throughout this dissertation I engage with how this term is used and how musicians within the genre engage with its shortcomings. In using "world music", I not only refer to non-Western musics marginalised in the German market, but also to the genre name itself, itself used ambivalently by its members. In this way world music 'is real if only because it is talked about as though it were real' (Brennan, 2001, p. 44). The German term "Weltmusik" has been similarly

criticised and replaced with various alternatives over the years (Burkhalter, 2010), including *globale Musik,* and the English terms "Global Pop" and "World music" (Leggewie & Meyer, 2017). However, these new names still denote largely the same concept, reproducing the underlying logic of world music even if eschewing the term itself.

Even taking this label as something real to be studied, it is difficult to see what unites world music as a genre (or even if it should be perceived as a single genre), much less what qualifies it as a bona fide field to be studied. With such diverse aesthetics and culturally-situated practices, one might wonder how a Persian art music ensemble shares any social or aesthetic commonalities with a Latin dance band. But I found that despite (or perhaps because of) this strange marriage between different music traditions, members in the world music scene must invent their terms of engagement and openly confront divergent perspectives in order to survive as a recognised unit.

Because of the field's overt constructedness, a study of its internal logics reveals interesting tensions and contradictions, as previous studies of cultural production have shown (Grenfell & Hardy, 2007; Myers, 2002; Olszewska, 2015; Ortner, 2013; Turino, 2008). Aesthetic movements often boast that they operate independently of their geo-temporal context, but they too are constituted of the same elements which define all social fields (Becker, 1982). Pierre Bourdieu defines fields as structured social spaces with rules, power dynamics, stakes, and varying amounts of capital which shape how people within them interact. What sets artistic fields apart is their "universe of belief", or an alleged disavowal of economic interest (Bourdieu, 1993). But this professed orientation often does not match the actual interests or actions taken in the field. This tension between economic and aesthetic values has led to insights on how art is produced, especially in the visual arts (Myers,

2002; N. A. Taylor, 2009; Winegar, 2006). Recent research in ethnomusicology has also investigated these connections (Morcom & Taylor, 2020; T. D. Taylor, 2024), but studies on the world music industry focus more on the intersection between the aesthetics and commercial interests, particularly for those musicians and groups who garnered the most international success (Leggewie & Meyer, 2017; T. D. Taylor, 1997; Whitmore, 2016), or specific genres and geographies within the "world music" label (e.g. Freitas, 2023; Schmidt, 2019; Silverman, 2012).

This dissertation takes a different approach by giving a comprehensive overview of a local world music field in a peripheral market in the Global North. I do not analyse the aesthetics of this scene, but rather investigate the social structures, labour, resources, interests, and discourses that constitute it. This approach contrasts with the majority of the previous literature that profiles the global world music industry and key markets (Feld, 2000; Haynes, 2005; Hernandez, 2012) as well as those which tell these stories from Global South perspectives (e.g. Guilbault et al., 1993; Irscheid, 2023a; Kiwan & Meinhof, 2011). While much literature on world music starts with local practices and ends with global markets, I study how my interlocutors bring the global to this intensely local scene.

2.1.2 "Migration background" as a contested category of practice

In comparison to my interlocutors' rather resigned approach to "world music" and its role in prefiguring their careers in Germany, they were strongly opposed to describing many musicians in this scene as "people with a migration background". As with many German terms that are used to denote cultural and ethnic diversity, their official definition deviates from popular usage and

underlying meanings. As this and the following sections unpack, they are all proxies for engaging with race, whose taboo discursive status in Germany has a unique historical and political basis.

The category "people with migration background" was institutionalised by the Federal Statistical Office in 2005 as a way to capture data about migrants and their families living in Germany. In official statistics, one has a so-called "migration background" if the individual or at least one parent did not acquire German citizenship by birth after 1949 (*Einwanderungsgeschichte*, n.d.). This definition encapsulates not only migrants, but also those born in Germany to migrants. In some cases, it even extends to third-generation migrants whose parents were born before *jus soli* citizenship was introduced in 1999.

The invention of this category was a response to Germany's changing understanding of itself as a "land of immigration" [*Einwanderungsland*]. As a statistical category, "Migration background" provided an alternative to the pre-existing binary of "foreigner" and "German" which no longer captured the experiences of naturalised citizens and children born in Germany to immigrants. Critiques in the intervening 20 years have highlighted that "migration background" better indexes inherited citizenship than it does actual experience of migration (Will, 2019). The recent turn to speaking of people with a "family history of immigration" [*familiäre Einwanderungsgeschichte*] attempts to further differentiate those who were born in Germany from those who immigrated (*Einwanderungsgeschichte*, n.d.). Yet this change does not overcome the fundamental issue with the category itself.

As with the term "world music", "people with a migration background" is grounded in issues of othering. Both categories are defined more by absence than inherent similarities. Critiques of the

term target both its failure as a statistical category and its social shortcomings. In terms of data collection, "migration background" fails to group populations with similar life trajectories. The category can include a family of resettled Palestinian refugees, a child born in Germany to Black parents, or, like me, a white US-American who voluntarily immigrated as an adult. The statistics gathered on people with so-called "migration backgrounds" are not precise enough to deliver accurate insights about this group of people (Will, 2019).

A more fundamental ethical problem arises in its everyday usage. "Migration background" as a category of practice is used to draw borders of non-belonging and Germanness. In everyday usage the term generally refers to people of colour and Muslims, regardless of their citizenship status. This semantic understanding has been empirically found in TV & media (Lünenborg & Fürsich, 2014) as well as scholarly works (Moffitt & Juang, 2019). Such usage is problematic because it continues to define racialised people as non-citizens regardless of their actual legal status (El-Tayeb, 2011). Furthermore, it may also falsely attribute socio-economic outcomes to nationality and citizenship and not more salient factors, such as race, class, and educational attainment (Borrelli & Ruedin, 2024). Here, "migration background" functions as a way for German institutions to indirectly address topics of race and ethnicity. Yet in doing so, it perpetuates processes of racialisation and othering.

2.1.3 "Forced migrant" as imperfect category of analysis and practice

I took these critiques of the term "people with a migration background" on board in developing Musikwelten NRW, and extended this approach to my DPhil research. Given that the term's primary weakness lay in encompassing too many diverse experiences and not recognising the power

imbalances inherent in this collectivisation, in my research I initially decided to focus on a single legally-defined category that faces multiple marginalisations: forced migrants.

When I began my work in NRW, many publicly funded diversity programmes in the culture sector specifically addressed refugees or forced migrants more generally [*Flüchtlinge* and *geflüchtete Menschen*]. These projects recognised that musicians in displacement confront different, intersectional challenges to practicing their art in Germany, particularly on a professional level. This impulse brought about a flurry of policy responses in NRW which will be profiled in chapter four. Given the increased institutional and academic interest in the experience of forced migrants in Germany since 2015, I decided to join the discussion with my own work. Instead of reproducing the same problems inherent in "migration background", it seemed that I was moving in both a more politically engaged and empirically robust direction.

Yet I quickly found that the category "forced migrant musician" also encompassed a broad and ill-defined group in practice. Those arriving in the past ten years came mainly from Syria, Iran, Kurdish regions, Afghanistan, and Ukraine. Previous generations of forced migrants also include those from, among other places, Iraq, Venezuela, Turkey, the Gambia, Biafra, and the Balkans. Many left their countries of origin fleeing war and political persecution, but others cited a lack of economic opportunity as a motivator to leave. Some have become naturalised citizens, but the majority of them still reside in Germany irregularly or on limited residence permits. These musicians brought vastly different constellations of capital with them. This includes education qualifications, previous professional experiences, and financial resources. In Germany they have access to different social networks based on linguistic, cultural, religious, and national affiliations.

Some of these networks are well-established in Germany and Europe, whereas others are more nascent. Lastly, the challenges posed by their migration status interact with other intersectional identities, such as gender, sexuality, able-bodiedness, and age. As if this category was not broad enough, many of the programmes for forced migrants profiled in this dissertation do not control access based on legal status. For example, people across the forced-voluntary migration spectrum – indeed even naturalised or second-generation migrants – often participate . Many of these people would not qualify as forced migrants by the most commonly-held definitions.

Secondly, even the category of "forced migrant" encompasses people with access to very different rights and resources. Living conditions in Germany for those recognised as refugees under the Geneva Convention differ from those with subsidiary protection granted under German asylum law or EU temporary protection. These also differ significantly from those with *Duldung* [tolerated stay], in which a person does not have legal residence, but cannot be deported due to the situation in the country of origin, health issues, or travel restrictions. Duldung itself is divided into multiple (non)statuses (Schütze, 2023), each with their own constellation of rights and access to services and education (Drangsland, 2020). Finally, those living in Germany irregularly face significant challenges existing in a papers-based society (Boswell & Badenhoop, 2021).

Thirdly, these policies do not apply to all forced migrants equally. An interesting corollary to this discussion is the people generally *not* addressed by forced migration policies despite being involuntary migrants. Such groups generally come from countries perceived to be similar to Germany and thus have less of a need to integrate into German society overall. One example is EU nationals who left their countries of origin for primarily involuntary reasons such as homophobia,

domestic violence, or a lack of economic opportunity. Yet this extends to third-country nationals as well. Previous research on differentiated citizenship policies has compared outcomes for Turkish guestworkers and *Spätaussiedler:innen*[10] – German-speaking populations in the former Soviet Union who were automatically granted German citizenship upon the fall of the Iron Curtain (S. Green, 2005). *Spätaussiedler:innen* were less subject to integration programming than other migrant groups who entered Germany at the same time (Di Bartolomeo et al., 2015).

This differentiated approach to migration management manifested again in the over one million Ukrainians who have sought refuge in Germany since Russia began its full-scale invasion in February 2022 (Mickelsson, 2025). There are clear legal differences, such as the EU Temporary Protection Directive which granted immediate and collective protection to many people fleeing Ukraine, but not those attempting to leave Afghanistan after the takeover of the Taliban less than twelve months prior.[11] This also extended to the imperative to integrate into German society. These forced migrants were not subject to mandatory German language and integration courses, nor restrictions on housing and employment eligibility as many categories of forced migrants are.[12]

Beyond these three limitations to the term as a category of practice, it has also been critiqued as a category of analysis. The term "forced migrations" also homogenises experiences that can vary widely based on intersectional factors (Malkki, 1996). For example, some argue that the category of "refugee" should be kept distinct to emphasise the legal imperative for protection (Haines & Rosenblum, 2010; Ong, 2003). Others advocate for new terms such as 'survival migration' to

[10] I clarify my use of gender-neutral forms in footnote 2 (p. 12).
[11] The EU directive also only protected Ukrainian citizens and third country nationals who could not return to their country of origin. Therefore not all of those fleeing the war were eligible for protection in the EU (see Karakayali & Kron, 2023).
[12] This is not to suggest that Ukrainian refugees are not struggling in Germany. Ethnographic work has shone a spotlight on the many challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees in Germany (Davitian et al., 2024).

foreground lived experiences over institutional classifications (Betts, 2013). The forced versus voluntary binary does not fully capture the spectrum of motivations for people on the move (Crush et al., 2015; Erdal & Oeppen, 2018), nor does it include those unable to migrate due to involuntary immobility and statelessness (Carling, 2002).

Perhaps most importantly, continuing to reproduce this constructed category through research might inflict additional harm on this population. Terminology can impact the outcomes for migrants, including healthcare treatment (Horton, 2004), state governance (Thiollet et al., 2024), and even how individuals think of themselves in the context of displacement (Willen, 2005). In fact, many people reject the identity of "refugee" or "forced migrant" as one that continues to delimit them from fully identifying with their current place of residence.

One of my interlocutors, Fabakary Jobateh (known by friends as Papa Jo), drummer and antiracist educator, brought these experiences to my attention during my research. He read the consent form documents and handed it back to me, saying, 'I'm not a migrant, I'm a German citizen now'. Even though Papa Jo was born in the Gambia, I had to agree with him – according to the law he is no longer considered a migrant, but rather a full-fledged German citizen. And yet, he was still addressed by programmes aimed at migrants. The same was true of his fellow ZLG coursemates who immigrated to Germany as children or even those born in the country to migrant parents.

Papa Jo's reaction proved an important insight for me into the power of terminology. Programmes mostly target particular legally-defined categories on paper, such as "forced migrants" or "people with a migration background"; however, in practice they address and serve a different population altogether – those racialised in Germany's musical landscape.

2.1.4 Race as a category of (non)practice in Germany

German political and societal discourses have long eschewed addressing topics of race and ethnicity – despite producing many of the foundational ideas that gave rise to Western constructs of racial hierarchies. This reluctance to engage with race emerged, among other reasons, out of a confrontation with the persecution and genocide committed in the Third Reich (Campt, 2004). The discussion that followed connected racism with the crimes of National Socialism, which has hindered investigations into race-based violence in other eras of German history (Bojadžijev, Celikates, et al., 2025). Such violence includes genocides committed by the German state before 1930 – including that of the Herero and Nama in what is now Namibia and other colonial atrocities in present-day Tanzania (Zimmerer, 2023). The reluctance to engage with race has also mischaracterised the myriad of racially-motivated attacks in Germany since WWII that have been presented instead as "anti-immigrant" or "xenophobic" (Celikates, 2025). This resistance to talking about race in Germany extends to the academic world as well, as some view it as an ill-fitting concept imported from Anglo-American scholarship (Alexopoulou, 2023). Another feature of the debate in Germany is the terminological distinction between racism and antisemitism which has become more polarised and politicised in recent years (Bojadžijev, Brenner, et al., 2025).

Antiracism activists have nevertheless long been active in Germany (El-Tayeb, 2011; Florvil & Plumly, 2018; Louz, 2025; Oguntoye et al., 1986) and achieved a breakthrough into mainstream politics within the past ten years. The 2017 National Action Plan to Fight Racism [*Nationaler Aktionsplan gegen Rassismus*] introduced a broad set of reforms to address multiple forms of discrimination (including transphobia and Islamophobia) across a number of spheres. The

German National Monitoring of Discrimination and Racism [*Der Nationale Diskriminierungs- und Rassismusmonitor*], commissioned by the federal government, has published a number of studies since 2020 providing data on race-based discrimination in everyday life, media, and the law (Racism and Its Symptoms, 2025).

Despite this growing acknowledgment of race-based discrimination, the state has maintained its 'colourblind' foundations. This manifests clearly in the continued decision not to collect statistics and census data on race and ethnicity. Similar to practices in many other European countries, Germany grounds its disavowal of race as a way to counter discriminatory practices (Farkas, 2017). Instead, countries use proxies such as birthplace, citizenship, and family records to explain different outcomes within their populations. However, this refusal to collect race-based data makes it more difficult to attribute discrimination to race (Williams, 2025), such as in healthcare (Gangarova et al., 2025), policing (Hunold et al., 2025), and access to welfare and social services (Barwick-Gross, 2025; Lewicki, 2021). Fundamentally, this erasure of an identity does not bespeak a colourblind society, but is rather a structural manifestation of anti-Blackness (Cox, 2025; El-Tayeb, 2025).

Indeed, reluctance to recognise race as a demographic category actually exacerbates these boundaries of exclusion. When other identity characteristics (such as "migration background") are used as proxies for discrimination, such discourses engage in the process of *racialisation* (Murji & Solomos, 2005). This term foregrounds the overt constructedness of racial categories, as well as how race and racism emerged historically. While race is widely understood to be a construct based on bodily differences (R. Miles & Brown, 1989), the process of racialisation may unfold along any number of phenotypical or even perceived cultural lines (Lentin, 2020). This extends beyond just

the visual to "sonic colour lines" as well, such as speech and musical taste (Stoever, 2016). Racialised identities can be based on religion, language, and migration status (De Genova, 2017; Engelmeier et al., 2025; Köttig & Sigl, 2020; Meer & Modood, 2009; Menjívar, 2021; Partridge, 2012). As early critical race theorists wrote (Fanon, 1952/2008; Hall, 1996; Said, 1978), the construction of racial others often serves to reinforce the hegemony of an invisible Western white identity (Cox, 2025; Hesse, 2007) and are grounded in neoliberal, capitalist systems (Bhattacharyya, 2018). This means that racial bias can transpire even in the absence of racial language (Lewicki, 2021). Racialised discourses can also be unevenly applied, for example in the case of Eastern Europeans who are in some contexts seen as 'peripherally white' (Lewicki, 2023; Nowicka, 2024; Safuta, 2025).

While the process of "racecraft" in the US and UK is well-documented (Fields & Fields, 2022), similar studies in Germany have been hampered by a reticence to discuss racially-constructed othering (Bhimji, 2020; Bojadžijev, Celikates, et al., 2025). Such processes harden borders that are all the more difficult to identify and deconstruct in the absence of language around race and racialisation (Piwoni, 2025; Williams, 2025). While racialisation may lack a precise definition as a category of analysis (Garner & Selod, 2015; Goldberg, 2002), this study contributes to an understanding of how racialised individuals engage with this imposed identity in practice.

2.1.5 "Integration" as a 'wicked' category of practice and analysis

One outcome of the racialisation process is the imperative to "integrate". This manifests in which populations are subject to integration measures and into which idealised form of Germanness they should transform. The neocolonial harms inflicted by integration policy on racialised populations

are well documented (Favell, 2022), in particular in Germany (Bhimji, 2016; Etzel, 2023; Schulte, 2021). I unpack the critiques of integration policy itself more thoroughly in chapter four.

Yet some scholars even reject taking integration as an object of research at all given its many normative shortcomings (Rytter, 2019; Schinkel, 2018). They assert that research should not reproduce the harms inflicted through policy discourses. Furthermore, this orientation can bias research and obscure results that might challenge the trajectory of integration (de Haas & Fokkema, 2011). Nevertheless other migration scholars advocate for maintaining integration research, but employ a more critical approach that recognises its inherent problems and responds to them creatively (Penninx, 2019; Spencer & Charsley, 2021). Instead of 'writing against' integration, such approaches call for 'unmaking the architecture' of integration or recasting it as a 'wicked concept' (Kutor et al., 2023; Murphy & Vieten, 2025).

These latter perspectives offer a way forward for research that investigates the impact of these policy categories on migrants in precarious positions. Such a viewpoint recognises that while "integration", "migration background", and "forced migrant" are identities produced by nation-states, these constructs nevertheless have real, material consequences on individuals' lives and livelihoods. This manifests in employment and education opportunities, housing and healthcare, and everyday experiences of racism. As long as differences persist between the treatment of racialised migrants and other populations, integration remains a legitimate object of migration research. Nevertheless, as my encounter with Papa Jo showed me, continuing to refer to people in policymakers' terms can perpetuate these same harms.

Therefore, I adopted an approach akin to Oliver Bakewell's call for 'policy irrelevant research' (2008) in order to engage with experiences of racialisation and migration in more ethical and liberatory ways. In this project, I engaged with individuals first as musicians, not as forced migrants or people with "migration backgrounds". My research questions focused on the present and future – what are these artists doing now to reach their personal and professional goals? I thereby avoided probing questions into experiences in their countries of origin or asking them to reproduce experiences of flight. Many offered these without my asking, recapitulating narrative forms that are often demanded through the asylum process (Jacobs & Maryns, 2022). Yet, some did not offer information about their migration status or routes to Germany – and I did not ask for them. This means that for some interlocutors, I can only speculate about their residency status and right to work. What I can be sure of, however, is that they have been racialised through various integration and diversity programmes aimed at "diverse" people. This population is the primary group studied in this dissertation.

2.1.6 Racialised and forced migrant musicians in Germany's integration regime

Given the above discussion, one begins to see the terminological imprecision that ethnographers face when working with racialised people in Germany. This undifferentiated treatment of people across migration and citizenship categories reveals the undeniable racialisation that underlies the imperative of integration. Not all forced migrants are subject to integration measures, nor does integration only target forced migrants. The common underlying factor is experiences of *racialisation*. And what unites racialised musicians in the world music scene is their experience of

othering in their profession – whether based on their nationality, migration status, skin colour, ethno-religious identity, linguistic abilities, or artistic practice.

An important point to note is that racialisation is not necessarily always based on differences of skin colour. It is a social process whereby groups are essentialised based on characteristics perceived to be innate or unchangeable. Such characteristics can also include religion, migration status, culture, or language. These features, based on culturally constructed differences, often become the basis for their exclusion. Such identity markers of "Un-Germans" include being Black, Muslim, Sinti and Roma, a migrant, or speaking "*Ausländerdeutsch*" ["foreigner German"] (Cox, 2025; El-Tayeb, 2025; Partridge, 2012). These people are thereby marked as "other" and subjected to integration measures. Critics of the term "racialisation" argue that as an analytical category it groups together and thus mischaracterises different forms of discrimination (Garner & Selod, 2015; Goldberg, 2002). If we take this narrower understanding of racial discrimination as based solely on phenotypical features, then indeed it may be more fitting to characterise discrimination of white-presenting populations in other terms, such as as migranticisation, islamaphobia, or more general "othering".

However, I advocate for a broader understanding of racialisation in which nonracial markers of difference are subsumed into the logic of racial (non)belonging. I adopt the framing of racialisation posed by Jessie Cox (2025) in which culturally-constructed categories of difference are manipulated into physiological conceptions of belonging. As Cox discusses for neighbouring Switzerland, those without native blood cannot become full-blooded citizens. Therefore, while the imperative to integrate is imposed, the culmination of this process by becoming "German" remains

out of reach for most of these people (as I explore in chapter seven). Therefore, while the nominal basis for exclusion might be grounded in one's religion, language, or migration status, the mechanisms of exclusion all connect back to physiological narratives of blood, thus foregrounding biological notions of race-based belonging. Adrian Favell (2022) similarly argues that this racialisation is an inherent component of migrant integration regimes, not just a by-product thereof.

Scholars have repeatedly pointed to the connection between borders of non-citizenship and racialisation (Bhimji, 2020; Campt, 2004; Cox, 2025). This is particularly relevant in Germany's alleged "colour-blind" society (Williams, 2024) in which race intersects with issues of class and economic precarity (Amrute, 2016, 2020) and gender (Partridge, 2012). Such othering is perpetuated across domains, including access to healthcare (Falge, 2021) and online service provisions, dubbed "digital othering" (Berg, 2025). This extends to EU-citizens residing in Germany as well, for whom EU social protection benefits are often decided along racialised criteria of "deservingness" (Ratzmann, 2021).

Admittedly, while I write about the analytical category of *racialised musicians*, a large proportion of the people in this research can also be described as *forced migrant musicians.* As the above discussion shows, these identities overlap substantially but not fully. I use both of these categories of analysis because only in combination do they fully encompass the population at the heart of this research: those subjected to and addressed by integration and diversity measures in Germany's world music scene. This distinction is nevertheless important because precarities grounded in race and migration status can interact in unexpected ways, as this dissertation explores.

While I foreground discussions about racialisation in this dissertation, I do make use of these other terms outlined above. This is because "migration background", "integration", and "forced migrant/refugee" are still used in practice. These come to the fore in official policies, statistical categories, funding programme requirements, and sometimes even in how musicians refer to themselves. In such instances, these terms should always be understood as categories of practice, and I endeavour to distinguish them as such.

It should be noted that I also interviewed people who were either not forced migrants or racialised in Germany. These interviews mostly occurred at the beginning of my fieldwork, when I was aiming to gather general information about the scene and spoke to a wide range of people. These interlocutors include white German performers in world music, white EU migrants, and non-white third country nationals who immigrated voluntarily. However, these insights became important later to illustrate the different information and resources available to various categories of musicians within the world music scene, as well as the varying attitudes between these identity groups. While some might see such semantic imprecision as a methodological weakness (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003), these comparisons ground many of the insights in this dissertation. Indeed, speaking to a broader range of people allowed me to uncover which experiences were shared across demographics in the world music scene and which were unique to forced migrants and those racialised in these contexts.

I include one final justification for focusing primarily on the subcategory of racialised and forced migrant musicians: they are also "outsiders" in this social world and thus stand to make their own ethnographic contributions to understanding these processes. Migrants bear many resemblances to

ethnographers in the way they gather information and make sense of new contexts. Compared with so-called "natives" who have an intuitive sense of local social practices, I often worked together with my interlocutors to make sense of how this scene functions. By nature of their displacement, they must figure out new systems of social relations and culture. Accompanying people on this process as a fellow "outsider", I learned with them how this field worked through trial and error, asking questions, and sharing new information with one another. In this way, many forced migrants themselves work ethnographically to understand new social environments by questioning practices and how things are done. This process constitutes a large part of negotiating value, detailed in the following section.

2.2 Theories of value

This dissertation analyses the strategies of racialised and forced migrant musicians in the world music scene through the framing of value. I draw on theories from a number of works to explore the ways value is negotiated within this field. Understanding how value emerges across different cultures and societies has given rise to numerous lines of thinking in the past century. Some genealogies followed a Marxist framing in which value is positioned relative to labour and production (Blanchette, 2020; Chin, 2016). Others foregrounded socially-situated exchange in line with Mauss's *The Gift* (Mauss, 1925/1990; see also Ortiz, 2013). This dichotomy has been characterised as the study of *value* and *values*, or economic versus social exchange (Graeber, 2001).

Yet the production of value rarely emerges in solely economic or social contexts; many scholarly works on anthropologies of value examine how value and values relate. For example, some follow the 'social life of things' as they circulate through different regimes of value (Appadurai, 1986; see

also Chin, 2016; Pedersen, 2013; Stamatopoulou-Robbins, 2020). Others foreground how actors acquire and exchange different forms of capital that generate value within a given field (Bourdieu, 1984; see also Gershon, 2024; Mears, 2020). Yet another strain locates value in action and performance (Graeber, 2001; Lambek, 2013).

Many of these works on value have produced high-level theorisations through which one can analyse how different groups of people negotiate value (Souleles et al., 2023). In contrast, this dissertation will not develop a generalisable theory about how value emerges. Instead, I pursue the question now asked by value theorists, 'What can we say that is more specific about how life works?' (Souleles et al., 2023, p. 162). In this way, I follow in the path of recent ethnographies that examine the details of how value is made (Mears, 2020; Ortiz, 2021; von Schnitzler, 2016; Zaloom, 2019). To do so, I mobilise elements of value theory from anthropology and cultural studies to better understand how my interlocutors advance their careers. In this section I outline the relevant elements of value theory on which I draw. I engage first with David Graeber's action-centred theory of value, followed by Bourdieu's theory of capital and fields, with a specific focus on the field of cultural production. Finally, I survey theories of value creation in ethnomusicology.

2.2.1 Performing value through action

In his seminal work on anthropological theories of value, David Graeber posits an all-encompassing action-centred theory of value. He advocated for a more human-centred understanding of value, or the 'way in which actions become meaningful to the actor by being incorporated in some larger, social totality' (Graeber, 2001, p. xii). Sheyda's pride at opening her own music school illustrates this concept. Her efforts to establish her own career in music and gain

financial independence have been reflected back to her through recognition by the NRW world music scene and Germany's integration regime.

Graeber is quick to emphasise that by 'imagined totalities' he is not talking about bounded social units that exist in the field to be studied, as previous generations of social scientists believed. He refers instead to those which exist in collective imagination and shape actors' decision-making. These 'little universes of time and space constructed in the imagination' condense down reality's infinite complexity into spheres of valuation (2001, p. 87). But even with this simplification of reality, there exist multitudinous systems of values.

How these spheres relate creates conflict and competition. Graeber argues that while imagined totalities allow for the possibility of different value systems, hegemonic power structures place this diversity under threat. A failure to engage with the political dimensions of imagination risks unknowingly reproducing the logics of the market (2001, p. 89). He uses 'imagination' as the bridge from social totalities to freedom, specifically the freedom to decide 'what it is that makes life worth living' (2001, p. 88). I explore these differing – and at times conflicting – notions of freedom in the freelance music scene in section 3.5.

Therefore, Graeber argues, these 'imagined totalities' and their role in politics should not just be used to explain current structures, but to help imagine other ways of being. Graeber acknowledges that such a Maussian revolution through collective imagination may produce 'a naive relativism utterly blind to power' (2001, p. xiii). To ground this theory in real-world, observable behaviour, he argues that value is made visible through media of value. Such media not only represent value, they become items of value themselves or 'objects of desire' (2001, p. 259). The imagined totalities

reappear here as well, inscribed on the objects. Sheyda's pursuit of German qualifications and opening a small business represent such media of value. For her, these media have become the objects of desire themselves, although she began pursuing them as indicators of her own ability to survive and flourish in German society.

Again, such an all-encompasing theory risks reproducing structuralist interpretations. For example, Graeber wrote that, 'Such objects imply within their own structure all those principles of motion that shape the field in which they take on meaning' (2001, p. 259). Graeber claims to eschew this trap by focusing on action. These media of value do not represent structures, per se, but are rather 'frozen images of those patterns of actions'. And these objects of desire are in practice 'called into being by the very fact that people value them'. He connects back these representations to power through positioning value as 'potential for action', which he denotes as one's 'creative energies' (2001, p. 259). Such energies resist concrete definition and quantification, but are presented by Graeber as an expanded labour theory of value based on action. This act of creation has both symbolic and material significance, both of which are necessary to produce value. The materialism inherent in creative action refers back to these media of value that become objects of desire (such as money, or non-capitalist forms of remuneration). But the true source of value, according to Graeber, is one's capacity to act via these media. It is this cycle of action reflecting value within our imagined totalities that brings universes into being: 'This social order is not some abstract set of categories that exists prior to action. Actions are what it is, what it primarily consists of. It is a process of constant creation' (2001, p. 77).

To make this argument, Graeber draws on the work of Marilyn Strathern and Nancy Munn to establish the link between value, recognition, and action. Strathern argues that an object's value stems from the social relationships which it brings into being; its value is therefore not determined solely by the producers themselves. Value, arising from the social relationship produced by the activity, therefore only affixes itself to one part of the person, as recognised in the broader social totality. Similarly in Munn's theory, Graeber points out that value is 'importance being recognised by someone else' (2001, p. 47). This transpires through a process in 'which a person's invisible "potency" – their capacity to act – is transformed into concrete, perceptible forms' (2001, p. 45). Graeber mobilises these theories from Strathern and Munn to emphasise the role that the visibility of potencies, as recognised by others, plays in realising the value of our actions to ourselves. Graeber often calls this arena for recognition an 'audience':

> Insofar as value is social, it is always a comparison; value can only be realized in other people's eyes. Another way to put this is that there must always be an audience...For most of those involved in pursuing a particular form of value, that's what "society" is: that audience (2013, p. 226).

If those who reflect value are audiences, then that makes actors the performers. Graeber points to these moments of performance as the realisation of value – the way in which it is made visible. Simultaneously these actions partially constitute actors through seeing the potency of one's 'partible person' reflected back to them (Strathern, 1988).

Acknowledging this separation of individuals from the fields in which they operate allows the connection between actors, audiences, and values (accumulated structures of past action) to be probed. In laying out this argument Graeber uses Bourdieu's analogy of the social field as governed by 'rules of the game':

> Each [field] can, again, be imagined as a kind of game where the players are vying to accumulate some form of "capital," but at the same time, there is a kind of higher level game, of dominance, subordination, and autonomy, where the economic or political field will attempt to subsume the others, and fields like academia or art are forced to adopt complex strategies to maintain their own autonomy (2013, p. 228).

Graeber adds (drawing on work by Terence Turner) that this competition between individuals and across fields is the essence of politics, 'not just to accumulate value, but to define what value is' (2013, p. 228).

The inherent political struggle over value is made apparent throughout the chapters that follow. The actors at the centre of this study traverse multiple social fields to create their art, often engaging with different logics of economic and social value to bring their careers forward. Sometimes these values come into conflict. One example is the introduction of a minimum artist fee (section 3.4.3), which is intended to decrease freelancers' economic precarity, but might reduce the number of people who can earn a living as professional musicians. In this case, advocating for the social value of economic security might impede the goal of diversifying performers and the musics performed – two social values professed by the state. Another example is the tension between the underlying values of the LMA's certification programme to diversify music education institutions and the participants who pursue performing careers. While the LMA envisions these musicians participating in Germany's mainstream music education system, the musicians profess a different imagined totality for their music that may not necessarily be based on their race and ethnicity.

With this final comment about the political nature of value, Graeber nods toward the conflictual terrain underlying its determination. However, these frictions are not borne out in his grand

theory, neither ontologically nor methodologically. These 'imagined totalities' and large collectivities obfuscate the countless competing notions of what should and should not be valued, and how some positions gain hegemony over others. Graeber's record of activism and public anthropology refutes any accusations that he peddles a happy-go-lucky theory of the future. Yet, his focus on individuals creating value in 'communitarian' cooperation with others does not provide a fruitful apparatus for studying how these struggles over value are borne out in the public arena. An alternative frame for studying mid-level structures of value creation and exchange can be supplemented through Pierre Bourdieu's work.

2.2.2 Value, capital, and fields

Bourdieu's theory of capital and fields shed light on categories of value that undergird power and class differences reproduced across generations. In particular, his theorisations of the field of cultural production and position-taking help clarify the tensions between monetary, artistic, and political value which many world music professionals experience.

Capital is delineated into three different types of resources that actors accumulate and trade (Bourdieu, 1984). Economic capital is money or assets that can be easily converted into money. Cultural capital consists of the resources afforded by one's habitus – the embodied dispositions, or ways of being, that prefigure behaviour through practice. Social capital encompasses the resources afforded by one's social network, which can also mobilise economic and cultural capital. A spurious, fourth form is symbolic capital – understood as prestige. Bourdieu asserts that it does not constitute a genuine form of capital but is nevertheless widely accepted as such (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984).

Bourdieu conceives of capital as 'accumulated labour' stored either in material or embodied forms (1986, p. 241). It explains the ability to transform 'material types of capital into immaterial forms and vice versa' via the process of 'transubstantiation'. While capital may transform – such as when economic resources are exchanged for cultural capital through an education qualification – the fluctuating exchange rate between the types of capital means that their relative value must be negotiated in the broader social arena. Developing different forms of capital and promoting their exchange constitutes a significant part of qualification programmes. I explore these processes in the context of creating working professionals in section 5.2.

In Graeber's formulation, the social value of actions unfolds in imagined totalities; in a Bourdieusian reading value determinations play out in fields. Bourdieu developed his theory of fields over multiple works and synthesised it in his writings with Loïc Wacquant (1992). According to Bourdieu, a field is,

> ...a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation... in the structure of the distribution of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (Wacquant, 1989, p. 39).

Key to analysing a field is to understand the full spectrum of relations and distribution of power or capital. These hierarchies shape the exchange value of capital, as well as confer recognition (or indeed non-recognition, as I discuss in section 5.1). Even without the element of exchange, one's own position in the field is deeply entwined with power relations between actors. For example, the act of taking a political position only gains meaning in relation to the positioning of others

(Bourdieu, 1993). In this way, even taking a non-position is often still a stance that carries meaning within the politics of a particular field (see section 6.4).

Much like Graeber's imagined totalities, fields are constructs with the power to shape social experiences. The fact that a field exists largely in the mind of its members does not undermine its reality. As expanded upon in section 2.1.1, world music illustrates how an overtly-constructed category can nevertheless have real-life social consequences. According to Bourdieu, this shared perception gives a field its legitimacy.

Critics of Bourdieu's theory accuse him of focusing too much on actors as rational, selfish decision-makers (Bolin, 2012; Graeber, 2001). This approach, Graeber notes, does not account for how individuals can maximise for non-material values, such as friendship and communitarian living. Graeber initially rejected Bourdieu on this basis, claiming that the goal of value theory is not to 'cut through to the level on which you can say people are being selfish', but rather to investigate what is 'at stake' in the game of negotiating value (2001, p. 29).[13] Defenders of Bourdieu's field theory locate its strength in explaining the relationship between individual behaviour and large social systems. Indeed, in some fields, actors do make calculated decisions for themselves, even when they try to dissemble this fact.

The field of cultural production operates on this basis, which will be explored more in sections 3.3 and 5.4. Cultural production's unique logic as a field has been grounded in Bourdieu's empirical work (1993) as well as subsequent studies in this vein (Bennett et al., 2009; Grenfell & Hardy, 2007). Like Graeber's imagined totalities, Bourdieu posits that actors relate their decision-making

[13] In Graeber's later writings, however, he synthesises perspectives from Bourdieu's theory into his own work (see Graeber, 2013).

to their position within a social field. The strength of Bourdieu's approach is to understand how these totalities are constructed on the basis of power relationships, whether they are found among the Kabyle in Algeria or in France's *petite bourgeoisie*.[14] But what about when fields intersect? Ethnographies of artistic worlds beyond nineteenth-century French literary circles challenge Bourdieu's understanding of cultural production. In particular, they question whether the dualism of art for art's sake and commercial production obfuscates the multiplicity of meanings that art embodies (Manske, 2023; Olszewska, 2015; Ortner, 2013; Winegar, 2006). Nevertheless, field theory remains relevant as a compelling model to study both social structures and actors within them. Field theory's strength lies in its capacity to capture not only competition, but also 'shared passions', which draw out the approach's 'fluid and dynamic aspects' (Savage & Silva, 2013, p. 112). Compared with Graeber's communitarian approach, Bourdieu's theory of fields facilitates a more structured understanding of how individuals related to broader social structures.

From the brief overview of Graeber and Bourdieu's work on value given here, one can see how this stalemate has come about. This is partly due to the fact that authors on the topic of value 'struggle to clearly articulate common themes and to define what exactly is meant by value/s and its/their associated processes' (DuBois & Salas, 2021, p. 3). Graeber sought to position value as action performed within imagined totalities. Graeber's universal theory of value may be able to encompass diverse economic systems, but it does not necessarily explain how to approach mixed systems, especially those embedded within larger capitalist supply chains. Similarly, Bourdieu's

[14] Critics of Bourdieu's work argue that he privileges static structures and how power is maintained, not how it may be challenged. Richard Jenkins identified 'more than a passing similarity' to a structural functionalism's static view of the social world (2013, p. 56). This has bearing on the methodological approach, which in his ethnographic work in Algeria has been criticised. Jenkins accuses Bourdieu of locating behaviours to ground the theory, instead of the other way around: 'We are slipping here from a model of reality to the reality of the model' (Graeber, 2013, p. 52, see also Elster, 2016).

portrayal of capital's convertibility and consumption prefigures a static, rationalist approach that applies economic thinking to non-commercial areas of life (Bolin, 2012).

Given the existence of multiple frameworks for how to approach and theorise value, it seems that 'the good questions, fresh approaches, and big problems now exist in exploring the exciting and often quite weird implications of this larger paradigm' (Souleles et al., 2023, p. 167-8). Following this impulse, I similarly pose the question: how can these diverse understandings of value creation be integrated into actionable ethnographic research? Locating value in musical production may offer one answer.

2.2.3 Locating value in musical production

In this dissertation I argue that the world music scene presents a compelling field through which to understand broader values in Germany. This connection between music performance and value theory is already established in Graeber's framing of value as audience-performer relationship. Audiences, both imagined and real, reflect the value of our actions. These assemblages of people are where "society" takes concrete material form, such as in important ritual events, including concerts (2013, p. 226).

Ethnomusicologist Timothy Taylor draws an even more explicit connection between Graeber's theory of value and musical practice by developing 'ways of understanding the value of music that are not determined by conceptions of the economic' (2024, p. 152). To do so, he centres musical performance as a medium of value. This seems at first an odd proposition, as value is often stored in physical tokens that can be exchanged and compared. But if we consider performances as both the site of value's realisation and circulation, as Taylor argues, then we can see how a public event

also functions as a medium of value. The value itself is created long before and only becomes realised through performance. Value creation transpires through action – both the labour to prepare for the performance, as well as the social relations necessary to make it happen. My interlocutors intuitively understood this as well, as evidenced by the various strategies they take as freelancers to earn a living from music (section 3.3.1). This 'action potential' is then realised or made visible through material media, such as a performance. This framing dovetails with Graeber's insistence on value as actions which become meaningful through their reflection in a social totality. In other words, value requires an audience.

Through this paradigm, ethnographies within the field of musical production can ground such theories in empirical research. Indeed, studying value through music 'is a way of particularizing it, making it less amorphous, analyzing it as a way to try to understand what particular social actors are doing in particular times and places' (T. D. Taylor, 2024, p. 13). Recent studies in economic ethnomusicology work exactly at this nexus of value and values, as well as local meaning creation and global exchange (Morcom & Taylor, 2020). Many of these works reveal broader insights about value, production, and circulation through ground ethnographic case studies (Infante-Amate & Born, 2025; McGraw, 2020; Ndaliko & Anderson, 2020; Tsioulakis, 2020).

I will detail one such ethnomusicological investigation here, as it bears many similarities to the case study at the heart of this dissertation. Shannon Garland (2022) explores value creation in indie music scenes in South America. Specifically, she asks if value stems from the labour that goes into producing the music, the "sounds themselves", or the social relationships built through musical production and exchange. This third category should not be underestimated as they are 'the very

relationships that define aesthetic value and animate efforts to make independent music financially viable for all involved' (Garland, 2022, p. 3). All three are valued in the music industry and are unevenly represented through monetary transactions. My own interlocutors echoed this sentiment when discussing the issue of concert fees, quick to argue that 'it's not about the money', but rather about the recognition (see section 3.3.3). 'In other words,' Garland writes, 'the objectified form of money cannot account for the full sociality of the activities which produce music' (2022, p. 4).

Garland illustrates how these forms of value are balanced through the work of Fora de Eixo, a cultural organisation supporting the indie music scene beyond Brazil's large metropoles. Marginalised both geographically and within the music industry more broadly, this scene operates on the edges of the capitalist economy. Indie musicians engage in an alternative economy, pursuing music for the love of it, until they are 'translated' into productive, profit-generating musicians by record labels and corporations (T. D. Taylor, 2024). This strongly resembles the conditions in which world music performers in NRW find themselves, namely operating at the generic and geographical boundaries of their industry.

These issues of material reproduction at the margins are encapsulated by *Card*, the currency created by Fora de Eixo to pay its supporters. Card could only be redeemed in the network to compensate for labour related to performances (organising tours, marketing, applying for grants, cooking, etc.). This ensured the continued reproduction of the scene by creating a mechanism to reward the usually unpaid labour that goes into keeping this marginal, unprofitable enterprise afloat. But as with all media of value, it risked becoming the source of value itself, not just its

representation. This brought arguments within the scene to a material level about the 'relationship between aesthetic quality as value and acts of musical production as value' (Garland, 2022, p. 3).

Artists' fees in Brazil are called *cachê*, a word which fittingly summarises the central tension in remuneration: do artists' fees represent social prestige or rather the means to materially produce themselves? In this case study, cachê was conferred on people recognised as important for producing the world of indie music. This medium of value did not represent the entire value of the band aesthetically or the scene's social relations. Instead, it constituted the means to reproduce the system, which in turn conferred aesthetic and social value on its holders. The basis of exchange boiled down as such: bands perform labour (either through concerts or work supporting the network) and are paid in Card, which could be redeemed for future labour in the network, such as promotion and support staff for further concerts.

A complicating factor in this system of circulation was how it translated into the capitalist sphere beyond Fora's own network. While Card ensured the network's social reproduction, how would musicians pay for their own material reproduction with no externally-recognised currency? This was an especially bitter exchange given that Fora was awarded extensive public funding for its work, itself monetary recognition of the added value contributed by the network to Brazilian culture. In short, the network used Card to quantify its value creation in order to generate further value, materialised through state grants. But this money did not necessarily trickle down to the actors producing the basis of this value.

As Garland writes, this system of recognising value crumbled over time. Card incentivised Fora de Eixo to promote aesthetically weak bands who were committed to supporting the network and

punished those who did not perform free labour: 'Card thus highlighted, but could not resolve, the problem of how real cachê, the labor of production, and public recognition– which entails the judgement of aesthetic quality – should be linked' (2022, p.9). The world music scene in NRW is facing similar challenges in regulating artist remuneration with public money. This tension will be explored through the introduction of a minimum artist fee (section 3.4.3).

Garland brings the discussion to a close by returning to the initial question: is the source of value in a marginal music scene the labour, aesthetics, or social recognition? She notes the shift from locating value in labour solidarity to visibility through public recognition, i.e. circulation. Fora de Eixo came to focus its work on promoting bands who already had achieved a certain degree of circulation. This recognition by association benefitted the network within its own field of cultural politics in Brazil (2022, p. 10). This constitutes a classic example of fetishism where the medium of value (public recognition) is confused for the locus of value (the musical performance and the labour which made it possible). My fieldsite experienced a similar displacement of value. In this case, an education qualification became fetishised when the world music scene in NRW attempted to increase its professional standing using this institutionalised cultural capital (section 5.5).

Garland acknowledges that such larger social totalities, such as Fora de Eixo, are necessary for the realisation of value. But, she insists, value determination should nevertheless still arise from exchange, discussion and performance, not the other way around (2022, p. 11). This conclusion can be applied to other fields as well. For example, I explore how the value of diversity became similarly inverted in sections 4.1 and 5.6.

Through Garland's work and that of other ethnomusicologists writing about value, we can see how music becomes a site to study broader phenomena, including precarity (Tsioulakis, 2020), capitalism (Infante-Amate & Born, 2025), affective labour (Silverman, 2022), and the moral economy of humanitarianism (Ndaliko & Anderson, 2020), among others. While Garland's fieldsite is geographically and artistically removed from my own work, the underlying logic of value creation in a peripheral music scene still applies. Drawing connections to her work has allowed me to analyse world music in NRW not just as a singular case, but as another instance of marginalised cultural producers negotiating value at the intersection of social, aesthetic, and economic logics. Before I begin to unpack these broader social discourses in subsequent chapters, I will first ground them in the context of NRW.

2.3 NRW as fieldsite

This section will introduce the context of NRW and Germany more broadly as centres for world music through their history of migration and state support for arts and culture. In contrast with the wealth of literature at the national level or focusing specifically on Berlin (Bader & Scharenberg, 2010; Irscheid, 2023b; Kaya, 2015; Leggewie & Meyer, 2017; O'Toole, 2019), this study instead takes the paradigm of a subnational region. Such an approach not only challenges methodological nationalism in migration and anthropology research (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002; Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017), but in fact allows a broader diversity of experiences within Germany to be captured and represented.

2.3.1 *Einwanderungsland*: migration to NRW since 1949

Germany is a country of immigration, although as a society, it has only recently begun to see itself as such (Hell, 2005). Large-scale immigration from other countries beyond Central and Eastern Europe began in the 1950s with West Germany's recruitment of guest workers from around the Mediterranean. Through deals with Italy (1955), Spain (1960), Greece (1960), Turkey (1961), Morocco (1963), Portugal (1964), Tunisia (1965), and Yugoslavia (1968), approximately 14 million people came on temporary work contracts to West Germany. The programme formally ended with the economic crisis of 1973, but many workers remained and brought their families to Germany as well. While temporary limits on work permits slowed immigration in the 70s and 80s, German unification and the fall of the Soviet Union facilitated new mobility patterns across the region. In addition to internal migration between the newly-unified states, 1.4 million ethnic Germans from the Eastern Bloc [*Spätaussiedler:innen*] arrived in Germany between 1989 and 1993 (Hess & Green, 2016). Conflicts in the Balkans, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Chechnya (among others) led to many people migrating and seeking asylum in Germany in the 1980s and 90s. EU freedom of movement and enlargement, alongside sweeping immigration legislation in the 2000s, paved the way for different patterns of migration to Germany, with policy particularly focusing on highly skilled workers. However at the same time the right to asylum was being restricted, most notably through the 1992 *Asylkompromiss* [asylum compromise] which amended the right to asylum in Germany's Basic Law.

Asylum law and integration policy took centre stage again following 2015's "long summer of migration". Despite then-Chancellor Merkel's claim '*wir schaffen das*' ['we can manage this'], the

"welcome culture" quickly faded into violent backlash against refugees and migrants (Benček & Strasheim, 2016). This was fuelled by a racialised debate around protection, deservingness, sexism and "German values" (Hinger & Schweitzer, 2020; Köttig & Sigl, 2020). In terms of migration policy, the gap between voluntary and forced migration pathways has grown larger. On the one hand, the 2020 Skilled Immigration Act opened new avenues for third-country nationals to work in German industries with labour shortages. On the other, asylum laws have been tightened once again, including restricting eligibility for family reunification, expanding the number of safe countries of origin, spearheading EU border externalisation deals (i.e. with Tunisia and Turkey), and reintroducing internal-EU border controls with neighbouring countries. While the number of asylum applications dropped dramatically during the Covid-19 pandemic, it rose again significantly with the lifting of lockdown restrictions as well as the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021 and Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

This history of migration is a core element of NRW's present-day identity. As the economic heart of West Germany's economic miracle [*Wirtschaftswunder*], NRW has been a destination across the decades for many migrants. Guestworkers in the 1960s and 70s came to the Ruhr region and Rhineland cities through recruitment programmes and later settled with their families. Subsequent migrants found economic opportunities and social networks in NRW's many urban centres, although some have also moved into smaller cities and rural regions (see Aeham Ahmad's story in section 3.1).

These narratives are reflected in demographic statistics. NRW is Germany's most populous state and the most densely populated (not including the city-states). A quarter of all people with a

"migration background" live in NRW (*Population in Private Households*, 2024). Approximately 35% of the population in NRW is identified as having a migration background in 2023 (*Population*, 2024). 14% of people in NRW have a so-called migration background without a migration experience of their own, otherwise known as the post-migration generation, or children of migrants. 21% of NRW's population have migrated to Germany themselves. This population of "*Nichtdeutsche*" ["Non-Germans"] has risen even since I began my DPhil, from 14.2% in 2021 to 15.9% in 2024 (*Nichtdeutsche Bevölkerung*, 2024).

Labour market integration of migrants in Germany overall has yet to reach the level of those born in the country. In 2024, the employment rate among migrants stood at 70%, a full 10% lower than that of native-born workers; among highly qualified migrants, the difference expands to a 15% difference (*Stand der Integration*, 2024). Forced migrants face even more barriers to entering the labour market. Even after accounting for differences in human capital, a significant part of the employment and wage gap between refugees and other migrants cannot be explained by educational attainment or language skills alone. These structural hurdles push many migrants (and other racialised people) into self-employment and entrepreneurship. People with a so-called "migration background" are more than twice as likely to found their own company than people without a migration background since 2021 (Täube et al., 2024). As chapters three and five in this dissertation show, this overrepresentation of migrants among entrepreneurs is often celebrated in public discourse, but this laudation masks the factors excluding them from more secure employment opportunities.

Given this broader migration context in Germany and NRW specifically, in what ways do the interlocutors at the heart of this study reflect these trends? Based on the survey of musicians in Cologne's world music scene I conducted with IFM in 2023, we may draw some comparisons. 25% of respondents identified as people of colour (PoC) and 38% have a non-German passport. All the respondents are engaged in entrepreneurial work for their art. Self-reported data on monthly income shows an impoverished artist class in the world music scene. In Germany overall, an individual was considered below the poverty line in 2023 if they earned less than 1,247 EUR before taxes per month, which described roughly 21% of the overall population. In our survey, we found that at least 46% of respondents were living in poverty by these standards. While reports on outcomes for migrants' labour market integration show modest gains in past years, the experiences of interlocutors in this study present more mixed results.

2.3.2 The *Kulturstaat*

Germany's flourishing arts and cultural scene is bolstered by its self-image as a *Kulturstaat*. Germany emerged as a "cultural state", or a state that supports independent arts and culture, out of a confrontation with the horrors of the Third Reich. In contrast to the Nazi Party's use of art for propaganda, the newly-formed West German government committed itself to funding independent artistic production, regardless of its economic or political positioning. This led to state-funded arts that critiqued the hand that fed them. As anthropologist Jonas Tinius wrote about West German theatre in the second half of the twentieth century, it developed an uncomfortable position of being 'non- commercial and critical, yet bourgeois and dependent on cultural patronage' (2023, p. 60). This position extends to the myriad state music ensembles and

operas in Germany, which receive considerable public funding to support their independent artistic creation. In NRW, nearly 50% of public culture expenditure goes to the performing arts (Landeskulturbericht, 2022, p. 269).

Beyond direct funding for performing institutions, the *Kulturstaat* also supports the many associated organisations which facilitate these performances, including political representation organisations, music schools, cultural education, competitions, festivals, and professional development programmes. These interventions cut across all levels of governance. In 2021, for which the latest statistics are available, the federal government spent nearly 3.5 billion Euros on arts and culture. The states collectively spent 5.6 billion Euros and the municipalities 5.8 billion Euros (*Öffentliche Ausgaben Für Kultur*, 2025). In NRW alone, 870 million Euros were spent in 2021 in the areas of theatre and music. Among the federal states, NRW often boasts the highest absolute expenditures in culture with most of the funds coming from municipalities (Kulturfinanzbericht, 2024). This combination of federal, state, and municipal funding for culture poses a challenge to creating an overarching understanding of the funding landscape within one region, much less facilitating international comparison.[15] However, one should also note that these expenditures do not necessarily reflect strong from the population interest in these cultural offerings; NRW also has the lowest rate of attendance in public concert halls and theatres in comparison with other federal states – about 15 people per 1,000 residents (*Kulturstatistiken* 2024). This contrast between strong state support for the arts and relatively low attendance rates characterises the German Kulturstaat;

[15] . NRW's closest basis for comparison is with the Netherlands which also has a population of roughly 18 million. While the Netherlands funds 12 public orchestras in the entire country, NRW alone boasts 23, about one for every 880,000 residents.

public funding for performing arts is not driven by popular demand or public engagement, but rather a commitment to state support of independent artistic creation (Tinius 2023).

Yet there is a huge disparity in resources available to the institutionalised and independent music landscape, in particular the world music scene. In NRW, much of the public funding for music goes to public orchestras and operas, as well as the public conservatories. To date there are no state-funded ensembles for world music in the state, and only one course of study at the HfMTK which was inaugurated in 2024 (see footnote 67 on p. 221). The primary way in which public funding reaches the world music scene is through individual project funding, the limitations of which will be shown in section 3.4. In terms of cultural production more broadly, racialised artists in Germany's post-migration society have less access to public funds for their work (Schneider et al., 2024)

While this structural imbalance in public investment was evident to many people I spoke with in the scene, there is a distinct lack of available data on funding for these musicians and their art to back up these claims. The *Deutsches Musikinformationszentrum* [German Music Information Centre] has produced the most comprehensive study to date about professional musicians in Germany; yet this report failed to disaggregate income data by genre or by migration/ethnic background (Deutsches Musikinformationszentrum, 2023). Similar issues emerges in the NRW Landeskulturbericht (2022) and the federal Kulturfinanzbericht (2024), neither of which present data separated by individual genres or migration status of funding recipients. This lack of large scale studies to track the flow of public money in Germany's cultural scene prevents systematic inquiries into the equity of public investment in the arts.

This asymmetrical public investment in different genres illustrates the limits of Germany's *Kulturstaat* ideal. Indeed, even state policies that aim to reduce freelancer precarity might actually have the opposite effect for some, in particular racialised and forced migrant musicians. As this dissertation endeavours to show, the strength of social and professional protections in Germany in many instances exacerbates the harms for those outside of their remit.



Figure 3: Final performance by attendees at the 2023 "Sounds of Zagrosian" workshop in Cologne

Chapter 3: The value of world music in the racialised gig economy

Sitting on a wobbly plastic chair in a darkened room, I watched Sheyda take the stage and face her ensemble. She raised her arms, gave a downbeat and the 19 musicians erupted into song. Sheyda kept time with her index finger, later moving to the side of the crowded stage, leaning against the wall, and smiling as one of the instrumentalists played a solo. The ensemble stumbles through a rather difficult passage and Sheyda smiles encouragingly with wide eyes and energetic nodding.

This concert is the culmination of her three-day amateur music workshop "Sounds of Zagrosian" in Cologne (Figure 3, p. 87). Sheyda has organised and implemented everything – from developing the initial concept, acquiring funding, planning the logistics, and coordinating the teachers and participants. 'I don't make any money from this', she told me, 'but it's important to me that I can share my culture here in Germany and do something for myself'.

State-funded institutions agree. They want to support forced migrants pursuing their own career paths. As posed in chapter one, Sheyda embodies everything they advertise in their 'cultural diversity' programming. She independently develops new, creative project concepts and implements them. She sings about women's empowerment and talks about her activist work in Iran. She is not only proficient in the German language, but also in the state's bureaucratic processes. Such people have become the focus of state funding programmes which attempt to transition from helping "refugees" [*Flüchtlinge*] to "empowering forced migrants" [*Empowerment von geflüchteten Menschen*]. This change in language mirrors the broader migrant debate in

Germany which now centres on supporting forced migrants to become self-sufficient, integrated members of society.

And self-sufficient is exactly what Sheyda wants to become – independent of state welfare and just another freelance musician trying to make it in Germany. She loves the freedom it brings. She decides her own schedule, pursues her interests, and creates opportunities for herself and her art. 'Being a freelancer isn't easy', Sheyda told me one night over dinner, 'But I am going to make it, I know it'.

When we meet, we often talk about her professional plans: what sort of work she wants to do, the educational opportunities that will help her get there, and which contacts she needs to move forward. But ultimately in these discussions, we end up talking about money. Not because she is greedy, but rather the opposite. She is reluctant to demand contracts or talk openly about artist fees with concert organisers. 'These projects are nice events, music is a good thing', she told me one day. 'I don't want to ruin it by talking about money or looking like I only care about what I get out of it.'

This goodwill has been exploited in the past. In 2024 she joined the teaching staff of a music education project in Düsseldorf. She was recommended by the LMR based on the success of her previous projects. We celebrated the fact that she was expanding her network and seemed to be getting noticed not just as a refugee, but as a professional singer in her own right. I asked her how much they paid her. She looked at the ground, 'Well they haven't given me my contract yet'. I pointed out that she had been teaching for weeks at this point, to which she responded, 'I know, but I don't want to be too pushy. I'm sure it will be fine'.

A few weeks later, she was quite ill and called to cancel her lessons. The programme insisted that she should come in and teach if she could manage. Still without a contract and not wanting to anger them, she travelled to Düsseldorf and began the lesson. Within minutes she collapsed and was brought to the hospital in an ambulance. The doctors told her she was fighting a virus and her stomach was aggravated by stress. She was told not to do anything strenuous, including work, for two weeks. But of course, this advice compounded the stress of her precarious situation. She was less worried about losing two weeks' income – she still received support from the unemployment office as a refugee trying to build a freelance career. What worried her more was the threat of losing future opportunities with this organisation and others with which she worked. She concentrated her efforts in 2024 on building up a portfolio of teaching and performing opportunities to decrease her reliance on the unemployment office. She wanted to be independent of public benefits by the end of the year, and cancelling half a month's engagements could jeopardise these relationships. She carried on.

But the situation in Düsseldorf did not improve. The next time we met, she came through the doorway fuming. 'I just found out that my male colleague is making more than me! But I have more students – nobody goes to his classes!' The difference in pay stemmed in all likelihood from their educational backgrounds. Without a recognised degree in Germany, Sheyda is often put in lower salary brackets than those with bachelor's degrees. But she saw this as unfair compensation relative to the work she performed for the organisation. Following this revelation, she returned to the organisation and demanded contract negotiations. She and her colleague are now paid the same amount per hour, formalised in a written contract.

But the terms of the contract still put Sheyda in a precarious position. She was engaged as a freelancer, not an employee of the organisation. Her job was subject to renewal after a few months, meaning she could be let go in the middle of the year. And ultimately, the payments were still hypothetical at that point – she had not received any money after months of teaching. The programme is funded by a state institution, which only pays lump sums to project managers to distribute at the midpoint of the project and at the end. Until the money appeared in her bank account, she still felt unsure about how much she would actually be paid. Sheyda thought joining a publicly-funded project would mean stability. But as a freelancer contracted by another organisation, she did not see many of the benefits that state funding supposedly brings.

Sheyda's experiences and those of other cultural actors in this chapter illustrate the dual nature of freedom in freelance work. This creative independence and chance at self-made success is not only valourised by migrants, but state migration narratives as well. The goal of labour market integration is to support the economic independence of forced migrants, especially those with entrepreneurial ambitions. Yet, migration policy and precarious conditions in the creative sector can inhibit as much as enable these initiatives, as this chapter endeavours to show.

Section 3.1 will outline the structural barriers to labour market integration that forced migrant musicians face. I trace their entrepreneurial pathways into Germany's world music scene through theories of mixed embeddedness, mobility, and the field of cultural production in section 3.2. In section 3.3 I detail the practical strategies these 'reluctant entrepreneurs' employ to scale up their careers, focusing on their various sources of income, non-musical labour performed off stage, and how artist fee negotiations unfold. The analysis then turns to the state's dual role as both an

enabler and a disciplining force in the freelance scene in section 3.4. I examine how public funding and professional protections can exacerbate precarity for not only musicians but also venues. I illustrate the impact of state and market logics on the freelance scene through the proposed minimum artist fee in NRW, which is due to roll out in 2026. Finally, section 3.5 concludes the chapter by synthesising these threads to critically interrogate the ambivalent value of 'freedom' in the racialised gig economy, challenging heroic narratives of migrant entrepreneurship in the face of multiple precarities.

The ways in which these musicians translate their actions into a capitalist space shows the extent to which they can generate economic value from their work. It also illustrates the limits of what musicians are willing to do "just for the money". The many pathways migrants take into freelance work, told here through the experiences of musicians, can reveal insights about the values underpinning larger economic forces: precarity, flexible capitalism, and the role of the state.

3.1 Barriers to accessing the labour market for forced migrants

Increasing the labour market participation of migrants is a major concern of migration policy in destination countries. This is not just limited to forced migrants, but those across the forced-voluntary spectrum including highly skilled workers. This complex process of matching the needs of migrants, employers, industries, and societies demands multifaceted policy interventions. Such initiatives are supposed to identify existing human capital, match migrants with appropriate education and work experience opportunities, and lower the barriers to entry into the labour market.[16]

[16] The primary policy levers include language and culture classes, qualification recognition and skill assessment, education, apprenticeships and work experience, career counselling, facilitating the right to work and long-term

However, these integrative measures have been unevenly applied to different categories of racialised migrants. Asylum seekers must adhere to other regulations which dampen or even counteract these integrative measures. For example, the dispersal of forced migrants across Germany follows the capacity of local authorities and states and does not take into account career prospects or family networks. The number of asylum seekers allocated per region is based on current population density and the unemployment rate, meaning that more refugees find themselves in rural areas where there are often fewer employment opportunities available to them (Degler & Liebig, 2017).

The prospect of employment only becomes relevant in most cases after asylum has been granted. In 2022, this process took an average of six to seven months.[17] For asylum seekers with job offers, wait times to enter the market have been lowered from nine months or more to three months, but some authorities impose additional hurdles (Degler & Liebig, 2017). In order to work in cities with high levels of unemployment among residents, asylum seekers in their first 15 months in Germany must secure a job over a locally-determined salary threshold and demonstrate that no unemployed EU citizen is eligible for the position. The bar is raised further if one wishes to move to a different city in order to take up employment or education. In most cases, a forced migrant must have a job offer that meets minimum salary requirements in order to relocate. To move on the prospect of employment alone is not allowed until three years after asylum status is approved. Some states, including NRW, have extended this wait time to four years (Degler & Liebig, 2017).

Conditions become even more restrictive for those with Duldung, or tolerated stay. This applies to migrants with rejected asylum claims, but whose deportation has been temporarily suspended. It

staying prospects, and incentives for employers (Hooper et al., 2017).

[17] However, if one had begun proceedings in another EU state, the average time rose to nearly two years (*Antwort Der Bundesregierung*, 2023).

functions as a fragile residence status subject to reversal at any point. Among the many types of Duldung status, only some grant the right to work. Overall, those in this category have limited recourse to state resources in comparison with recognised refugees (Gesetz zur Steuerung, 2004). Some politicians in migrant-receiving countries claim that these measures deter voluntary migrants who use asylum pathways to obtain work permits. Evidence to support such claims is either lacking (Czaika & De Haas, 2013) or even contradictory (Abdelaaty, 2023). Better data exists on labour market integration outcomes overall, which shows generally positive trends in Germany since 2015 (Stand der Integration, 2024). Yet this data does not reflect the diversity of pathways taken by migrants in this process, nor the potential counteractive effects of enforced integration.

Ethnographic work in the past years has begun to fill these gaps. Leonie Schulte (2021, 2024) shows that the period in which asylum seekers aren't allowed to work but are expected to gain German proficiency may actually inhibit integration outcomes. Morgan Etzel (2023) similarly outlines how Germany's asylum decision system, unemployment office, and other bureaucratic institutions inflict harm on asylum seekers who do not align with the narrow model of the "grateful refugee". Both of these ethnographies show the challenges to labour market integration stemming from poor living conditions, unemployment, limited benefits, and opaque bureaucratic processes.

Even after asylum is granted, a data gap continues to limit our understanding of forced migrants' outcomes, especially in terms of labour market participation. For example, data on secondary migration within Germany could answer questions about where forced migrants want to live and where they find employment. Here too ethnographic work paints a richer picture than the statistics

can show. In my own research, many interlocutors have voluntarily relocated at least once since arriving in Germany. The two driving forces were proximity to family and career prospects. Hossein*, an Iranian percussionist, was initially sent to Magdeburg in the eastern state of Sachsen-Anhalt. There his career ambitions were frustrated by the relatively small world music scene. He dreamed of moving to Cologne, home to many stars in Persian art music and a large Iranian community. Yet, as someone with Duldung status, he needed to provide evidence of a work contract in order to relocate. He took the first job offer he received: assembling and sorting packages in a shipping facility. He commented spitefully, 'I did a masters' degree in Iran, and that's where I found myself everyday'. Soon he left that job and has since been pursuing a part-time MA degree in Germany and a budding performing career.

Those with asylum also face a long bureaucratic process if they want to relocate within Germany. Aeham Ahmad struggled to find housing in the city of Wiesbaden for his seven-person family, including his visually-impaired father. The Syrian-Palestinian pianist and his family successfully petitioned to move from an urban to a rural area, and now live near Warburg at the very edge of NRW. He has to travel far for his concerts, but at least he and his wife's combined income can put a roof over their family's head. Petitioning to move from one urban area to another, or from Eastern Germany, proves more difficult, as Sheyda experienced. She was initially housed in refugee camps in the state of Saxony, where anti-immigration sentiment has become a rallying point for many political groups, including the far-right extremist group Pegida. After she was twice attacked by far-right extremists, she relocated to Cologne to be with her brother (see p. 16 for Sheyda's biography). This move defied the terms of her asylum status, which caused some issues for her in

those first few months. Looking back, she said it was worth it: 'How can I live somewhere where I don't feel safe?'

These lived experiences illustrate the limitations and potential harms inflicted on refugees by the very policies that are nominally meant to support them. One example of a differentiated policy would be to expand degree and skill recognition programmes that try to reduce skill-employment mismatch and migrant overqualification, an issue that I explore more in section 5.1.

Through these examples we see how the state both affords and limits labour market integration. Yet finding decent, meaningful work transpires largely through the 'creative energies' of the migrants themselves (Graeber, 2001, p. 56). Within these pathways to workforce participation, individuals must find their own place within this complex system. This is especially true in freelance work and self-employment more broadly.

3.2 Migrant entrepreneurship, mixed embeddedness, and mobility

How does one get started in Germany's world music scene? In this section I profile my interlocutors' career trajectories, from their first concerts in Germany, to finding audiences for their music, and to where they hope to play in the future. Such strategies of racialised and forced migrant musicians can be viewed through the lens of entrepreneurship. I set these interlocutors' experiences in dialogue with theories of mixed embeddedness, mobility, and the 'universe of belief' in cultural production. I ultimately argue that we might call these musicians 'reluctant entrepreneurs' in the precarious gig economy (Haynes & Marshall, 2018).

When I asked my interlocutors how they got started in Germany, many people reflected on their first gigs. For forced migrants, this ran primarily via refugee aid organisations, multicultural festivals, or churches/interreligious encounters. The Iranian *santur*[18] player Kioomars Musayyebi was "discovered" at a jam session in Dortmund by an established guitarist in the music scene. Mohammad Khaled, a keyboardist and pedagogue from Syria, met his biggest advocate by performing at a multicultural street fest in the small Ruhrgebiet town of Witten. This selective story-telling mythologises such encounters. One's career seemingly hinges on the right gatekeeper attending the right events and recognising the value of the performer. This relativises or ignores previous failures and the considerable educational and financial investments made to even reach the stage in the first place.

Indeed, considering the risks involved, it seems surprising that so many forced and low-income migrants engage in freelance work at all. The so-called start-up costs are high. This includes the time and money invested in education and honing one's craft, as well as acquiring the material means necessary to be heard. Musical instruments, equipment, transportation – the costs add up quickly. Mohammad confessed that he bought his first keyboard with help from his parents in Syria, commenting, 'That's not how it's supposed to be, people in Syria sending money to Germany for us to buy things!' Migrants are not just limited by costs, but by the very availability of materials in Europe. Ordering specialty instruments online can take months to be delivered. When I wanted to take a picture of Hossein's collection of *dafs*, a frame drum from the SWANA region, he forbade me from sharing it anywhere, because 'if people find out I have all these instruments, they'll come and try to buy them off me!' A daf order can take months to ship and pass through

[18] A hammered dulcimer commonly found in Iranian music.

customs. Therefore, many people rely on family and friends to bring the instrument when they travel to the region.

Early research on migrant entrepreneurship pointed to such transnational exchange to explain how those without substantial financial means could nevertheless establish businesses (Kloosterman et al., 1999; Portes et al., 2002). As shown through these two anecdotes, migrants often got their start by mobilising social networks across borders. Shifting the frame of analysis to transnational entrepreneurship identifies the strength of migrant ties in countries of origin and destination. This was a key insight in the early 2000s, especially as debates around the "retreat of multiculturalism" swirled and new integration policies took hold (Schönwälder & Triadafilopoulos, 2016). In a foundational study in this field, Portes et al. (2002) compared institutional factors impacting transnational entrepreneurship, such as conflict and stable governments in countries of origin, and migrant outcomes in the US. They concluded that transnationalism does not hinder migrant integration, but rather opens up additional career pathways. In fact, businesses meeting the needs of one's ethnic community often offer an avenue to self-employment in general (Lassalle et al., 2020).

Migrant entrepreneurs accomplish this through strategies of mixed embeddedness – encompassing the multiple social and institutional fields in which they operate by nature of their migration background. According to Kloosterman et al. (1999), migrants mobilise strong and weak ties in both countries of origin and destination to find and exploit niches in the market. This generally follows the trajectory of businesses first servicing one's ethnic community in the country of destination, but then expands to include other communities and the native population. Building

on Portes's comparison of migrants' outcomes based on their countries of origin, the mixed embeddedness approach compares institutional factors at home and in the receiving country that influence entrepreneurship. These include regulations, state welfare provisions, and systems of networks and relationships (Kloosterman, 2010).

Migrant musicians similarly make use of their mixed embeddedness, especially to gain a foothold in the world music scene. Many migrants got their first performance opportunities in Germany via events organised by their ethnic or national communities. This was the case for Sheyda, whose first performances at Newroz festivals and political rallies were organised and paid for by Kurdish cultural organisations. In these settings, musicians can make use of skills cultivated in their country of origin, such as performing familiar repertoire and addressing audiences in a common language. These gigs simultaneously help bring their careers forwards in Germany through networking with established co-ethnic musicians and event organisers, as well as exchanging knowledge about how the scene works. These non-state actors play a large role overall in supporting new arrivals in Germany. They help migrants navigate bureaucracy, find accommodation, and seek legal advice. Catu Diosis, a DJ from Uganda, identified MigAfrica office as her primary support structure in Germany. Even though they do not specialise in performing arts, this non-profit works as a knowledge hub bringing together actors in Cologne to match skills with needs.

While performing at these events put on by cultural organisations have proved valuable for musicians at the start, few want to stay exclusively in this circuit. First of all, such events almost never pay proper artist fees. The band 5000 Miles noted that the payments rarely even cover the cost of getting to and from the gig itself. Mohammad shared a similar sentiment. His band toured

the "*Multikulti* circuit" at the beginning, playing 20-minute sets for various pro-diversity, pro-migration festivals. He admitted that the fees were fair given the short time they spent on stage. But playing four songs at a street fair barely justified the effort of setting everything up and tearing it down again.

Many musicians identified private events (such as weddings and political rallies) as the exception to normally low fees. Such events bring with them their own risks, especially to a "serious" musician's reputation. For example, *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* [Kurdistan Workers' Party] – more commonly known as the PKK – offers exceptional sums to musicians who perform at events. But given their political status as an extremist group in Germany, such a performance might have repercussions to future opportunities, both professional and in migration proceedings.[19] Weddings are politically much safer gigs, and depending on the culture, can also be immensely profitable. Bellan Mustafa, a towering figure in the Balkan and Turkish wedding circuit, can earn as much money performing with wedding bands in Southeast Europe for one month as he earns in his day job in Germany for half of a year. Nevertheless, he wants to leave the wedding band world. He dreams of concert halls where he can premiere his Balkan-jazz crossover music for clarinet instead of playing someone else's tunes for a party.

Bellan's career orientation points to a second critique of this co-ethnic economy from musicians: such opportunities are limited to *events*, not *concerts*. Musicians distinguish between concerts, where music is the main focus, and events, where music plays a functional role to create the desired festive atmosphere. This affective labour plays an important role in cultural transmission and value creation in music (Schäfers, 2022; Silverman, 2022), but musicians do not always see their artistic

[19] Sheyda and I had our own encounters with the party, which I detail in section 6.4.

value reflected in these gatherings. Negar Bouban, an oudist from Iran, explained to me that at events, audiences expect a spectacle achieved through the music. Instead, she prefers concerts, where the music is intrinsically valued.[20]

To make this transition from events to concerts, one also must appeal to a broader audience in order to make a living. This is not to say that minority ethnic groups do not have "taste" for concerts. Indeed these relatively small audience bases often do not have enough ticket-buyers nor institutional support from the Kulturstaat to sustain their own parallel scene in Germany.[21] Such a trajectory – from relying exclusively on one's own ethnic/national community for business, to engaging with consumers from the majority society – reflects exactly that outlined in mixed embeddedness theory (Kloosterman et al., 1999). At the end of this pathway, the theory posits, migrant entrepreneurs cannot be distinguished from their 'indigenous' counterparts.

But the experiences of some of these musicians tells a different story. Instead of moving from the minority to majority society, others have done the opposite. One example is Nure Dlovani, a Kurdish woman born in Armenia who trained as a violinist in Germany. After completing her studies at one of the country's best conservatories, she struggled to get a foothold in the classical music scene. Gradually she was drawn to Kurdish music where she found more opportunities. As she shared, at a certain point, one has to think strategically:

> There are so many classical musicians and one is better than the next. If you think in terms of a career – even if you don't want to go back to your own roots – you can experience success faster through Kurdish music than through classical music.

[20] Popular culture advocates and scholars disagree with this terminology, arguing that this brow distinction undermines the legitimacy of pop music's artistic worth. Musicians in the world music scene nevertheless reproduce this language in their own pursuit for value.

[21] The exception perhaps being Turkish cultural production in Germany (Kosnick, 2007; O'Toole, 2014).

> There are many, many good classical musicians. But [in Kurdish music] you can be one of only a few violinists, for example.

The same realisation came to Marisa Alvarez. She immigrated from Mexico to pursue a career in pop and rock music. But after months drawing on her networks and cold-calling venues and event organisers, she had the most success with Mexican cultural and governmental organisations in Germany. Her busiest months are September and October travelling across Europe for Day of the Dead celebrations. While she still favours contemporary songs from the English-speaking world, Marisa is most often recognised for her Mexican folk music programme.

Geographer Robert Kloosterman (2010) integrates such experiences into an updated and expanded theory of mixed embeddedness which he calls the 'interactionist approach'. In it, migrants navigate macro, meso, and individual opportunity structures in their entrepreneurial pursuits. From this perspective, one might view Nure and Marisa as strategic actors navigating the opportunity structures afforded by supply and demand in Europe. Nevertheless, Kloosterman's theory foregrounds the structures as the determining forces and neglects to take into account how migrants forge these opportunities themselves.

Kloosterman responded to critics of mixed embeddedness's static, structuralist framework for analysis, writing that research must entail 'extensive fieldwork and qualitative research to grasp the social embeddedness, strategies and careers of the immigrant entrepreneurs' in order to fully understand the ways they interact with the opportunity structures (2010, p.41). While the emphasis on qualitative data collection points toward a more nuanced understanding of differentiated migrant outcomes, Kloosterman still presents the core institutional framework as a given set of structures that prefigure any individual action.

Recent scholarship on mixed embeddedness challenges the rigidity and relevance of opportunity structures. Migrants' capital accumulation in countries of origin and destination might provide a more fruitful framework of analysis for transnational entrepreneurship (Nowicka, 2013). For example, migration scholar Giacomo Solano (2021) argues that social embeddedness leads entrepreneurs to go international, not the other way around as previously theorised. Furthermore, these pathways do not always proceed linearly. Migrants go through cycles of embedding and 'de-embedding', or distancing, from different groups (Lassalle et al., 2020). This dynamic social reconfiguration does not necessarily follow a set path, as posited by Kloosterman (2010), but ebbs and flows according to migrants' existing resources and the opportunities available to them.

Yet even this revised approach does not address the issue of methodological nationalism addressed in migration research (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). Indeed, migrants operate in multipolar contexts beyond countries of origin and destination, often drawing on local or regional connections over national ones (Solano, 2021). Such behaviour characterises Kurdish cultural production that must necessarily work transnationally (see section 6.1). But it also can be seen in Bellan's wedding tours in which he performs across ethnic and national lines in Southeast Europe and Turkey.

An alternative to mixed embeddedness theory that foregrounds such migrant agency is *mobility*. Sociologists Petra Dannecker & Alev Çakir (2016) introduced this term to the debate based on experiences of female migrant entrepreneurs in Vienna. They focus not only on spatial but also social mobility. Moving beyond purely economic concerns, 'mobility in its different forms becomes thus a symbolic element for imagining a better future and overcoming inequalities' (2016,

p. 108). Focusing on mobilities instead of structures introduces a fresh perspective on migrant entrepreneurship that gives primacy to individual actors instead of the systems that constrain or enable them.

This mobility-centred theory better encapsulates why the musicians profiled here seem to move in opposing directions in pursuit of the same outcome. Bellan earns respectable sums performing in different cultural and geographic contexts, capitalising on his intercultural capital and ability to move about the continent. This was not always the case, as his family arrived in Germany irregularly and he grew up with Duldung status. Once he received his residence permit, he could move and work more freely, including in his native Kosovo. But he wants to exchange the resources afforded by his spatial and cultural mobility for social mobility – moving away from events to concerts with attentive audiences. While Bellan strives to leave the ethnic community for the majority society, Nure has moved in the opposite direction. Despite her moderate success as a classical violinist and salaried position as a school music teacher, she decided to focus more on Kurdish music where she would earn less, but be a more prominent figure. In both cases, a mobility-centred perspective explained their decisions, which were made with respect to their relative position within a given social field.

As these two cases indicate, mobility theory presents an alternative to understanding how migrants interact with opportunity structures and create new ones for themselves. This approach seems to undergird the logic of recent policy initiatives in refugee entrepreneurship which are taking hold, particularly in the Global South (Newman et al., 2024). Much of the literature, particularly coming out of business and management studies, present refugee entrepreneurship as a desirable

integration strategy (Desai et al., 2021). Yet others view such policies as an extension of governmentality over migrants (Dlaske & Schilling, 2023). Indeed, the valorisation of refugee entrepreneurship is often grounded in racialised stereotypes that portray certain migrants as hard-working and deserving while others are deemed passive cheaters of the humanitarian system (Turner, 2020). Such critiques interrogate a fundamental pillar of migrant entrepreneurship: the driver of scalability and economic growth.

The process by which musicians scale up offers an interesting space to look at migrant entrepreneurship more critically. Namely, such entrepreneurs illustrate how value generated in a pericapitalist sphere is translated into capitalist accumulation strategies (Tsing, 2015). Skills which were cultivated for social or artistic purposes can become the means by which racialised and forced migrant musicians earn a living. They no longer make music "just for fun"; rather they would like to turn these skills into a full-time profession. To do so, one must scale up. Yet, as Taylor (2024) notes, unlike traditional commodities, musicians regardless of genre or race must find creative ways to increase their production. After all, musicians focused on performing can only perform in one place at any given moment. Thus they employ different strategies to increase the value and scale of their creative labour. This includes widening their reach (performing in more and diverse venues), expanding audiences, and earning more money per engagement. But it also includes setting aside time for less-lucrative gigs that produce other sorts of value that do not directly bring one's career forward, such as charity events or friends' parties.

Here a distinction must be made between words and behaviours. As Bourdieu noted, the field of cultural production operates by a different logic of capital conversion. It proclaims to disavow

economic capital in the pursuit of artistic aims. This constitutes the 'universe of belief' which shapes discourses around cultural production. Critically, as Bourdieu (1993) and Becker (1982) showed, financial and status concerns do play a role in artistic creation. Subsequent critiques question whether this rejection of profit is a totalising force in Bourdieu's field of 'autonomous art' (Grenfell & Hardy, 2007). Nevertheless, people believe that this norm constitutes, in part, the artistic sphere. And this belief shapes the imagined totalities which determine art's value.

So how do musicians simultaneously pursue production at scale while maintaining this 'universe of belief'? Sociologists Jo Haynes and Lee Marshall (2018) call such cultural producers 'reluctant entrepreneurs'. Musicians rarely identify as entrepreneurs even though they engage in similar behaviours and work under similar conditions. Nearly one in six musicians works full time as a freelancer, compared with 0.5% of the German workers overall (*Freiberuflich Tätige*, 2025). Surveys and interviews found that musicians routinely reject the label of entrepreneur, usually citing artistic goals over economic profit (Coulson, 2012; Haynes & Marshall, 2018). Yet the current neoliberal market for cultural consumption and the demands placed on freelance musicians push these artists into entrepreneurial practices. Independent musicians must create markets for their products, promote their work, develop a consumer base, and juggle many income streams. At their core, all entrepreneurs act creatively, as the economist Joseph Schumpeter characterised entrepreneurship in his foundational work (Schumpeter, 1942). A musician is simultaneously the innovator, producer, marketer, and indeed the product itself. In this way, the distinction between the producer and the product is blurred.

While Haynes and Marshall wrote about popular musicians, the label 'reluctant entrepreneur' extends even more forcefully to the world music scene. For this scene – without state-funded orchestras, salaried teaching positions, or a robust commercial music economy – the percentage of freelancers is much higher (*Freiberuflich Tätige*, 2025). But for many forced migrants, self-employment is not a new experience. One survey found that 30% of asylum seekers and refugees who arrived in Germany between 2013 and 2016 stated they were self-employed in their country of origin (cited in Liebig & Degler, 2017). However, navigating the rules and regulations of Germany and finding one's niche within an already crowded scene requires new skills and knowledge, from navigating state systems (e.g. insurance, retirement, taxes), to marketing, negotiating artist fees, and cultivating one's audiences.

3.3 Scaling up in the world music scene

This section outlines the strategies racialised musicians use to scale up and become working professionals in this field. Section 3.3.1 profiles the ways one can earn money through playing concerts and teaching. Yet many people still keep their day jobs – not only for financial security, but also to support their families abroad and become German citizens. Section 3.3.2 focuses on the non-musical labour that goes into putting on a concert, including organisation, promotion, and market research for concerts. Section 3.3.3 unpacks how artist fees are decided. Such discussions reveal how musicians balance the economic, social, and artistic value of each engagement through payment structures. I gathered much of this information by asking my interlocutors directly about their strategies and career practices. Some knowledge was jointly generated as I began organising

concerts during my time in Cologne (see section 1.1). Data was also gathered via a survey about working conditions conducted in Cologne's world music scene with IFM (see section 1.2.1).

3.3.1 Earning a living with world music in Germany

The first lesson many migrants learn is the limited number of ways one can earn a living with music in Germany. Even for those who previously worked as a musician in countries of origin and transit, they still needed to adapt to new industry standards. Tariq*, a Syrian percussionist, said he used to work long nights in Damascus performing for one party after another: "We'd enter the restaurants at 1 PM and leave at 7 AM – we'd get something to eat every now and then... That was our work." Ramesh Shotham, a legendary percussionist who deftly manoeuvres between jazz, rock and Indian classical music, told similar stories during his time studying in India, playing in the jazz clubs until 2 AM to fund his Carnatic music lessons, which started at 8 AM. Demand for these types of 'working musicians' (T. D. Taylor, 2023) or musicians 'in the night' (Tsioulakis, 2020) is much lower in Germany.

Instead, money can be made through concerts, studio work, and teaching. Especially coveted are the publicly funded, salaried ensemble and music school positions, which compared with other countries are abundant. Nevertheless, while the overall landscape might offer more wealth to cultural actors in Germany, it is not widely distributed beyond Western art music, jazz, and to a certain degree, pop music. Public investment in the world music scene is only a fraction of that which is allocated to the rest of the music branch (see section 2.3.2).

Still, for musicians in any genre, teaching is a reliable way to secure a stable monthly income. This is true for migrants as well, even though they almost exclusively work outside the public music

school system. A majority of my interlocutors simply saw it as a means to an end; teaching is a way to earn money while playing music, and is thus preferable to other types of "day jobs" one might engage in to support a performance career. One particularly utilitarian view was expressed by a new pedagogue:

> I had a new student who wanted to learn my playing techniques on her instrument. And I showed her everything in an hour. That was such a mistake! I could have easily spread it out over multiple lessons so she would have to keep coming back, and you know that means more money.

Another interlocutor discovered the lucrative nature of weekend workshops: 'Just think, you do one workshop per month in a different city and you make 1,000 Euros with each one. That's pretty good!' When I expressed my doubts about how high the profit would be given travel and other costs, he insisted that his calculations were correct. 'After all', he added, puffing out his chest, 'people are willing to pay lots of money to work with me'.

While the hourly rate for such a workshop might indeed reach those sums, it cannot replace the income and associated benefits of a job in a music school. These salaried positions provide a living wage for teachers with protections in case of illness, injury, or fluctuations in enrolment. However migrants are often deemed unqualified to take up these coveted positions, as detailed in section 5.2.1.

Still others keep their non-musical jobs for added security. Some of my interlocutors were forthcoming about their day jobs. The Iraqi singer Rita William asserted that her career in graphic design gave her the financial freedom to be picky about the concert requests she accepts. Others expressed less pride about their day jobs. One musician who I saw weekly for eight months never

told me what he did outside of playing music. I only found out two years after meeting him that he worked in a fast food restaurant when a friend bought a kebab from him after a night out.

These decisions around giving up the day job are more complicated for forced migrants, both in terms of their status in Germany and financial commitments abroad. Many people I spoke with, even if they travelled alone to Germany, are supporting family members in their country of origin. Mehmet Akbaş worked as a factory employee and sent remittances to his family in Kurdistan for many years. In 2021, his mother inherited a sum of money from the death of an estranged family member, giving her more financial security. After living and labouring in Germany for 16 years, Mehmet was finally able in 2021 to leave his job at the factory and pursue his career as a musician in earnest.

Yet beyond these familial obligations, the German state imposes additional financial burdens on migrants. Those seeking German citizenship, for example, need to prove their financial independence before submitting an application. This requires evidence of twelve months free from unemployment office benefits, and either evidence of substantial financial capital or a contract with monthly income. Further complicating this process is the fact that while citizenship laws are signed by the parliament, the local authorities make the decisions. This means that the baseline income needed to acquire German citizenship varies from one authority to the next, creating unexpected migration patterns. For example, one musician claimed that the citizenship process was easier in Hagen for freelancers than in the big cities in the Ruhr region. Whether this was true or not, the rumour spread and some musicians allegedly tried to relocate to the small town to increase their chances of a successful application.

Even with a lenient local authority, proving financial security poses a hurdle for freelance musicians. Even state-funded projects tend to pay out in lump sums at the end of the contract, leaving months without evidence of income on one's bank statements. After the Covid-19 relief money dried up and concert life had not fully returned, many migrants faced a difficult decision. Either they would go back to the unemployment office to bridge the gap until they could work full time as a musician – thereby jeopardising their eligibility for citizenship – or they would take on non-musical employment to demonstrate a steady income. Aeham Ahmad decided on the latter. The pianist went from earning a quarter of a million Euros per year from music before the pandemic to working as an untrained carpenter. When I asked him why he chose a job where the tools directly endanger his career as a pianist, he said it was the only option to be able to keep his health insurance, apply for citizenship, and still maintain some career as a musician. As he and his wife support their three children and his two parents, their burden of financial proof for naturalisation is especially high. He plans to only do this job until his citizenship application is approved: 'Once I become a German, then I can go back to my normal life, but until then I need to prove that I am a good refugee who can take care of himself'.[22]

In short, while one can principally earn a living in the cultural sphere, many of these options are not available to those with precarious migration statuses in the world music scene. As a former programme manager for a refugee artist traineeship told me, the first lessons these musicians need to learn are 'that they can't pick up where they left off [in their country of origin] and that they'll probably never get back to where they were'.

[22] Aeham reproduces the same language of "good", "glorious" and "grateful" refugees theorised in Ortlieb et al., 2021.

3.3.2 Non-musical labour in scaling up an artistic career

Focussing on concerts as a source of income, how do racialised and forced migrant musicians create performing opportunities for themselves which they consider valuable? This section unpacks the non-musical work that musicians do behind the scenes to bring a concert to the stage. This labour includes organising one's own events, online promotion, and expanding into different markets for concerts. As Garland writes, such labour is implicitly included in the artist fees – even if musicians do not always see it as such. Indeed "the sounds themselves" account 'for only one moment of the myriad social relations and acts that produce musical sound' (2022, p.4).

These social relations are forged even before the concert is scheduled. Indeed, most musicians in the world music scene need to initiate and organise their own concerts. Until a musician or ensemble acquires professional representation, they perform the same work as an agent. Percussionist Syavash Rastani explained the work behind one of his annual projects:

> When I do "Sya Live", I take care of everything, the concept, the execution, music, rehearsals, organisation, the venue, lighting, sound, advertising, camera, supporting artists, stage managers, design, rehearsal room, etc.

While some musicians get by through invitations alone, nearly all full-time musicians have to do some work organising their own concerts to reach the level to which they aspire.

This work takes up considerable time and energy. In the survey I conducted on behalf of the IFM, 50% of the respondents spend at least one hour on organisational work for every two hours of artistic practice (performing, rehearsing, and personal practice). 25% of respondents spend as much time on organisational tasks (if not more) as artistic practice. And this can be a difficult balance

early in a career when one is not yet established in the scene. First of all, this labour is rarely paid, as Andreas Heuser, leader of the multicultural big band Transorient Orchestra explained:

> The problem is that you have to do a lot of things as a band for which there's no money to begin with. You do get paid somehow when you play, but far too little. There's no way to pay for all the work that normally has to be done, all the organisational stuff.

Just as Shannon Garland wrote about in Brazil's indie music scene (2022), the labour which makes performances possible is often undervalued.

Another way in which performance opportunities are created is through marketing, especially via social media. Increasing one's visibility via circulation can amplify the value of "the sounds themselves", or the act of music making (Garland, 2022). A key part of the reluctant entrepreneur's toolkit is online marketing, but compared to other genres, world music is further behind in promoting itself. This perspective was shared by Neil Grant, who works across genres as an industry professional in folk and indie music and project manager of the Kultursekretariat's (KS) world music division. He criticises world music for ignoring industry standards. Compared with pop, those in world music do not invest nearly as much time and money in promotion and audience building. In short, he says, 'if they were in pop music, they wouldn't survive'. These expectations manifested during a publicly-funded concert administered by the KS. The artists expected the organisation to pay for and contribute to the marketing work, whereas the KS positioned itself solely as the funder with no responsibility for advertising. As Neil said, if you're a freelancer, this is part of the job. But often artists who subscribe to the "universe of belief" do not want to engage in what they perceive as naked self-promotion, nor do so without compensation.

Another factor that possibly explains this reluctance to engage in social media work is the time and financial investment one needs to establish an online presence. As Mehmet Akbaş shared, you have to earn money to make money. He identified this paradox as the primary hurdle to reaching the next stage of his career: 'I'm doing everything myself: Social media advertising, editing videos...I can't do everything. It will destroy me'. Instead, he wants to hire representation to take on these tasks for him: 'You can't do it alone, you need a team...and I have nobody, just my friends'. When Mehmet said this in our interview, he smiled sheepishly at his companion who was sitting at the kitchen table editing Mehmet's grant applications. To afford a team and not just rely on friends, one needs to achieve a level of renown, which requires personal financial investment. It is a circular problem; in order to make enough money to afford an agent, one needs concerts, which are generated through agents.

Beyond marketing, other economic considerations shape how musicians position their art on the market. Some openly admit that getting booked often depends on the finances and logistics of the ensemble in addition to artistic quality. Andreas noted that the Transorient Orchestra struggles to find venues willing to pay a wage that fairly compensates all 13 members for their time:

> We actually play regularly throughout Germany, but we...well, we didn't pay too much attention to the money. We just wanted to play. Of course, there were some well-paid gigs, but also a lot of gigs that we just took on for little money.

Andreas, one of the founders and leaders of the group, says that it's more a labour of love than a lucrative enterprise. His primary income stems more from his various chamber groups and duos, as well as teaching. From the perspective of *Veranstalter:innen* [event organisers and/or promoters], a

duo is far easier to schedule than a big band. They cost less overall, can perform in more settings, require less equipment, and pose fewer logistical hurdles.

Another consideration is concert frequency and geographic reach. How do these musicians decide where to perform? On the one hand, building up a dedicated fan base close to home grounded in one's own social networks is easier, but performing too often in one place can exhaust audiences for concerts. On the other hand, moving to new markets presents a potentially endless supply of new listeners, but organising concerts and reaching one's target audience from afar poses its own challenges. These calculations unfold along Anna Tsing's notion of scalability through translation (2015). The process of translating oneself into a product that can appeal to a broader audience beyond one's immediate circle requires a similar form of economic-oriented thinking. I saw this as a jury member for the KS's world music concert funding. In the applications I reviewed, ensembles from other regions in Germany demonstrated their appeal to listeners in NRW through previous tours in the state, collaborations with local performers, and even immigration statistics (presumably arguing for ticket demand based along ethnic lines).

A key part of organising concerts is knowing where the audiences are and how to reach them. Many of these musicians focus on urban areas which boast big venues and large immigrant populations. Many interlocutors commented on how often they could perform in a particular place. Fevronia, who leads a Greek rebetiko band, explained to me that they were trying to secure gigs outside of NRW: 'We've performed a lot in Cologne recently, so we need to take a break.' Aeham demonstrated a similar awareness in a conversation in 2022:

> Here in Warburg it's easy [to organise a gig]. But I can't play 20 concerts in Warburg in one year. In 2019 I played a concert, and it was well-attended. In 2020

> I did another one with a band from Kassel…but now I should take a break and wait a few years before I do another one here.

Much as with marketing tasks, working with a promoter or an agent expands one's reach. With representation, a musician can address different audiences within the same city and probe different niches outside their own social network. Aeham explained how he was able to play multiple concerts in one month in the city of Essen through his work with different promoters:

> I played a jazz concert with another pianist, then ten days later a solo piano concert, and two weeks later the same again. Three concerts in Essen but organised by different groups. It was a jazz organisation for the first one, a refugee organisation for my solo, and the book reading where I played piano was organised by my publisher Fischer Verlag. And they were all well-attended.

Through the various organisers, his concerts managed to address different publics within the same geographic area.

Another approach to reaching new audiences is to focus on smaller markets beyond urban centres. One interlocutor commented that some of his best concerts after the Covid-19 lockdowns were in rural regions. He inferred that, 'If you're the only concert in town that weekend, you can count on most of the residents being there.' He told this to me after a particularly poorly-attended concert in October 2022. I was one of nine people in the audience. Looking around the empty foyer, he added in a half whisper, 'You're not allowed to say this as a musician, but maybe there are also just too many concerts happening now'.

3.3.3 What is a concert worth? Value, values, and commodification

All of these factors influence the delicate negotiation of artist fees that transpires between musicians, event organisers, and funders. Such processes reveal not only the relative economic

value of various gigs, but also their respective social and artistic values. Interlocutors shed light on this balance between values and value by outlining under which conditions they accept concert requests. As I detail later in this section, such decisions become more high-stakes when one takes on artist representation. Negative experiences with agencies show how scaling up production can lead to commodification of one's art and professional identity. The insights presented in this section echo Sheyda's statement that, 'it's not just about the money'.

The amount a musician in this scene earns per concert varies widely. In the IFM survey of Cologne, respondents reported an average fee of around 440 Euros. Yet, per person, the average range of fees (i.e. the difference between the highest and lowest fees) per person in 2023 was 800 Euros, not even including the gigs they played for free. Over time, these musicians learn what they can expect from different venues and formats. Fevronia relied on her Business Administration degree to demand more from restaurants where her rebetiko group plays. She has often accused managers of underpaying them, saying, 'I know how much you made tonight, you can afford to give us some more'. In the large, publicly-funded concert halls such as the philharmonics in Düsseldorf and Essen, one can demand fees well above average. A woodwind player who is often asked to perform *duduk*[23] with classical chamber ensembles told me that he starts the negotiation at 600 Euros per concert.

But in the world music scene, where there is little money circulating, musicians have to decide whether poorly paid concerts are worth accepting. Bruno MC from Words Beyond Borders (WBB), a hip hop group in Düsseldorf, explained how they evaluate each concert request they receive:

[23] A double reed woodwind instrument made of apricot wood originating from Armenia.

> We agreed last year that we would always start at 500 Euros per person, but that this is also negotiable for the time being. And if it's significantly less, we decide for ourselves what kind of event it is and if we want to support it. If we think an event is particularly cool and we think it should definitely be supported and we want to be there, then sometimes we might even decide to perform without a fee. But those are exceptions. Of course we have to make sure that a bit of money comes in.

As Bruno noted, playing for little to no fee creates social value, such as when they perform at intercultural festivals or at friends' parties. But it can also be a strategy to earn more later on. Especially for forced migrants, who face barriers to starting work upon arrival in Germany, it can take years before the networks and opportunities are in place to step onto the stage. For Mohammad, his first performance happened 2.5 years after first arriving in Germany. And even then, he was just earning "pocket money" as he described it. He knew he was underpaid and performing free labour, but he justified it to himself with the potential future benefits. For example, he first played at a festival in Witten for free, and now he is hired to help organise it. Similarly, while playing for free at a festival in Essen he met a professor at the Folkwang Conservatory who later helped him get steady music teaching jobs.

Aeham takes an even more extreme approach. Seemingly infused with boundless energy, he performs at least two concerts per week, and even more frequently before the pandemic. In his view, every concert, even those in less-than-professional settings, is still of value:

> It's a domino effect, you know? You play in Marl and they love you in the next village. They think, 'He's a great artist and he doesn't need a lot.' They can bring me to the parish house where there is a piano, maybe it's not even tuned. I don't need a microphone, I don't need anything. If they don't have a piano, I bring my keyboard. I need only a small fee and even will work just for donations. If you make it really easy for them, anybody can organise a concert.

He gave a concrete example of how this benefitted him in the past. One time, he performed five concerts in a private salon in Weimar. The room only sat 25 people and he played with an electronic keyboard. When I asked if it was worth it, he answered, 'Yes, I got some donations to pay my travel costs to Weimar. I met nice people. And there I met someone who I later did a project with'. This connection led to a collaborative album and multiple concerts.

But not every musician agrees with this strategy. Two Syrian musicians in NRW who often collaborate together are famous within the scene for demanding high fees. Even within projects for which they are paid, they will not do more than what is stipulated in the contract. One of them claimed that when the agreed-upon rehearsal time is done, he will stand up and leave even if they are not finished. The other will allegedly not even return calls for gigs paying less than 400 Euros. My own experience of trying to engage one of them for a concert confirmed this. When I asked another Syrian musician who collaborates with them about this, he admitted that this behaviour does increase the value of their time, but overall they have fewer gigs than he does. I queried other musicians about this tradeoff between fees and frequency of concerts. Like WBB, many claimed to have a baseline artist fee – with exceptions: for friends, for charity, for a 'good cause', for publicity, nothing better to do, etc. This long list of exceptions often means that at the beginning of one's career, it's a luxury to be paid a decent fee for a concert.

The aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic has profoundly shaped these negotiations, especially from the promoter side. Before the lockdowns, musicians and venues were already operating with narrow profit margins. But since cultural life reopened, event organisers claim that audience levels have fallen dramatically. Not only is it artistically unfulfilling to play for an empty hall, but it also

impacts the pay. I was impressed by how some musicians were able to do these calculations in their heads with stored knowledge about ticket prices, take-home percentages, and associated costs. For example, sitarist Hindol Deb laid out the margins on playing at a popular venue in Cologne:

> [This venue] can hold 100 people max, including standing. Before Covid, tickets were five Euros for students and ten for everyone else. So in the end, the take home is next to nothing, when you think about how they cater so much to students.

Once they pay the sound engineer and the venue takes its cut, he claims that he barely makes any money from the evening.

Streaming or selling CDs and books doesn't provide much better income. Aeham nevertheless appreciates the contribution they make, which he can calculate down to the Euro. He told me that he can produce a new album for only 350 Euros. When I raised my eyebrow in surprise, he conceded, 'Yeah in the end it doesn't sound like Sony Music, but if I sell 100 CDs I will at least get money as the artist'. He buys back the CDs (writing it off as a tax deduction) and sells them himself, doing the same with the two books he has written (Ahmad, 2018; Lukas & Ahmad, 2021). He has decided that cutting out the distributor generates more money for him, even if this means more work and fewer sales. In our interview, he rattled off the calculations from memory:

> I buy the books from the publisher and I get a 50% discount: I pay 10 Euros for the book and people pay me 20 Euros. Plus I make a special deal at the concerts. When people buy the book and the CD, they get it for 25 Euros...You know it costs one Euro to make the CD, so that's four Euros back to me. And the person gets a nice present for Christmas. It is a fantastic deal because when you buy the CD online it's 20 Euros. And when somebody looks for the book on Amazon, it costs them 18 Euros and I only get 7 Euros from that. So it's better to sell it to the person directly and I sign it for them. Win-win.

Aeham calculates these potential sales into every concert request he receives. But even then, it's sometimes still not enough to justify the concert: 'When I see numbers like 150 Euros, 200 Euros, even if it's a great organisation doing things for refugees, I'm starting to think that I'd just rather spend an evening at home with my kids'.

As many musicians conceded to me, scaling up ultimately means acquiring representation. Music managers play a critical role in which they 'take artists as raw material and transform them as much as possible into productive laborers' (Taylor, 2024, p. 44). Cultural producers challenge the very notion of scalability; the workers themselves perform concrete labour and therefore are themselves not replaceable. It is this tension between what can and cannot be scaled that provides insights into value creation through supply chain translation, or how commodities accumulate and transform value along the supply chain (Tsing, 2015).

Taylor locates value in the work of managers who mediate between artists and the industry. Managers commercialise the work of musicians by focusing on factors which can be scaled: numbers of listeners and loyal fans. But in attending to the nonscalable, Taylor notes that not every band can reach international stardom. Musicians must prove their potential through not only talent, but a keen market sense of what fans want. Only those musicians whose artistic identity can be moulded to industry standards are eventually taken on by management.

While "making it" as a professional musician is the dream of many, Aeham noted the costs of scalability to his own artistic autonomy. He took on representation with an agency after winning "The International Beethoven Award for Human Rights, Peace, Freedom, Fight against Poverty and for Inclusion". Aeham first drew attention from his videos playing a piano on wheels in the

bombed-out neighbourhood of Yarmouk in Damascus. These reached Western media who dubbed him “the pianist from the rubble”. When he was identified in a German refugee camp by a journalist who had followed his path through the Balkans, the agency contacted him. The organisation went on to arrange concerts for him, picking him up from the camp to bring him to the various event locations. But as Aeham noted, ‘the difference between supporting someone and using them – it's a very, very thin line’.

Aeham watched as the agency crossed this line in trying to scale him up as a performer. The initial concerts were framed as charitable actions to help him gain a foothold in the German scene. Once he was awarded the prize and began to tour Germany with the agency, they turned his artistic products into ‘surplus-value generating commodities’ (T.D. Taylor, 2024, p. 70). This transformed their relationship from one of gift exchange into one of commodification. Aeham complained that while he was earning 350 Euros per concert, his tour manager made nearly the same amount and squandered much of the potential profit on expensive hotel rooms for the both of them on tour. Aeham protested, ‘They should have given me this hotel money in my artist fee. I would have slept on the street or stayed with friends. I have friends everywhere, you know, fantastic people, German and Syrian people. They would have hosted me’. But this was not how things are done in the music industry. When Aeham asked for a workaround, ‘Did they find a solution to send this money to my family? No’.

In the end, Aeham acknowledged, he earned a considerable amount of money through this managed tour. He performed in well-known venues and with international stars in the classical music world including pianist Martha Argerich. He continued to profit from this renown in

subsequent years to generate book sales and perform more concerts in Germany and abroad. But in order to scale up into a commercialised product, he sacrificed part of this autonomy. In addition to ceding control over his schedule and wage negotiations, he also lost control over his media representation. He was marketed as the "Syrian refugee musician" – nowhere did it mention that Aeham is in fact twice displaced, growing up in Syria as a Palestinian refugee. He performed almost exclusively for events surrounding human rights and forced displacement. One day he would like to cast off all this political strategising and just be known as a talented pianist.[24]

After a year with professional management, Aeham cut ties with the agency, citing unfair treatment and payment disputes. He vows to never work with an agency again, saying that he values his freedom above all else, even if it means fewer gigs. He acknowledges that this decision has had its downsides: 'I can't reach the venues anymore. I'm just waiting for concert requests.' He has returned to his nonscalable roots and is content to remain an independent artist for the time being.

Aeham's experience was not the only negative encounter with management that I heard. One artist formerly affiliated with one of Germany's most prominent world music agencies complained bitterly about being exploited for profit. Amir* explained how this supply chain worked:

> Amir: The last concert we did with them was some small event in the Berliner Philharmonie. They do three or four concerts for world music, which doesn't do anyone's career any good.
>
> Rose: Why not?
>
> Amir: Limited audience, no marketing etc. It's just so the Berliner Philharmonie can say, "We're not quite so conservative, we bring a little bit of colour into the programme"... So they call [the agency], "Hello please deliver us three concerts".

[24] For more on how Syrian refugees in Germany are navigating these pressures in the popular music scene, see Brunner, 2022.

> [The agency] calls me, and we begin fighting. Yes, because [the agency] wants half the money for themselves. So it was really just a money machine. Yeah, which I want nothing to do with.

Amir reproduces the universe of belief in this quotation, rejecting gigs motivated by profit. Even though working with an agency ensured that he earned more money, he was no longer fully in possession of the products of his labour. Amir became a surplus-producer – both for the agency who earns a cut of the concert proceeds as well as the Philharmonie, which in his view, benefited from tokenistic migrant performances.

I talked to Birgit Ellinghaus about these sentiments. Through her political engagement with UNESCO and her work as a cultural manager, Birgit has been a key player in the European world music scene for 30 years. She criticises musicians such as Amir for not understanding how the music industry functions:

> There is often a lack of professionalism at this level. Many of the musicians here in NRW are at a good professional level, but simply don't travel internationally. They don't get beyond the borders of NRW and they have this idea that what they earn here, they can also earn abroad. And that's not the case.

Without professional representation, they cannot reach the next level of international renown, even with exceptional talent. She compared two musicians in Cologne who play the *Kamancheh* (an upright bowed string instrument) – international star Kayhan Kalhor and Ziad*, a musician who she represents:

> For me Ziad has always been on the same level of musical quality as Kayhan Kalhor. But Kayhan Kalhor has an American marketing structure behind him, and Ziad is based in Cologne and is seen as a local Arab with a *Kniegeige* [viola da gamba]. And how is someone like that supposed to make it into Olympus? No matter how good he is, no matter how well he plays, no matter how many great projects he does, no matter how much he invests – He will never get to the level of

> someone like Kayhan Kalhor... because Kalhor simply has this entire American marketing system behind him.

Musicians such as Amir, who rejected his management after five years, must pay a price for their freedom. This often means fewer gigs and a more limited reach for their concerts and recordings. Most importantly, it means that this important organisational labour must be done by someone else. For Aeham and Mehmet, they rely on networks of friends and supporters who believe in their work and do much of it for free. For Amir and Ziad, as well as many of the men with whom they play, their wives and girlfriends perform much of their organisational work. And similar to domestic and care work overwhelmingly performed by women, this supportive labour similarly goes unacknowledged and uncompensated.[25]

This narrative of independence, as manifested in deciding against cultural management, was mainly expressed in what musicians were and were not willing to do for their art. Amir laid this out in plain terms:

> I have my standards. Even if I don't have any money... I sold vegetables back then and cleaned toilets at Carnival. It was a huge hall, so easily 1,500 people... and my job was just to clean the toilet, three hours a day. But still, I'd rather do that than be taken advantage of by an agency.

Amir's decision illustrates the complex negotiations inherent in scaling up one's artistic career. In resisting scalability, Amir would rather simply become a worker in yet another capitalist industry in demeaning conditions. But both Amir and Aeham nevertheless saw such moves as a way of claiming back autonomy over their art, even if it came at the expense of widespread success and

[25] For more on these issues of gender-based division of labour, see section 4.4.3.

financial profit. These decisions shed light on the true value of artistic independence to these musicians.

3.4 Scaling up in the Kulturstaat

This section considers racialised and forced migrant musicians' ambivalent relationship to the state. Public policy and state institutions both enable and discipline musicians' scalability in the world music scene. In section 3.4.1, I argue that state interventions, while vital to world music's survival, create a two-tiered system of recognition that often excludes racialised and forced migrant musicians. Nevertheless, these artists find creative ways to manipulate the system for their own benefit. The same logic applies to concert venues, another important element of the world music ecosystem profiled in section 3.4.2. State efforts to support these spaces have had mixed results in previous years. Section 3.4.3 analyses one upcoming state policy which may have a drastic impact on NRW's musical landscape: the introduction of a minimum artist fee. Preparations and debates for the roll-out of this policy in 2026 have many actors in world music concerned about the future of this precarious, marginalised scene.

3.4.1 Governmental precarisation of racialised musicians

Musicians in Germany professed mixed feelings towards the state's opportunity structures in which they work. Indeed without public funding, Germany's art music scene would collapse (see section 2.3.2). Most salaried performing positions are paid for by taxpayer money. And even for freelance musicians, a large percentage of one's income is subsidised by public funding. This support flows from all levels, from the EU down to local authorities. World music depends on this

programming money as the scene receives very little private investment, especially compared to classical and jazz music. Hindol explained:

> Because of the economics and the cost of living here, the only possibility remaining for performers is to apply for funding. You don't have any other chance. You cannot pay your musicians. You cannot work with other musicians. The payments that you get...[without funding] it's just pocket money.

Increasing state support for the independent music scene has become a political rallying point in recent years. Advocacy groups argue that the succession of crises – Covid-19, the war in Ukraine, and the rise of the far right in Germany – have steadily eroded protections for artists, particularly freelancers. Intervention is justified along both political and economic lines. On the one hand, artists are lauded as an important part of democratic societies and act as a barometer for freedoms of expression and creativity. The freelance scene figures particularly strongly in this way, complementing state-run ensembles with diverse cultural offerings and providing social critique through their work ('Deutscher Musikrat', 2020). On the other hand, many organisations mobilise economic arguments as a reason to invest in arts and culture. Using data on economic losses caused by the pandemic lockdowns as evidence, advocacy organisations such as the Club Commission and PopBoard NRW demonstrated the live music industry's critical role in the German economy.

In this way, artists are praised in ways similar to entrepreneurs; they function as both cultural and economic figures who simultaneously represent themselves and larger democratic ideas. But praising freelancers' independence and creativity obscures the precarious work conditions that characterise this freedom. Working outside public organisations, freelancers receive little capital and infrastructural investment from governments. They nevertheless serve as central components to the health of democratic societies and large national economies. In this way freelance artists have

thus become 'the apple of the policymaker's eye' (Ross, 2008, p. 32), providing significant economic and cultural benefits for little cost.

This 'governmental precarisation', political theorist Isabell Lorey argues (2015), has created new vulnerabilities for freelancers. Lorey sums up the working conditions as follows:

> They pursue temporary jobs, make their living on projects and from contract work from several clients simultaneously and from consecutive clients, mostly without any sick pay, paid holiday leave or unemployment compensation, without protection against wrongful dismissal – basically with minimal social protection or none whatsoever... There is no longer any dividing line between leisure time and work. There is an accumulation of knowledge during the unpaid hours that is not remunerated separately, but which is naturally called on and used in the context of paid work (Lorey, 2011, p. 86).

Indeed, this blurred line between paid and unpaid work under-compensates musicians for the labour they perform. But it is also the basis on which they can enter the professional class (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011).

Interest groups are working against this governmental precarity to implement better protections for freelance musicians. Recent initiatives include reforming insurance structures for artists, guaranteeing protections against AI-generated music, and introducing a minimum artist fee.[26] The paradox of many of these policies is that they create first- and second-class protections for professionals. Those deemed genuine freelancers are afforded a robust safety net and fair compensation for their work. But those who fall outside the rubric or do not yet qualify as a full-time freelancers are placed in an even more precarious situation. And it is on the margins of this profession where most racialised and forced migrants in this scene find themselves.

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[26] See the press release page for the Kulturrat NRW for all of their policy positions: www.kulturrat-nrw.de/presse/pressemitteilungen

Many of these musicians on the periphery observed that becoming independent paradoxically demanded more engagement with state apparatuses. In terms of bureaucracy, how one navigates taxes, insurance, and music licensing is often used to indicate belonging to the profession. For example, membership of the *Künstlersozialkasse* (KSK), an insurance fund for freelance artists subsidised by the government, indicates a certain standing as a creative professional. KSK contributes to public health insurance costs and pension funds. This is especially important for migrants, who must pay into public insurance for 60 months before obtaining a permanent residence permit. For those earning less than 62,000 Euros per year, joining is essentially free.

Yet membership requirements limit eligibility to those strictly considered freelance cultural workers, which does not always translate well into the world music scene. The majority of one's income must come from artistic freelance work. This can be difficult to prove for musicians at the beginning of their careers, especially if they have worked irregularly or still hold their day jobs. Income earned abroad through informal work, such as touring without contracts, does not count. It's even more complicated for forced migrants who are still receiving state benefits. Given the advantages that KSK provides, I was surprised to find that few of my interlocutors were members. But it was soon clear that even if these musicians saw themselves as freelance professional musicians, the German state does not recognise them as such.

The same applies to the music licensing agency GEMA (*Gesellschaft für musikalische Aufführungs- und mechanische Vervielfältigungsrechte*). This institution ensures creators are remunerated for usage of their artistic products in many contexts, including film, television, concerts, background music, and on-hold music. Concert organisers are obliged to report which

pieces were performed and to contribute fees based on the sizes of audiences and venues. These are then redistributed to the authors and artists. Joining GEMA as a beneficiary follows a similar procedure to KSK in that one must prove one's professional status, evidenced by number of listeners and frequency of performances.

And just as with KSK, the rewards system is built on industry standards oriented more towards classical music. As one delegate from GEMA explained to me, payment structures for performances favour longer pieces and improvisation. This, combined with the distinction between "entertainment" and "serious" music ("*Unterhaltungsmusik"* and *"ernste Musik"*) reinforces this privileging of highbrow artforms over pop. Even more fundamentally, the premise of such an organisation that pays authors runs contrary to how other music cultures conceive of repertoires and ownership.[27] This structure of private property clashes with music cultures in which songs are collectively owned and performed. The remuneration system does not benefit musicians at all who only perform live and do not produce recorded music .

Yet some musicians found ways to make GEMA work for them. Ensembles that perform 'traditional music' from other countries can more easily get away with not paying licensing fees for their concerts. As Sheyda told me after a concert in Cologne, 'The event organiser asks for the setlist, and I just say it's all traditional music from Kurdistan with funny names, and then they don't have to do anything, and nobody has to pay for it'. Yousef* found a way to even profit from the system. He produced 17 CDs between 2015 and 2025, many of which are collaborations with various musicians. As he explained, he initially loses money by registering the CD with GEMA, but he earns back the investment many times over through his busy concert calendar. By performing

[27] For example, in Kurdish culture (see Schäfers, 2022).

his own works he generates economic value for his recorded music through GEMA remuneration: 'I don't have to pay, because I'm the musician, and in return I sometimes get something like 5,000 Euros back in a quarter.'

The catch? These songs don't really exist in the way GEMA has ossified them as singular, reproducible recordings. On his CDs Yousef often will simply record improvisations – fleeting flights of musical fancy – which are then legitimised as compositions with names and registration numbers in the GEMA database. When I visited him at his home, he flipped through his binder of invoices, showing the bureaucratic trail he prepared in case of an audit. He pointed to a track title and shrugged: 'This was just some improvisation. If you ask me to play it, I can't. My manager chose the names when he registered them'.

Such loopholes represent ways that non-Western music can profit within Eurocentric systems. Even if repertoire is not the property of individuals, nor composition a bounded, reproducible entity, enterprising musicians have found ways for the system to work for them. Aeham certainly knows how the system works. He explained the process to me drawing on figures he has long-since memorised: 'If you have a donation concert without tickets and 40 people attending, the organiser has to pay 44 Euros. I get 25 Euros. The rest goes to GEMA's lawyers who enforce the collections'. But Aeham and Yousef are certainly outliers in the world music scene; most do not see nearly the same profit margins from their performances. Andreas Heuser acknowledged that GEMA is important, but sometimes the cheques he receives as a composer barely amount to more than the cost of the stamp and the envelope.

When the benefits of working formally within the state apparatuses are not apparent, as is the case for many musicians with GEMA and KSK, some turn to the informal economy. Collecting statistics on this topic is inherently very difficult, but it is estimated that informal work makes up a small percentage of Germany's economy, especially if compared internationally (Tangermann & Grote, 2017). In this scene, the involvement of state money forces most projects to operate mainly above-board. All publicly-funded projects require artist fees to be reported and taxed accordingly. World music's dependence on public funding effectively conditions many musicians to work within these legal constraints. Nevertheless, for private events and teaching, musicians receive fees and wages that often go under-reported. I learned this when I put on a concert with the University of Cologne in 2023. The musicians we engaged (mostly coming from the jazz scene) expressed frustration that we processed the payments with invoices. Most of them didn't even have tax numbers despite living in Germany for ten years. They expected to be handed cash at the end of the night, which we as a publicly-funded institution could not do.

While working informally results in larger take-home sums, it can cause problems down the line as some experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic. Germany's state relief programmes for professional artists were among some of the most robust in Europe. For example, the *Auf Geht's* stipend in NRW paid freelancers a basic income to compensate for lost performing opportunities. However, to qualify for this and other relief programmes, musicians had to submit tax forms proving that more than 50% of their income came from freelance work. Many musicians who fit this criteria but could not prove it because of under-reported wages were deemed ineligible. Therefore the benefits of working informally must be weighed against the possible negative consequences, including repercussions from across state apparatuses.

3.4.2 Music venues at the centre of state policy

Venues and event organisers are also subject to state regulations. Germany has a long history of supporting stages and concert halls as the spaces where independent art can develop (Tinius, 2023). Flagship venues such as the Cologne Philharmonie or the Aalto Theatre in Essen receive multi-year funding guarantees that provide financial security for artistic experimentation. But beyond those organisations which receive structural funding, venues at the margins (such as those for world music) can also benefit from subsidies and targeted programming. Cultural ministries recognise the value of these small stages for diversifying the cultural landscape and providing opportunities for freelancers and up-and-coming artists.[28] Thus recent state interventions have infused the scene with funding through grants for building maintenance, digitalisation, updating technology, creative programming, and remodelling to increase accessibility.

But crises in recent years have tested the resilience of venues for world music and the state's ability to protect them from market forces. The Covid-19 lockdowns and the subsequent energy crisis devastated venues, even with extensive relief packages. Kazım Çalışgan, artistic and general director of the Katakomben Theatre in Essen, explained the conditions of pandemic relief funding to me on a tour of the underground arts space. Kazım proudly showed all the improvements they made during the pandemic, including freshly-painted walls and new lights, speakers, and curtains. While he was pleased with the improvements, he would have much rather used the funding to pay his employees and rent for the building. But the conditions of the relief package restricted its use strictly to building improvements. This became an even larger problem in the winter of 2022-23 when the EU's embargo on Russian natural gas caused heating costs in Germany to rise sharply.

[28] For example, see the LMR funding for venues: www.lmr-nrw.de/foerderung/spielstaettenprogrammpraemie

State payments to cover heating (such as *Kulturfonds Energie*) were only paid out to those establishments which successfully navigated the lengthy bureaucratic application process. Kazım expressed his exasperation openly. He had already struggled so much in the past decade to gain recognition for his work in the white, German-dominated theatre landscape. Once the Katakomben finally "made it" as an established venue in the Ruhr region, Covid-19 lockdowns, inflation, and rising heating bills threatened to shut the theatre again once again in 2023: 'With each concert we're just trying to recoup some of the costs through some tickets and drinks. We know we can't break even anymore'.

Part of the problem, he says, is that audiences have not come back since the pandemic. We held this conversation after a concert where three musicians performed for eight audience members. The musicians agreed – they used to have better attendance. I often experienced these empty concert halls during my fieldwork and heard many explanations: too many concerts in the post-Covid boom, bad marketing, inflation, being out of touch with younger audiences – the list goes on.

Whatever the reason behind these shrinking audience numbers, venues are reacting accordingly. Christine Brinkmann, a cultural manager who worked in the office of a NRW parliamentarian, sees venues acting more cautiously. She used to work as a programme manager for Zakk, a beloved venue for world music in Düsseldorf. Venues are gravitating towards low-risk acts which are guaranteed to sell out. This risk-aversion has hit the world music scene especially hard. Without publicly-funded concert halls dedicated to world music, the scene is reliant on venues that specialise in other genres, mostly known for jazz or pop. Within these concert calendars, world music acts function as their "exotic" programming. But now as event organisers increasingly

choose musicians who will fill the house, world music performers and their modest audiences struggle to find a home.

Some public institutions have tried to circumvent this bias against world music through policy initiatives. Rita Viehoff, a former project manager at the KS, shared the different strategies they tried over the years. One programme awards subsidies for venues which book ensembles from their annual *Musikkulturen* catalogue.[29] Each year, the advisory council (to which I also belong) selects circa ten music groups that reflect the quality and diversity of global music talent available to perform in NRW. The catalogue is intended to lower the barriers to engaging with world music. Not only are the bands pre-selected to draw audiences in the region, but they are also available to hire at a much lower cost to the organiser. Venues that book these ensembles receive 50% of the concert costs from public funding, provided the events take place in one of the KS's member cities. This massive subsidy is designed to encourage venues to programme more adventurously.

But even given these favourable conditions, the catalogue has not functioned quite so well as they had hoped, especially in the smaller municipalities. Rita explained:

> As a rule, only relatively established venues organise such concerts, because you simply don't know what kind of audience you'll attract. And usually it takes place as part of a concert series, like in Bielefeld or Neuss, for example. But if it's a one-off concert, even in prestigious venues like the Domicil in Dortmund, very few people turn up and the risk is relatively high, even though you're sponsored with the concert. And in the smaller cities they always say, "we don't have an audience for avant-garde". I mean it's not always avant-garde, but they just want even fewer risks.

The limited success of this policy opens up many questions for analysis. Given the economic and artistic value guaranteed by the Musikkulturen catalogue, why do so few venues take advantage of

[29] For more on this programme, see the Appendix 1 (p. 359).

the programme? As Rita posited above, Veranstalter:innen might still have concerns about recovering the remaining 50% of the costs through ticket sales. But when I spoke with representatives from other venues, they hinted at another reason – world music simply does not fit into the programmatic profile of many event locations. Musical acts deemed too "out there", "exotic", "strange", or even "avant-garde" (as Rita encountered) might dampen the venue's overall image with their *Stammpublikum* [regular attendees]. Therefore such state subsidies do not seem to be offering enough benefits to overcome these barriers to mainstreaming world music.

3.4.3 The value of a minimum artist fee

This lack of understanding about the impact of public funding in the cultural landscape has recently revealed itself in debates over artist fees in Germany. How much these reluctant entrepreneurs earn per concert concretises all of the value negotiations that occur between artists, venues, audiences, and the state. As Garland showed, artist fees become the media for not only artistic worth, but also labour time and visibility, or the potential to circulate. These values are realised on stage and captured (albeit inadequately) in resulting payments. Until 2024 fees were negotiated for each engagement individually between organisers and musicians. Since then, the state has gotten involved.

In March 2023, the Deutscher Musikrat (DMR), a national umbrella organisation representing Germany's musical culture, called for a minimum concert fee for performances sponsored by public funding (*Honoraruntergrenzen*, 2023). Focusing on conditions for freelance work, they cited issues of precarity and unrecognised value:

> Through innovative projects and their work outside of permanent cultural institutions, [freelance musicians] make a significant contribution to cultural diversity in rural and urban areas. However, the income level of these musicians does not reflect their professional qualifications and individual skills, nor the social significance and quality of their work. Many musicians are threatened with poverty in old age, as their income is sometimes too low even for a basic pension supplement, despite a continuous employment history (*Honoraruntergrenzen*, 2023).

In this justification for better pay, the DMR mobilises many arguments of deservingness and relative deprivation. First, freelance musicians' work is valued on the basis of their innovative projects that contribute to cultural diversity (mirroring terms applied to entrepreneurs as well). Yet current payment structures do not adequately reward the 'social significance' of this creative work, nor their qualifications and skills. An implicit comparison is made with salaried employees, who presumably experience more financial comfort in retirement. Freelancers are deemed to be just as worthy of such pensions based on their 'continuous employment history'. This argument reproduces narratives of deservingness based on how hard one is presumed to have worked and how much one has paid into the social safety net over the course of a career.

In their justification for a minimum fee, the DMR's statements mobilise all three locations of musical value according to Shannon Garland: labour, aesthetic achievement, and social worth. The DMR cites the 40% "invisible work" that goes into a performance, including individual practice and group rehearsals, organisational work, travel, marketing, and professional development, such as networking, skilling up, and political engagement. Fees should also reward one's artistic work. Finally, the social value of freelance musicians' contributions is also mentioned, often compared with the figure of the salaried musicians, such as those employed by the many public orchestras and music schools in Germany. Freelancers make important contributions to Germany's artistic

landscape outside of public institutions. Based on this claim, the DMR asserts that freelancers should be valued equally by the state. This recognition of value is reflected in quality of life in retirement.[30]

Based on these arguments, the DMR developed a minimum artist fee for concerts that would provide freelancers with an annual income equivalent to their salaried counterparts. With staggered implementation, the initial policy paper argued that freelance musicians should be earning 675 Euro per concert by 2025. The DMR shows how it arrived at this sum by taking into account all the labour time and costs behind one concert evening. The DMR calculates 220 working days per year for a "healthy/normal workload" enjoyed in other sectors, accounting for weekends, public holidays, vacations, and sick days. Drawing on statistics from salaried employees, they set the target annual gross income at 49,251 Euros. Accounting for savings (15%) and business costs (35%), the DMR calculated that freelance musicians should be earning 89,142 Euros per year to match their salaried counterparts. Dividing this sum by the number of "visible work" days, i.e. concerts and ensemble rehearsals, the DMR arrived at the sum 675 Euro per concert.

This announcement sent shockwaves through the system. State music councils took this recommendation to their respective parliaments for negotiations. In NRW where 2024 budget cuts severely impacted the cultural ministry, implementation seemed nigh on impossible. Even though the culture minister promised an extra three million euros to support this policy, event organisers and venues still worried about the potential impacts. The NRW Landtag began with a one-year pilot programme. From August 2024, artists working in two specific state-funded cultural

[30] For more on the DMR's position on the minimum artist fee as well as the current status of this policy, see www.musikrat.de/musikpolitik/professionelles-musikleben

education programmes were entitled to the minimum concert fee determined by a complex matrix of factors (*Faire Bezahlung*, 2024). A full roll-out of the minimum artist fee is planned for 2026. This means, according to members of NRW parliament Frank Jablonski and Heike Wermer, that this policy will apply for any event in which 'the state has contributed one cent' (Jablonski & Wermer, 2024).

While the DMR based its initial recommendation on comparisons with salaried employment, the 2024 NRW policy has taken additional factors into consideration when developing its remuneration matrix. The first draft of the planned roll-out made concessions based on venue size. While musicians may spend the same amount of time preparing a performance regardless of audience size, the profits venues make vary considerably based on ticket sales. Often paying each person in a band 650 Euros for an audience of 50 people would not be possible. In response, the minimum fee has already been lowered based on gradation of venue size and type of engagement. For venues with fewer than 100 seats, the minimum fee begins at 250 Euros; those with 100-200 seats, 375 Euros.[31] Such decisions have essentially halved the recommended amount by the DMR in most concert settings.

Another political decision was to treat "entertainment" and "serious music" equally. In early drafts of the proposal, no distinction was made between the two registers in terms of fees. Dr. Robert von Zahn, general secretary of the NRW state music council, praised the plan for treating all genres equally, as funding structures historically value classical music over jazz and pop. Yet, he noted, practices differ between the various genres, which complicates this one-size-fits-all approach:

[31] For a full description of the policy and how it is being applied across artistic media and audience sizes, see the MKW website: www.mkw.nrw/themen/kultur/kunst-und-kulturfoerderung/honoraruntergrenzen

> [The commission] said that rehearsals must also be paid for. That doesn't happen in pop. Organisers of pop concerts find it quite amusing that rehearsals have to be paid for. In response, the commission says 'well, not the entire rehearsal work, but only the dress rehearsal'... But even that often doesn't exist in pop music... The event organisers won't want to pay for rehearsals at all.

A further genre-related problem that Robert noted is how to compensate larger ensembles, such as jazz bands:

> [This minimum concert fee] won't work at all for popular music. If we have this minimum for every musician of a large band, then some concerts become too expensive for small organisers or for municipal promoters of pop music. ... A big band from the independent music scene consisting of 15 or more musicians will find it more difficult to find concert organisers if these minimum fees apply. For this reason, the funding guidelines for minimum fees in NRW now provide for a flat rate for bands with five or more musicians.

These issues show that the guidelines were modelled mostly on classical music industry standards. The provisions for a run-through rehearsal and dress rehearsal, as well as higher fees for soloists, conductors, and musical directors, mirrors the hierarchy of roles within large classical ensembles. For those in popular or world music, without conductors, musical directors, or dress rehearsals, these structures do not necessarily reward the type of labour or investments made into their performances.

One direct consequence of the DMR's recommendation was to bring discussions over artist fees out into the open. What was once a taboo question to ask another musician is now being explicated in policy documents. For many musicians in the world music scene, the most shocking revelation in the DMR's report was the high sums their classical counterparts earned per concert. In general, people knew there was more money to be made in classical music, but the size of the artist fees and the frequency of concerts showed just how large the wage gap is between the two

genres. This shaped discussions around artist fees from one of absolute worth – what one is able to buy with a concert fee, such as petrol or a meal – to one of relative worth – how much am I earning compared to musicians of similar experience and skill levels.

The comparison with other genres prompted indignation in the world music scene. These policy discussions around the minimum artist fee presented world music actors with a chance to change their standing within the field. I heard such calls to action in a 2023 meeting of *Globale Musik Köln e.V.* (GMK), a political organisation representing the world music scene in Cologne. In an address to the members, a prominent political actor in the scene (who wished to remain anonymous) stressed that they have to assert their value not based on simply being 'diverse', but for performing quality music: 'Calling this the *Freie Szene* [literally the "free scene"] was a mistake because it has actualised its name! It's seen as expendable!' Musicians have taken up this call and begun demanding higher artist fees in public funding applications in line with the DMR recommendations. While musicians may feel more emboldened by the wage negotiations, state funders are still hampered by pre-existing budget allocations. During a 2023 jury process in which I participated, many bands demanded 650 Euros per person, per concert, in line with the DMR's initial recommendations. By the third application a juror sighed exasperatedly and threw up her hands: 'Who do they think they are? Where do they expect this money to come from?'

Indeed, many cultural actors are concerned about how these fees should be financed in a scene where there is already a paucity of money circulating. Birgit Ellinghaus accused policymakers of not being sensitive to world music's needs:

> That's all fine for Western classical musicians in orchestras. But we're talking about a completely different scene...this will be the deathblow [for world music]... If

> someone says that you have to pay 400 Euros per person, where do we end up? Who's going to pay that? That shows me that both the DMR and the associated state music councils have no idea how the scene works…They don't know what the realities are.

Birgit expressed a fear held by many people in the world music scene. How can these fees be paid while still maintaining the same number of concerts? Although the state has promised to compensate for these increased expenditures, preliminary budget discussions for 2026 signal cuts across all ministries.

Considering the broader implications for this policy, it seems that the desired goal of freelancer equality might result in less equitable outcomes across the music industry. Conditions for top musicians will undoubtedly improve, but what about those performers whose value is not recognised by state funding bodies? The current system not only allows these musicians to work (mostly through non-monetised labour), but it actually *depends* on such self-exploitation. World music at the margins is a pericapitalist sphere that upholds an economically unprofitable scene. Until a musician 'makes it' – scaling up and translating their goods into a profit-producing enterprise – they must survive from the proverbial 'crumbs from the table' of other genres, mostly classical and jazz music. Taylor (2024) describes this phenomenon in the East Los Angeles indie music scene. Most performers play for symbolic fees until they can be translated into the industry as profitable performers. This industry relies on this 'reserve army' of labourers to produce value for the capitalist music business (T. D. Taylor, 2024, p. 119). The value which professional musicians bring to the industry is cultivated years before in pericapitalist, unprofitable local scenes. The business relied on this previous value-creation, generated through performing experience, honing one's craft, and building a loyal fan base. Taylor argues that the industry must

paradoxically maintain these spaces for its survival even as it simultaneously destroys them. The minimum artist fee threatens to collapse these spaces for Germany's world music scene. Considering the broader landscape of Germany's profitable and unprofitable music sector, this policy might have catastrophic effects. Such efforts to improve conditions for those who have "made it" may inadvertently destroy the pericapitalist sphere that sustains the entire ecosystem.

If world music as a whole will be hampered through this policy, racialised and forced migrant musicians in this field stand to lose everything. A minimum fee will condense the limited funding available into the hands of those musicians who are attractive to event organisers. As seen in section 3.4.2, Veranstalter:innen generally seek low-risk acts that require little investment. This system tends to reward musicians who are well connected (often arising from contacts made at German conservatories), have representation, and boast a large following of ticket-buying fans. Those restarting their careers here as forced migrants often lack all three. Forced migrants rely on the low-paid, multicultural-oriented events profiled in section 3.3.1 to gain a foothold in the scene. If events like these dry up or Veranstalter:innen turn to well-established bands, it is unclear whether this career pathway will remain open to forced migrants. An even more drastic consequence would be the collapse of the entire world music scene if it no longer has this pericapitalist sphere for cultivating new talent.

3.5 Entrepreneurship and the ambivalent value of freedom

This chapter has questioned the seemingly successful labour market integration of racialised and forced migrant musicians in Germany's world music scene. The fact that these musicians have carved out careers for themselves in the precarious gig economy seemingly aligns with narratives of

state integration policies and theories of migrant entrepreneurship. However, a closer analysis reveals a more complex and ambivalent reality. On the surface, these musicians exhibit remarkable business acumen and creative problem-solving. However, framing them as heroic entrepreneurs obscures the structural precarity that pushed them into these careers in the first place. By exploring multivalent notions of "freedom" and value creation, this conclusion challenges simplistic narratives of integration. I reframe racialised musicians' labour as a nuanced negotiation between agency and constraint, value creation and systemic exclusion.

Given the knowledge, strategies, and policies outlined above, to what degree can we call these musicians "entrepreneurs"? From the perspective of Germany's labour market integration policies and the literature on migrant entrepreneurship, these musicians seem to be performing exceptionally well. They bring skills from abroad and adapt them to the country's market conditions. They create networks, build knowledge about how the scene functions, and generate new project ideas largely through their own initiative and innovation. Even if these migrants do not follow the paths laid out by mixed embeddedness theorists, they nevertheless demonstrate their spatial and social mobility in their professional pursuits. Indeed, some musicians derive pleasure from a business-savvy exploitation of the system. This "trickster" identity often serves as a point of pride for musicians who can make a career from their passion (Tsioulakis, 2020).

But we should be cautious in framing these behaviours as heroic entrepreneurial actions. Here, studies on the field of music production can deliver insights into broader issues relating to migration and the state. As Jo Haynes and Lee Marshall (2018) write, musicians use such business strategies as a means to an artistic end, not just profit. While these musicians may engage in

entrepreneurial activities, their motivations differ from that of entrepreneurs. Economic success is not the sole goal, but rather is the means by which the real acts of value can take place: music-making.

This distinction may seem trivial, but Haynes and Marshall argue that to call musicians entrepreneurs misrepresents their work. Musicians' entrepreneurial impetus comes from necessity, not from the pleasure derived in Schumpeter's "creative destruction". Indeed, over-valuing the economic dimension of creative labour reinforces the 'positive associations of autonomy and creativity as a mask for lack of infrastructural support, uncertainty and continuous job insecurity' (Haynes & Marshall, 2018, p. 478-9). Insights about this narrow category of 'reluctant entrepreneurs' in the music scene can reveal broader truths about the direction of the economy:

> Looking at it this way, rather than a transformation of working conditions within (popular) music, it could be argued that labour in other industries is simply becoming more akin to the traditional economic structures and working practices of the popular music industry, with more and more people working in a "gig economy" (Haynes & Marshall, 2018, p. 475).

In a similar vein, what happens when we question the migrant entrepreneurship narrative where migrants move from state benefits to work in ethnic markets, eventually metamorphosing into fully integrated members of the labour force? We might begin to see them as what Isabell Lorey calls 'virtuosos of freedom' (2011): those who adopt the conditions of their precarity in the face of limited options and nevertheless champion the freedoms it seemingly affords. Tsing offers a similarly ambivalent framing of the bifocal lens of "freedom". Like the matsutake mushroom trade profiled in her ethnography, the world music genre is similarly 'contaminated with the cultural practices of "freedom"' (Tsing, 2015, p. 68). By this she means that freedom may permeate the

overarching narratives of the profession, but the experiences from within do not always match these expectations.

Actors spoke about freedom in a number of contexts with the world music scene. Freelancing can afford maximum creative and economic freedom for artists. Musicians can follow their own artistic impulses, especially compared with salaried musicians embedded in rigid hierarchical ensembles. Mehmet waxed lyrically about his feeling of freedom when he performs:

> I have this passion. I do it with love. It's simply the only light in my life, the only sun in my life... On stage I feel free there. Yes, I only have this freedom there... Not completely but it's something.

When musicians speak about freedom here, it is often contrasted with the freedom they lacked in their countries of origin. Aeham spoke about finding freedom in Germany: '[With music] I am free in my mind. I left my country not because I was hungry or thirsty. I left my country to be free, to think freely and to stay free'. The asylum system in Europe purports to offer this freedom to refugees. Those seeking asylum should not only be free from violence and persecution, but also be free to realise their full potential in the country of destination. But these freedoms are couched in terms of exchange. In Germany, one receives support only by adhering to the trajectory of integration policies imposed by the state (Schulte, 2021; Etzel, 2023).

Here we see how narratives of migration and freelance work come together under the notion of freedom. As Tsing writes, migrants must translate narratives of freedom imposed by the US and other immigrant-receiving countries into livelihood strategies. Indeed such strategies 'provide the only official rudder for precarious living' (Tsing, 2015, p. 101-2). These narratives of freedom can obscure the underlying conditions that forced one into 'life without the promise of stability' (p. 2).

In precarious work the freedom of choice can also mean freedom from the social safety net – left to fend for oneself in a neoliberal, capitalist system. Musicians noted this when it came to scalability. To scale up via an agency may generate more economic freedom through increased reach and income, but it also limits one's control over the artistic product. These underdeveloped support structures are reflected in state funding as well. Even within Germany's state cultural funding apparatus, allegedly guided by the principle of art for arts' sake, this freedom to create is only afforded to a select number of musicians within the professional class. And membership to this field structurally excludes migrants in the world music scene whose biographies and musical practices do not fit within existing music industry standards. The protections afforded to professional musicians make work for non-recognised professionals even more precarious. This is born out in the minimum concert fee policy, which may shutter the pericapitalist world music sphere altogether, extinguishing even the ambivalent sense of freedom experienced there.

This feeling of freedom reported by workers in precarious conditions does not mirror that which is touted by narratives of migration or entrepreneurship, as Tsing writes:

> This is not the freedom imagined by economists, who use that term to talk about the regularities of individual rational choice. Nor is it political liberalism. This mushroomers' freedom is irregular and outside rationalization; it is performative, communally varied, and effervescent... Freedom emerges from open-ended cultural interplay, full of potential conflict and misunderstanding (2015, p. 76).

Indeed, much of the pleasure derived from navigating this free market is learning how it works and exploiting it for one's own benefit. In this chapter I have relayed the knowledge and skills which my interlocutors acquired on their path to building a freelance career in Germany. Mastering the bureaucratic systems – KSK, GEMA, taxes, funding applications, and the foreign office – is only

part of the process. First they needed to enter the scene and scale up their circulation. Artist fee negotiations arise not only from a belief in one's own worth, but also emerge in interaction with larger field-level considerations. These include demand for particular instruments and genres, industry-wide discourses about decent work and fair compensation, venues and financial risk, public budgeting, and the political expediency of certain nationalities, ethnicities, migration statuses, and genders. The capricious funding structure and dearth of money circulating in world music keeps freelance musicians in a state of precarity.

Given all these risks, why are forced migrants overrepresented in this field compared to other types of migrants and their German-born counterparts? In light of the multiple types of precarity they face, what draws them to this career path? As the overview of labour market integration policies in section 3.1 and theories of migrant entrepreneurship in section 3.2 showed, structural factors often push new arrivals into self-employment. Some admitted that while they love working as a musician, they also couldn't get a job anywhere else. Here we could speak of the other side of freedom – not the freedom *of* choice, but rather *from* choice. With limited alternatives, many of the migrants were pushed into a path of precarity, even if the overarching narrative is one of freedom.

I saw the complexities of these employment trajectories through conversations with Sheyda. At the end of 2023 she announced her goal to become independent of state benefits by the end of the next year. The *JobCenter* [unemployment office] provides support, but simultaneously serves as a mechanism of state control; forced migrants must comply with language course requirements, job-seeking training, and provide detailed personal documents under threat of financial sanctioning.

Furthermore, once enrolled, it is difficult for refugees to reject benefits if they cannot demonstrate a high enough monthly income to support themselves (as dictated by the state). In our discussions, I asked Sheyda if she considered temporarily getting a part-time job at a supermarket. From my research, it seemed that the JobCenter preferred long-term contracts to freelance work as evidence for financial stability.

When I suggested this to her, we were sitting on Venloer Straße in the rapidly gentrifying neighbourhood of Ehrenfeld in Cologne. I pointed at the Rewe market across the street, 'why not apply there?' Sheyda reacted indignantly: 'I'm a famous Kurdish singer! Can you imagine how degrading that would be if my fans saw me scanning groceries!' I questioned how likely this was and if her ego had maybe not grown a bit too large. But sure enough, five minutes later a person approached our table in the cafe and asked her for an autograph. Perhaps being seen in what she considered an unworthy job could damage her performing career after all. Nevertheless, I thought that such conceit was endangering her safety, as she could be deported to Iran if her migration status changed. But half a year later, she shared the true reason behind her strong response. She had applied for a job at that very supermarket and had been rejected. She didn't even qualify for their apprenticeship programme without the required educational documents.

For Sheyda this narrative of freedom and independence that music gives her masks the grim reality of everyday exclusion. Denied the option of pursuing stable, protected employment, forced migrants turn to other industries with lower barriers to entry. Music, especially world music, is comparatively unregulated in Germany, meaning one does not necessarily need a degree to enter the profession (although the increasing importance of qualifications will be discussed in chapter

five). Even though a musician must still work hard to be 'discovered' and get a foothold in the scene, at least the profession itself is still open to them.

This feeling of exclusion from 'normal' jobs is not just limited to those without qualifications. Many forced migrants with formal access to other sectors through degrees and technical skills still turn to the world music scene. They are drawn by the creative freedoms, but also reported feeling ostracised within their majority-German workplaces. Ayham Nabuti, a musician and cultural project manager, started off with a tech job at a large German corporation. But despite his quickly-achieved German fluency, he still did not manage to connect with colleagues. After a few years he left that job, completed the ZLG, and has since worked as project manager in socio-cultural projects. While the working conditions are far more precarious, he nevertheless values the ethos and perceived commonality of those also working in the cultural sector, especially that of world music and migrant inclusion. With the rise of the far-right party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) in recent years, many migrants have expressed concern about the increasing number of racist attacks and threats of deportation. These fears came one step closer to being realised when the far right's secret so-called 'remigration' plan to deport citizens and residents of colour was revealed in January 2024 (Bensmann et al., 2024). In low-paying positions on short-term contracts at cultural organisations, at least the likelihood of sitting next to a neo-Nazi is relatively low – or so their logic goes.

But forced migrants' overrepresentation in the freelance music scene cannot be fully explained by labour market exclusion. In fact, some parts of the forced migration experience actually facilitate entry into the field. While the state-imposed waiting periods may have negative consequences for

many people not allowed to practise their professions (Schulte, 2024), it gave many of my interlocutors time to invest in their art. Omar*, a Syrian Kurd, was only able to pursue playing *saz* full time since coming to Germany. He plays in three semi-professional groups while simultaneously completing an apprenticeship in preschool education. Sheyda followed a similar path. In Iran she worked in a firm designing wedding dresses. But on her journey to Europe she began developing her voice and increasing her online presence in Kurdish channels. Once in Germany she invested in this career path, taking voice lessons and getting advice and training on how to work as a freelancer from various migrant and arts organisations.

From this perspective, Germany's refugees and affluent cultural producers have one thing in common: time. As Bourdieu wrote about cultivating cultural capital, 'the work of acquisition is work on oneself (self-improvement), an effort that presupposes a personal cost...an investment, above all of time' (1986, p. 245). While the wealthy may pursue the arts on the basis of their economic security, refugees may do so in the context of their state-imposed forced waiting period. Refugees receive modest state benefits while attending language and integration classes, as well as during the job search process until they earn a liveable salary, provided they fulfil the JobCenter requirements. Many of my interlocutors took advantage of this enforced unemployment to invest in their art – improving skills, making connections, and performing for little to no fee.

This is not to say that refugees live a life of luxury upon arrival in Germany. Run-down facilities shared with hundreds of people and a lack of private spaces characterised nearly all refugees' first months, if not years, in Germany. Safety concerns within the centres, as well as threats from anti-migrant aggressors outside, left no place of security for many. Despite the robust bureaucratic

machine, some people still fall through the cracks, not receiving their legally-mandated stipend or being barred from enrolling in language courses. And this is just for recognised refugees; those with Duldung status receive a fraction of this state support. Omar said it took him two years before he could touch his saz again after arriving in Germany: 'You need security and a bed and the basics before you start thinking about even playing music, about even having free time'.

Bivalent stories of agency and powerlessness, inclusion and exclusion often go hand in hand. These 'virtuosos of freedom' do not describe conditions of ultimate choice, but rather a lack thereof. Rebal Alkhodari, a singer and conductor from Syria, told me that his ambition arose from the freedom of loss: 'When I say, "okay, I want to do this project", whether it works out or not, I don't really care. I have nothing to lose compared to what I already lost'. Aeham evoked freedom in our interview as independence from control – whether by a dictatorial state or an exploitative agency: 'And when it will arrive to the point where I'm told to wear something or they force me to play some piece or other, I will leave music. Music for me is freedom. And I fought for that in Syria'.

This ambivalence of freedom is reflected in how these so-called "entrepreneurs" exercise their mobility. This combination of aspiration and ability (Carling, 2002) manifests not only in physical mobility, but also mobility as the capacity to 'act in difficult or uncertain circumstances... to disentangle themselves from confining structures, plot their escape and move towards better positions' (Vigh, 2009, p. 419). By conceiving of movement both spatially and socially, 'mobility becomes thus a symbolic element for imagining a better future and overcoming inequalities' (Dannecker & Çakir, 2016, p. 108). Therefore, within these conditions of forced mobility (migration) and immobility (Germany's restrictive refugee policies), migrants created spaces to act.

Even if their employment prospects in Germany pushed them into an unregulated, precarious profession, they nevertheless claim this move as a moment of agency, a step towards their desired life in a new place.

Returning to the original question of how racialised and forced migrant musicians create value for themselves, one part of the answer established in this chapter is through an ambivalent form of business-savvy economic strategising. These 'reluctant entrepreneurs' or 'virtuosos of freedom' inform how we can approach mixed embeddedness and mobility in migration studies. This process of 'moving out' and 'moving up' may be an established pathway that many self-employed migrant musicians follow (Dannecker & Çakir, 2016, p. 99), but the forces driving this mobility are not so heroic as entrepreneurship narratives would have us believe. The musicians in this study acquired these business skills and acumen out of a mixture of economic necessity and desire to succeed in a chosen profession, even if "choice" does not accurately reflect the degree of agency present within these opportunity structures.

Graeber ties this question of freedom back to the politics of value creation: 'The ultimate freedom is not the freedom to create or accumulate value, but the freedom to decide (collectively or individually) what it is that makes life worth living' (2001, p. 88). Thus the meaning of life, Graeber argues, is rooted in political struggles over what is valued and by whom, not in how it is converted for monetary gain.

Many of my interlocutors would agree with this sentiment, insisting that, 'it's not just about the money' – and German migration and cultural policy reflects that. The next chapter will explore the

social value of racialised musician's labour through the lens of diversity programmes in NRW's world music scene.



Figure 4: Words Beyond Borders performing at Zakk in Düsseldorf (2020)

Chapter 4: Differentiating the value of diversity in NRW policy

> That's called a dictatorship, when the master alone decides.
> You will be killed there, brainwashed from birth
> Your throat will be cut if you oppose them.
> Those in power want to control and keep people down
> as if they were their servants.
> We have every right to speak the truth
> Shout it loud, now is the time
>
> Words Beyond Borders, '*Faryad Bezan*'[32]

I listened to Words Beyond Borders (WBB) perform this song at an outdoor concert in Düsseldorf in summer 2021. The performers looked the part of a hip rap crew – styled hair, fancy trainers, designer-looking black hoodies. But when they peered out over their tinted sunglasses they addressed a curiously-composed audience.

The crowd could have been posing for a stock photo labelled 'diversity'. The hard-core fans, mostly migrant youths from Afghanistan and Iran, populated the front rows, looking edgy in their tracksuits and over-the-shoulder bum bags. Behind them stood the white, mid-sixties, Green Party voters. They wore flowing skirts with flowers behind their ears and danced in a manner more appropriate for a folk music concert than for a rap showcase. Residents from the majority working-class neighbourhood filtered in and out at the edges, trying to make sense of why these hippies were swaying to a young Iranian wearing a bullet-proof vest and gold chains, a nod to US rappers' fashion choices. I stood at the back with my colleagues, there to represent the LMR which funded

[32] Translated from Persian to German by WBB and to English by the author

the event. Some of us dressed for a summer festival; others straightened their collars and wiped mud off their brogues between songs.

Such is the multiculturalism circuit, or the '*Multikultikreis*', as a WBB member called it. By day, they play for white, pro-immigration Germans at state-funded cultural festivals and so-called "one world" block parties. By night, they perform in small venues for their other public – fellow unaccompanied, asylum-seeking youths who personally relate to the lyrics. This strategic positioning across audience groups helps WBB operate within different regimes of value (Appadurai, 1986). On the one hand, Multikulti gigs confer economic and symbolic value via recognition from public institutions. These values can be converted into future opportunities, such as paid performances and further investment. On the other hand, their nightlife performances generate more social and aesthetic value by performing their chosen music for their desired audience. These events reflect back the value in how they see themselves through the eyes of their audiences. As Graeber argues, such a process of recognition embodies the ultimate locus of value. With these mixed sources of value and multiple publics, WBB has established themselves as a rising professional music group in the region.

For groups like WBB, the Multikulti circuit has developed into an identifiable and exploitable performance niche in Germany's music landscape. This is only possible because of extensive public funding in the cultural sector. Such funding supports concerts in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, like the one profiled above, as well as amateur music-making, professional exchanges between musicians in different genres, and teacher training programmes. Uniting all of these initiatives is the umbrella term "diversity".

Public funding presents one avenue for state institutions to express the value of diversity in German society. This includes not only what type of diversity is promoted and who is affected, but also how many resources are devoted to realising these policy goals. In terms of fiscal value, the amount allocated to these programmes does not constitute a significant portion of the state's annual budget, even within cultural ministries. But within the world music scene, diversity-oriented funding accounts for a substantial part of the resources available, in particular for semi-professional musicians. Therefore, aspiring musicians must grapple with this fragmented policy landscape in order to get a foothold in the scene. In terms of *values*, the ways in which public institutions attempt to promote diversification reveals their underlying conceptions of what diversity signifies.

As the analysis in this chapter shows, the meaning of diversity in funding for world music mirrors the broader mainstreaming of diversity discourses. Diversity's increasing 'banality' has proved a double-edged sword; while it is becoming a more common concept in business and public institutions (particularly in the Anglo-American sphere), it has become more ambiguous and multivalent as a driver of change (Vertovec, 2012). Unpacking how value is conceived within this impulse to diversify may help to differentiate this meaning within this broad policy landscape.

Positioning diversity as a societal value is a relatively recent phenomenon. Diversity policies first arose in the US during the civil rights movement and subsequent anti-racism legislation of the 1960s and 70s (Wrench, 2007). Its incorporation into European politics followed in the 1980s. The diversity turn in Europe has been less successful in courts and legislative bodies (Vertovec, 2012) but more "mainstreamed" in policy discourses (Steuerwald & Ünsal, 2012). In Germany,

one sees this across all levels of government, from the federal (*Der Nationale Integrationsplan*, 2007), to the state (Chancenland, 2021) and the local (Hackett, 2018). Diversity's reach is not limited to the public sector; corporations took on the "business case for diversity" in the 1990s in Europe as well (Vertovec, 2012; Wrench, 2007). This followed the logic that diverse teams increased productivity and profit and (at least in the US) reduced the likelihood of affirmative action lawsuits. In such spheres, '"diversity" has been considered as a means to an end' (Vertovec, 2012, p. 295).

Since the rise of the "diversity machine" in the 1990s, the semiotic strength of diversity has been splintering (Lynch, 1997). Anthropologist Steven Vertovec distinguishes two broad drivers in diversity initiatives: those targeting the "diverse" in order to better their conditions and those aiming to change the habits and perceptions of the majority (2012, p. 299-300). He describes these "facets" of diversity as different sides of the same jewel – all reflecting the value of diversity in modern societies. But these facets range from redistribution and recognition (seeking justice for historically marginalised groups) to strictly economic concerns (improving business competition and organisational efficiency).

Moreover, the identity markers that qualify as diverse have also multiplied. A term that once targeted racial minorities and women now encompasses differences in nationality, age, religion, ability, culture, gender, sexual orientation, and education. That these diverse identities can coexist in the same signifier emphasises diversity's 'elusive multivalence' (Vertovec, 2012, p. 297), or alternatively its 'semantic bleaching' (Modan, 2008). Vertovec acknowledges critiques that the term has been diluted through this expansion, but argues that diversity has only been able to

'transform the social imaginary because of its ambiguity, multivocality and banality' (2012, p. 306). Vertovec sees this transformation as a positive sign of more acceptance of difference across all aspects of the social imaginary.

While this may be true, policy drivers within diversity programming can nevertheless obfuscate the intended beneficiaries of such initiatives. Some policies intend to improve conditions for the "diverse" (e.g. racial minorities) while others benefit the organisations in which these people are found (e.g. public institutions). This distinction shapes the intervention, its implementation, and ultimately which social imaginary is realised. These initiatives – almost as diverse as the populations meant to benefit from them – have received mixed reviews in academic circles, the press, and public institutions. Often, diversity policies are grouped together as if they were one coherent set of political initiatives.[33] However, this amalgamation hides their varied objectives, the populations they intend to serve, and the mechanisms deployed. Scholarly works similarly risk reproducing this semantic imprecision (Gaupp & Pelillo-Hestermeyer, 2021).

Furthermore, the term is rarely used in isolation; in Germany, "diversity" often appears alongside other policy goals such as promoting integration, inclusion, participation, multiculturalism, intercultural dialogue, empowerment, and a post-migration society. In each of these combinations, diversity takes on a slightly different meaning. For example, 'diversity and integration' has been primarily used in programming for migrants, while 'diversity and inclusion' has historically referred to (dis)ability. These terms have come and gone over the years in political discourses. The so-called "death of multiculturalism" in Western Europe was followed by the era of

[33] In the UK the collective term is Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) and in the US Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). DEI has become a household phrase due to recent attacks on these initiatives in the current presidency.

interculturalism and integration (Korteweg & Triadafilopoulos, 2015). Now, the catch-all term "diversity" has taken precedence in many policy fields to encompass multiple axes of discrimination. Yet many policies currently flying under the banner of diversity target vastly different outcomes for different populations using different understandings of the term. Therefore, disentangling the various policy drivers can help reveal an initiative's internal logic. This in turn exposes the value and values undergirding the push for diversification.

Once again, the cultural industries might provide insights into broader societal discussions. For example, sociologists Roaa Ali and Bridget Byrne (2023) distinguish between diversity in the creation of, rather than representation in, cultural products.[34] They focus on who performs the work of diversification within institutions of "white institutional benevolence". In doing so they uncover the persistent barriers that undermine these policies in museums and television production. In short, diversity's transformation from an 'impassioned call against racial inequality to a less politically conscious multicultural vision of society' has resulted in 'practices lacking in efficacy and legacy' (Ali & Byrne, 2023, p. 493). Other studies have found similarly mixed results from diversity initiatives in UK music festivals (Haynes & Mogilnicka, 2024) and US theatres (Kondo, 2018), as well as German art museums (Mandel, 2019), classical music institutions (Kolbe, 2024), and festivals and theatres (Jurkiewicz & Schneider, 2024).

This chapter contributes to such studies by unpacking the policy drivers and outcomes of diversity initiatives in NRW's publicly funded music landscape. Akin to Ali and Byrne's study, I too examine the efficacy and legacy of such programmes through the lens of value. I argue that public

[34] A corollary to this distinction would be diversity of audiences. This has been studied in the Germany context with "ethnic" media production, such as Turkish and Kurdish television (Kosnick, 2007).

funding's grouping of multiple policy drivers under the banner of diversity masks vastly different values and value ascribed to these initiatives. In section 4.1, I reconstruct how discourses of diversity and associated policy terms have unfolded in NRW since 2005. In section 4.2, I survey the diversity-oriented music initiatives funded by the state of NRW to illustrate the variety of policy goals and applications of "diversity". Sections 4.3 and 4.4 build on this analysis by delving ethnographically into two programmes: the LMR's Culturally and Inclusively Diverse Music Projects with Forced Migrant Musicians (formerly called Music Projects with Refugees) and the KS's annual Dialogue Project. Each of these sections engages with academic and grey literature on the respective manifestations of diversity policy: refugee integration and intercultural dialogue. These two ethnographic deep dives reveal how such programmes have evolved with and responded to broader migration-related policy discourses. They also illustrate the material limitations and challenges that such projects face in bringing about structural change.

4.1 Diversity discourses in NRW

In this section, I engage with the various diversity-oriented cultural funding programmes currently available in NRW. I unpack the different terminologies and policy levers they use.

From the perspective of mainstream cultural funding, a key turning point in the past 20 years was Germany's adoption of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Cultural Diversity in 2005. As Robert von Zahn explained to me, by signing this pledge, all levels of government took on the obligation to protect cultural heritage in Germany. The DMR took up this call and argued for increased public investment in preserving the diversity of musical cultures. The convention was seen as a tool against globalisation or the marginalisation of German culture

and was initially applied to local German musical traditions, including amateur musical life, choirs, and brass bands. But in NRW this mandate opened the door for intercultural music, or music traditions with a "migration background". On this basis *bağlama*[35] also qualified under the banner of protecting musical diversity in NRW. This promoted a cultural diversity 'that one could actually hear', as Robert put it.

According to him, however, many cultural actors have changed their focus in recent years to diversifying personnel in institutions. Discussions around structural racism in Germany have become more common since the summer of 2020 when the murder of George Floyd sparked a global protest movement. Subsequent revelations in NRW brought these issues closer to home. Several high-profile cases of structural discrimination in public theatres have since been uncovered, including accusations of systemic racism against actors in the Düsseldorf Schauspielhaus.[36] The *Ministerium für Kultur und Wissenschaft des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen* (MKW) [Ministry for Culture and Science of North Rhine-Westphalia] under the direction of Isabel Pfeiffer-Poensgen led an inquiry and implemented policy recommendations to improve the diversity of personnel in public cultural institutions.

The state could act so quickly for two reasons. First, a group of civil servants in the MKW already had recommendations prepared, one of which was the 'Diversity and Participation in Arts and Culture Plan' [*Diversität und Teilhabe in Kunst und Kultur Gesamtkonzept*]. This paper formed the basis for a collection of policies, including improving accessibility in cultural infrastructure and digital platforms, cultural education programming, and professional development options for

[35] A family of long necked lutes originally used in music from the SWANA region, in particular in Turkey. Closely related and often used interchangeably is the word *saz*.
[36] (For more on this case, see Dpa, 2021; Oelze, 2021).

artists. All of these are detailed in the 'Plan for Diversity and Participation' (*Gesamtkonzept*, n.d.). Second, the 2021 state culture budget increased by nearly 6% – about 15 million Euros more than in 2020.[37] These financial conditions gave the MKW minister Isabel Pfeifer-Poensgen space to enact these diversity initiatives.

Many actors in the cultural sphere have similarly shifted their focus in recent years to align with these state priorities. Such advocates campaign for greater diversity in management within these cultural institutions, with the assumption that diverse content and audiences will follow. In Robert's opinion, however, this is not always the case. Reports from other interlocutors corroborated this perspective. In 2021, an ensemble project in NRW posited that diverse programming and personnel would engage diverse audiences. The project, which marked 60 years since the first guest workers from Turkey came to Germany, performed classic *Gastarbeitermusik* [guest worker music] as well as contemporary hip-hop. But as one ensemble member shared, their concerts in NRW were only modestly attended by the target audience:

> There were a lot of *Biodeutsche* [white Germans] and some foreigners in the audience, but not a strong majority I have to say... There weren't that many Turkish people there... I was surprised if I'm being honest.

Not only has the focus on diverse personnel begun to eclipse diverse programmes and participants, but "diversity" as a term has expanded to encompass more than just racial difference. This is most clearly visible in the MKW's call for applications to the *Diversitätsfonds NRW* [Diversity Fund NRW], which addresses people of colour (PoC), migrants, the elderly, and queer artists, as well as

[37] Thank you to Jérôme Lenzen who brought this key point to my attention. See www.mkw.nrw/kulturgipfel-landesregierung-stellt-185-millionen-euro-fuer-die-kultur-zur-bewaeltigung-der-corona and www.mkw.nrw/kulturhaushalt-trotzt-corona-krise-landesregierung-plant-ausgaben-hoehe-von-rund-289-millionen-euro

those with disabilities (see Appendix 1, p. 358). The MKW's assertion that 'diversity is the norm' mirrors a broader trend towards treating diversity as 'mainstreamed, expected, and even taken-for-granted' in a super diverse social imaginary (Vertovec, 2012, p. 287). But this normalisation of diversity discourses can also dilute their power politically. Some cultural actors in NRW share these concerns. Packing all these facets of "diversity" into one funding pot might weaken the interests of each of these movements – although no one I spoke with was willing to go on the record with such comments.

A similar transformation has happened to a state-wide, inter-institutional diversity committee. According to Robert, it began as a small circle of people who ran music projects with forced migrants and wanted to exchange their experiences. Representatives from the LMR, LMA, and Soziokultur NRW (the umbrella organisation for NRW's sociocultural centres) constituted the core group. Initially, it facilitated pragmatic exchanges about criteria for selecting funding programmes. This small circle grew larger over the years with the addition of representatives from more institutions, art forms, and diversity spectra. It is now formally embedded within a larger state-wide cultural institution which facilitates two to four meetings per year, as well as larger conferences about diversity and participation in the state's arts and culture sector.

The growth and institutionalisation of this committee shows its increasing value, yet members note that the exchanges have become less meaningful and effective over the years. As one person told me, 'I drive for hours to sit in a meeting where people just talk hot air and nothing ever happens. Or even worse, we spend three hours debating a position paper that no one will read'. Robert put it more diplomatically: 'The discourse has become theoretical, abstract, and

personality-oriented. The consequences are not necessarily noticeable in cultural offerings'. A high-ranking official in one of these music organisations shared a similar sentiment: 'To be honest, I just get bored. At some point I stop listening. I have the impression that they are actually talking about a different cultural life than my cultural life. I'm more interested in implementation, not talk'.

Yet even the implementation itself has become muddled by the multiple policy areas, levers, and outcomes now grouped under the banner of "diversity". As programmes increasingly bring together various diversity markers into one funding pot, this collectivisation often leads to undifferentiated policies. To address this issue, some institutions have adopted the framing of the "three P's of diversity" in culture: *Personal, Programm* and *Publikum* [personnel, programme, and participants/audiences].[38] This device allows policy initiatives to be distinguished along different axes of diversity. For example, a policy seeking to diversify the staff at an institution will work very differently to one targeting the sounds heard on stage or the people sitting in the audience. This heuristic has become more common in cultural-political circles in Germany since 2017.[39] Yet, this differentiated discussion of diversity strategies has so far stayed within the realm of diversity-focused lobby groups and reports, and has not yet been integrated into the everyday parlance of public institutions and their structures (Schneider, 2022, 2024).

[38] For an example of how this framing is used, see the following MKW funding programme: www.mkw.nrw/themen/kultur/kunst-und-kulturfoerderung/publikumpersonalprogramm-kultur-divers-und-inklusiv

[39] One early adopter was the *Kompetenzverbund Kulturelle Integration und Wissenstransfer*, *Kulturpolitische Gesellschaft e.V.* It has also been used in various reports on diversity in cultural institutions (see Barz et al., 2019; Diversity Compass, 2022; Priller et al., 2021).

4.2 Diversity in NRW's state music programming

At the time of writing in 2025, many cultural organisations in NRW profess some sort of diversity-oriented funding programme. In this section, I offer a brief overview of the various publicly-funded projects that target diversity in NRW's musical landscape, encompassing both amateur and professional music-making. I exclude national, regional, or municipal programmes that are merely available in NRW,[40] as well as organisations that have no discernible diversity-oriented programming for music.[41] Instead, I focus solely on initiatives funded directly at the state level. This choice is deliberate: it highlights the different understandings of diversity that exist within a single government body – namely, NRW's MKW.[42] This is not intended to single out NRW as uniquely inconsistent; similar heterogeneity could be identified at any level of government. Rather, the purpose here is to illustrate the broader discursive environment through which racialised musicians must navigate in order to secure state support for their creative work, which as section 3.4 showed, is vital in the world music scene.

An overview of this analysis is presented in Table 1 (p. 168). Appendix 1 (p. 354) provides details of each institution and their respective programmes. I include more extensive descriptions of the LMR and KS in sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2, to provide background for the analysis in sections 4.3 and 4.4 respectively .

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[40] These would include, but are not limited to, each city's *Kulturamt* funding, *InterKultur Ruhr* which funds projects in the Ruhrgebiet, as well as private foundations that support such initiatives.

[41] The *Kunststifung NRW* is one such example. This does not mean that racialised musicians are rejected for funding, only that these particular generic or personal identity markers are not explicitly articulated in the funding description. This is not to say which way of promoting diversity is more effective, only that programmes like the Kunststiftung do not fall under the scope of this study.

[42] The one exception is the *WDR-Jazz Preis*. The WDR is funded from federal public media contributions. Nevertheless, it still falls within the scope of this study as the prize is awarded exclusively to musicians from NRW with public money.

Table 1: *Summary of diversity initiatives in music offered at the state level in NRW*

Programme organisation and title	Target outcome in "3 P's" terms	Dimension of diversity
Landesmusikrat NRW (LMR)		
1. *Kulturell und inklusiv vielfältige Musikprojekte mit geflüchteten Musiker:innen:* focus on forced migrant musicians as project leaders and participants	Personnel participants	Migration status
2. *Interkultur:* intercultural amateur music-making projects	Programme	Ethnicity
3. *Creole:* prize competition for world music in NRW	Programme	Ethnicity
Landesmusikakademie NRW (LMA)		
1. *In.Di.E Musik*: empowers music educators with "diverse backgrounds"	Personnel	Migration status, ethnicity
2. *Brückenklang*: promotes intercultural continuing music education	Programme	Ethnicity
3. *Zertifikatslehrgang Musikpädagogik Musiker*innen verschiedener Kulturen*: qualification programme for educators in world music genres	Programme [personnel indirectly]	Ethnicity
Landesverband der Musikschulen in NRW (LVdMS)		
1. *Heimat: Musik:* funding for music school projects that engage students of "different backgrounds" as well as training for music educators	Participants personnel	Migration status, ethnicity, age, ability
2. *Global Music NRW:* formerly a competition and now a festival for young performers in global genres	Programme participants	Ethnicity, age
3. *Mondomuziko:* transcultural state youth ensemble	Programme	Ethnicity, age
Ministerium für Kultur und Wissenschaft des Landes NRW (MKW)		
1. *Diversitätsfonds*: support new artistic perspectives, including from PoC, elderly, and queer artists, as well	Personnel	Ethnicity, age, LGBTQ+,

as those with disabilities.		ability
NRW Kultursekretariat (KS)		
1. *Musikkulturen Katalog:* subsidised concerts for select ensembles to perform in NRW	Programme	Ethnicity
2. *Dialog Projekt:* funds one project annually to explore musical exchange across cultures	Programme	Ethnicity
3. *Kultur, Diversität und Diskurs:* supports projects that engage with the relationship between culture, diversity, and societal discourses	Programme	Ethnicity, ability, gender

4.2.1 Landesmusikrat NRW (LMR)

The LMR is an umbrella organisation of amateur music-making organisations in the state. They distribute annual project funding from the MKW, the sum of which varies every year depending on the budget allowances made in the state parliament. The LMR has two funding pots that address diversity on the basis of migration, as well as one prize.

Originally under the name Music Projects with Refugees (2015), the programme Culturally and Inclusively Diverse Music Projects with Forced Migrant Musicians [*Kulturell und inklusiv vielfältige Musikprojekte mit geflüchteten Musiker:innen*] funds amateur music projects in which forced migrants form a significant percentage of the participants. Since the programme's establishment in 2015, it has been apportioned approximately 100,000 Euros each year by the state of NRW (±20,000 Euros).

4.2.2 NRW Kultursekretariat (KS)

The KS arose out of a cooperation between municipal cultural offices across NRW. They offer funding for multiple artistic media, including music, opera, theatre, musical theatre, dance,

painting, literature, film, and digital media. They have developed a strong profile within the world music funding landscape under the programme titled Musical Cultures [*Musikkulturen*], focusing on 'music of ethnic diversity' [*Musiken der ethnischen Vielfalt*]. Within this stream, the KS offers two funding opportunities. Section 4.4 focuses on the Dialogue Project [*Dialog Projekt*], which funds one ensemble each year to foster intercultural dialogue between musicians of different cultures. Here, the emphasis is solely on diversifying programmatic output, which I argue leads to issues of equality between the musicians.

4.2.3 Which diversity, for whom?

These profiles give an insight into the state level programmes in NRW that engage with diversity in music. Distilled in this way, we see how "diversity" as a term is used not only to engage with different identity markers, but also achieve different policy objectives. Sometimes these arise even within the same organisation.

Three further points underwrite this insight about the broad usage of diversity. Firstly, there is a distinct lack of programming to diversify concert audiences. The furthest these programmes extend in this direction is to amateur musicians and music students participating in the projects. Institutions are increasingly discussing the need to diversify audiences for publicly-funded cultural goods in Germany, although awareness and action are comparatively far behind efforts already made in other countries, such as the UK.[43] Similar programming in Germany is more often tied to integration and education initiatives. This has the effect of being strangely divorced from diversification initiatives aimed at personnel or programme.

[43] See for example the special issue on *Everyday Participation and Cultural Value* (A. Miles & Gibson, 2016).

Secondly, it is also interesting to note how other music programmes address diverse populations *without* employing the terminology of diversity. For example, *Kultur hilft Kultur* [Culture Helps Culture] was an initiative from the MKW to help Ukrainian refugee musicians find work and make connections in NRW.[44] Aside from calling these people "refugees", there is no other mention of diversity markers, nor the associated terms of integration, interculturalism, social cohesion, inclusion, etc. The website simply presented information and coordinated mentoring programmes without doing so under the terminology of refugee integration. Since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, many actors in the scene have discussed differences in treatment of Ukrainian refugees with those from Syria, Afghanistan, and Palestine (Mickelsson, 2025). While the differences in terminology are nuanced, the initiative Kultur hilft Kultur illustrates how language around diversity contributes to a racialisation of its target beneficiaries.

Thirdly, while this analysis distilled the stated goals of diversity policies down to one or two of the "three P" outcomes, they are almost always assumed to indirectly benefit the other two. For example, the ZLG is open to anyone who plays non-Western art genres (programme), and yet the target participant group is racialised musicians (personnel) who will be able to teach more diverse groups of students (participants). So while stated policy levers may only officially target one element, the long-term underlying logic often envisions stronger connections between them.

Such conflation is problematic on two levels. First, it reproduces 'ethnicised niches' which can limit the scope of a musician's creative practice to that based solely on their racial identity (Kiwan & Meinhof, 2011).[45] In these pro-diversity initiatives, musicians are often expected to represent

[44] See www.kultur-hilft-kultur.de

[45] New conceptions of world music in Germany are challenging these racialised framings by disentangle musicians' creative practice, cultural background, and listenerships. For examples of such efforts, see the Planet Ears Festival in Manheim (Irscheid, 2023).

"their cultures" and traditional repertoire. Many musicians reject this premise, as will be explored in sections 5.3.2. A second issue with the presumed symbiosis of diverse personnel, programme, and participants is that these assumptions do not always hold true. It is not a given that Turkish music or performers will draw Turkish audiences, as the project in 4.1 (p. 165) illustrated. While many diversity programmes operate under these presumptions, in my experience these goals do not always manifest. Interventions to diversify one the three P's do not automatically extend to the other two.

These different usages of "diversity" in policy point to a need for a nuanced examination of how they are applied in practice. The remainder of this chapter explores two of these programmes through an in-depth ethnographic analysis. Specifically, I explore the ways in which these programmes achieve (or fail to achieve) their respective pro-diversity agenda.

4.3 Integration, inclusion, and diversity at the Landesmusikrat NRW since 2015

Responses to the 'long summer of migration' in 2015 emphasised Germany's *Willkommenskultur* [welcome culture] for newly-arrived forced migrants. This manifested in a number of public, private, and third sector integration initiatives, many of which engaged with forced migrants for the first time in their institution's history. Music and cultural organisations were no exception. A deluge of programming "for refugees" received public money to put instruments in the hands of children, bring concerts to refugee camps, and establish multilingual choirs, to name a few initiatives.

The LMR boasts one of the longest-running and best-known funding programmes in this field in NRW. The programme has evolved over the years in dialogue with public discourses surrounding the term 'integration' and its many meanings. Reflections after 2015 led to broader critical engagement with this terminology as well as how local actors put integration into practice (Hinger & Schweitzer, 2020; Hoesch, 2024; Schammann et al., 2021). The research presented here shows some of the ways in which people working on the ground engaged with these discussions surrounding diversity and migration happening on the national level.

The LMR's trajectory parallels debates in migration studies over the use of the term 'integration' (introduced in section 2.1.5). I distinguish between integration as a *policy* and as an *everyday practice*. Integration as a top-down assimilationist policy is indeed a 'wicked concept' that should be approached with scrutiny in academic work (Kutor et al., 2023). As outlined in section 2.1.6, discussions around migration and integration often contribute to processes of racial othering that are often not addressed directly in Germany. Yet a non-normative concept of everyday integration still holds academic value for helping to understand 'the process of becoming an accepted part of society' (Penninx & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016).[46]

In this section I follow the broader sociological understanding of integration, investigating how the LMR's relationship to the concept has evolved since 2015. I argue that it transformed from a funding programme "for refugees" to one focused more on inclusion and self-determination. Tracing this trajectory shows how forced migrants engaged with policy discourses themselves and reshaped them to their own ends. Insights for projects that took place prior to 2019 are based on

[46] I thank Sarah Spencer for drawing my attention to this distinction.

desk research I conducted at the LMR and interviews with key actors after the fact. Information from 2020 onwards stems from my own experience working with this institution.

As I discussed in section 1.2.2, my work within this scene, in particular at the LMR, has certainly influenced the evolution of this funding scheme. My own engagement with the topic has brought me into interesting and at times difficult conversations with stakeholders on the future of the programme. I maintain that these exchanges enrich the analysis in this section, not undermine it.

4.3.1 "Projects for refugees"

In November 2020, I embarked on one of my first project visits in Düsseldorf as a guest researcher at the LMR. While the funding application I read claimed that "this project teaches children to play the oud," this goal bore no resemblance to the scene before me. Firstly, of the twelve people in attendance, only four were children, all of whom were running around the tables in the back room of a Catholic community centre. They weren't missing out at the moment though, since the only four instruments in circulation were being played by parents diligently repeating the passages sketched out on the sheet before them. One of the two Syrian instructors sat at the piano, attempting to teach an uninterested adolescent "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star". Eventually the other instructor called for silence, initiating the 'tuning in' process of gathering the attention and energy to the centre of the room (Schütz, 1951). He played the opening phrase of a song by Lebanese star Fairuz – instantly recognised by everyone in the circle – and the room broke into collective singing. 'That's the reason people come', one of the attendees told me later. 'It's nice just to get together and sing songs we all know'.

While many state-funded institutions might frown on such a discrepancy between the project's promised application and execution, this funding programme nevertheless sees the value of the results. The programme coordinator Sandra Hoch sat beside me clapping along and chatting with the people in the room: mostly women from Syria, Lebanon, or Morocco. The LMR programme that funded these weekly meet-ups had recently changed its name to foreground "cultural and inclusive diversity". This signalled a change in the programme's orientation. Instead of funding primarily German welfare organisations to initiate music offerings with refugees, its orientation has broadened to include projects for forced migrants conducted by musicians who themselves are often forced migrants.

This project represented one such initiative. A woman from Morocco who has lived in Germany for over 20 years organised weekly meet-ups facilitated by two Syrian musicians who arrived in Germany after 2015. They met under the aegis of childhood music education, but the scope was larger in practice. The driving motivation was to bring Arabic speakers together for informal weekly gatherings. They spoke the language, sang popular tunes, made new social connections, and exchanged information. The leader saw this last point as the most important part of the project, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic: 'People have questions about the rules, about immigration processes, housing, schools, etc. Here is where those questions get answered'. Sandra agreed. Music-making might have been the occasion bringing people together, but the social benefits of the project created additional value for those present.

Yet, this orientation towards migrant-led projects with both social and musical goals only emerged after a few years of funding just "for refugees" which contrasted strongly with the scene described

above. The LMR established this funding stream in 2015 with special dispensation from the MKW in response to the perceived 'crisis' of immigration.[47] In a 2019 interview Sandra reflected back on that time, saying 'it was just a very spontaneous thing that my colleagues and I said: "Let's just do it"'.

This linguistic differentiation "for refugees" brought structural advantages for those in this field, but also perpetuated a normative othering. In 2015-16 alone over 100,000 Euros was earmarked for projects specifically targeting forced migrants – a significant amount of resources for an extraordinary budgetary action in the culture sector. But at the same time, this framing of projects explicitly "for refugees" widened the gap between this population and other music-makers in NRW by channelling them into their own funding categories and further marginalising them (Anthias & Pajnik, 2014).

This was the case for many projects in the first two funding rounds of 2015 and 2016. Taking up Chancellor Merkel's impetus of '*wir schaffen das*' ['we can do this'], many civil society organisations, public institutions, and private individuals worked quickly to put together applications for instrumental lessons, DJing tutorials, and orchestral concerts in camps. Crucially, these formats largely did not differ from those found in other funding streams at the LMR for amateur music-making. Many groups applied project formats into new settings without necessarily adapting them to the target participant group.

This undifferentiated approach to the project design had serious consequences in the first years of funding. One choir leader who recruited new members at a refugee camp was frustrated by the

[47] Framing 2015's long summer of migration as a 'crisis' negatively shapes public opinion of those seeking asylum in Europe (S. M. Holmes & Castañeda, 2016). I therefore refrain from using 'crisis' where possible.

irregular attendance of her participants. Transferrals, camp closures, and deportations alongside the demands of the bureaucratic process were not conducive to weekly participation. Many camps were also reluctant to host such programming, which upset leaders who merely saw themselves, as one person put it, 'making a kind offer to teach the refugees music'. But this parade of well-meaning volunteers became tiresome, as Ayham Nabuti, a musician and cultural project manager who we met in chapter three, later told me:

> [In the camps] I met a lot of people and every time they'd say, "What is your name? Where do you come from? Syria? What's wrong with your country? Are you Muslim? Look, my neighbour is also Syrian, blah, blah, blah". I feel it's like an investigation. I just wanted to say, "I'll email you my CV".

What participants like Ayham thought of such programmes could only be partially reconstructed after the fact. Any interviews I conducted with former participants happened years later and only with those who were still reachable and willing to talk about the project. Participant experiences can be obliquely inferred through grant reporting documents written by project leaders. Moments of decision-making are visible between the lines, primarily in acts of omission and protest "with their feet" (Ghorashi, 2008). For example, one open jam session at a camp ended prematurely when all of the participants gradually stopped attending. Not all projects unfolded in this way, but even the patchy data suggests a certain resistance to many of these early projects. The overwhelming majority of them focused on integrating refugees into Germany's pre-existing musical landscape without taking much consideration of their specific needs and interests.[48]

Project leader expectations were often based on the racialised stereotypes that Ayham referenced in the quotation above. In the final reports from successful grantees, many preconceived ideas about

[48] For more on music programming that unfolded in the contexts of refugee camps from 2015 in Germany, see Pistrick 2020.

people from the SWANA region and Sub-Saharan Africa are laid bare. One project claimed that participants thoroughly enjoyed themselves, noting that 'the Arab kids had more fun singing, the African kids more fun dancing'. In a similar vein, a one-day workshop on Western art music claimed that 'the Syrian and German participants got into this style of music quickly while the African refugees had big problems with this soundworld'. These statements not only reproduced stereotypes steeped in deeply colonial rhetoric (Carstensen-Egwuom, 2011; Riva, 2018) but portray "the refugees" only within racialised categories, not as individuals. One project report encapsulated this phenomenon succinctly: 'We were able to arouse interest in learning an instrument in *individuals*, but unfortunately participation in the percussion group courses was not met with the necessary resonance from *the refugees*' [emphasis added].

Such language reproduces the racialised paradigm of integration discourses, especially along the lines of who should integrate into whom. While integration policy is often characterised as a 'two-way street', the onus of integration is largely placed on migrants, ignoring the other populations and institutions entwined in this process (Charsley et al., 2020). Furthermore, policy metrics tend to highlight integration *outcomes* over *processes*, including employment rate, educational attainment, and citizenship acquisition (Di Bartolomeo et al., 2015; Goodman, 2015). Yet these outcomes deliver a normative ruling on what it means to be integrated as defined by the receiving society.

This leads to another common critique of integration: into which social imaginary are migrants supposed to integrate? These policies flatten not only migrants' cultural identifications, but also their conceptions of German society. The term integration presupposes a pre-existing homogeneity

and cultural stasis within Germany's borders which does not exist. Integration's changeable goals reinforce the divide between migranticised populations and the native majority in which even migrants' successes can be spun into 'yet another example of non-integrated, problematic Muslim immigrant families' (Rytter, 2019, p. 681).

So what might a reformed theory of integration look like? Migration scholars Sarah Spencer and Katharine Charsley (2021) address these critiques by foregrounding a process-oriented understanding of integration in which conceptions of society and migrant identification are both in flux. They bring back in the local level, emphasising that the real work of integration overwhelmingly takes place in these spaces. Other scholars have similarly offered new conceptions of integration that seek to preserve its value as an analytical category while addressing the above-named weaknesses (see section 2.1.5 and Klarenbeek, 2019; Penninx & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016).

Such critiques and reconceptualisations of integration transpired not only in academic discourses, but also in how the term has been implemented in practice. The LMR identified similar issues in their programming based on the impetus towards "integration". The evolution over the years, led by Sandra Hoch and engaged actors in this scene, has created a new funding philosophy based on "inclusion and diversity" which I outline in the following section. This transformation shows how local implementation ultimately manifests the meaning of these policy concepts.

4.3.2 "Inclusion and diversity"

I met with Bruno MC, Arbab Klein (Ali), and Behruz Hacker at a cafe in Düsseldorf in 2023. As we sat down, Bruno took my recorder and brought it to his face, 'Check check, *was geht ab, was geht ab* [what's up, what's up]'. The others laughed at his posturing with the handheld mic. These

three MCs form the core membership of WBB. What began in 2017 as a weekend project for unaccompanied underage asylum seekers in a socio-cultural centre has now evolved into an award-winning music group. Membership has ebbed and flowed over the years, but these three have continued to work closely with EviN, school-teacher-cum-rapper, who once led these young men in the workshops. Their ultimate goal? To become millionaire rap legends, Ali only half-jokingly replies. Growing up in an Afghan family living in Iran, they were subject to state violence from an early age. They each made the decision as teenagers to take the risky irregular route to Europe.

This story and their dreams for the future come out in their music, manifesting primarily in their multilingual tracks and political criticism – not only of Iran's authoritarian regime, but also of racism and the asylum system in Europe. The group performs these tracks in myriad contexts. Shortly after their founding, they frequented the *Multikultikreis* of pro-immigration events, neighbourhood festivals, and school assemblies, transmitting positive messages of interculturalism and social cohesion. They found this work rewarding and shared many positive memories of well-received concerts with me.

And yet staying within this realm of publicly-funded, daytime fêtes was never the goal of WBB. One member shared with me back in 2021, 'We don't rap for the refugee aid scene, but rather want people of our age and situation to understand the music'. They lead a double life, performing an entirely different setlist at late-night parties and clubs throughout Düsseldorf and the Ruhr region. In these contexts, they cast off the identity of refugees and instead perform the rap music they hope will one day bring them fame. These texts deviate strongly from their child-friendly, Multikulti repertoire, instead reproducing sociologist Tricia Rose's trifecta of hip-hop archetypes: the

gangster, the pimp, and the ho (1994). In these shows, Ali takes to the stage in a bullet-proof vest, and Behruz looks over his opaque sunglasses down at the women in the first row. The group regaled me with tales of wild weekends in which they performed for an elementary school on a Friday morning, at a friend's 21st birthday party that night, and finally for a migrant aid relief event the following day, rapping under a tent on the town square.

This bifocal lens characterises how many publicly-funded music projects have evolved in past years. The ontological ground on which integration initiatives were built has shifted. This can be seen in the linguistic addressivity used at the LMR. Instead of projects "for refugees" (using the diminutive *Flüchtling*), the programme is now called Culturally and Inclusively Diverse Music Projects with Forced Migrant Musicians. While this new title might not fully index the thrust of the programme, it signalled a shift to projects led by racialised musicians.

One of the projects that prompted this change was WBB. They transitioned from a socio-cultural project "for refugees" to a music group led by a mixed team – a white German, an Iranian-born man who has lived in Germany for over two decades, and two recently-arrived forced migrants. Their work caters to their various intersectional interests. They gladly perform at public events and promote pro-diversity messages, but they just as much like to address their own young, racially diverse followers. Other LMR-funded projects have gone down a similar path. For example, Raed Khoshaba offers Oud lessons in Essen in a mix of Arabic and German, using the same methods he learned from his teachers in Iraq. At least 85% of participants at these weekly lessons in 2022 were Arabic-speakers.

The LMR welcomed this change and explicitly gave preference to projects with forced migrants in leadership positions in the jury criteria for 2022. They argued that the decision-making and the resources should be put in the hands of those who are meant to be "integrated". An additional benefit of the new project orientation towards "inclusivity" meant that other marginalised and intersectional identities could also come to the fore, not just asylum-seekers. For example, Annegret Keller-Steegmann's projects in Duisburg-Rheinhausen targeted not only newly-arrived forced migrants, but also Sinti and Roma children and families living beneath the poverty line. The *Mädchen Musikakademie* in Gelsenkirchen professed a similar multilayered approach with their pop music lessons and band coaching. Their programming explicitly recruited women and gender-non-conforming young people, forced migrants, and those with disabilities to work in the projects.

This expansion of project participants and leaders was mirrored by an equally expanded approach to musical practice. While in 2015 some project leaders focused on "traditional" music and reproduced ethnic-based prejudices, more diverse genres emerged when forced migrants began to submit their own project ideas. WBB brought hip-hop into the funding catalogue. MN:WEN, a group of young Syrians who first met on a state-mandated German language course, perform electronic music. The Roaches were a heavy metal duo, a genre they could not perform in Syria under the Assad regime. Through this process many multilingual choir and orientalist orchestra projects were replaced by music that appealed more explicitly to forced migrants themselves.

A further change has been an increase in the number of cooperation projects with socio-cultural organisations. Programme leaders working with nonprofits or charities, especially those with strong reputations in diverse neighbourhoods, tended to succeed more in reaching new participant

populations (Campion, 2021). Such *Multiplikatoren* [multipliers] can also be individuals with transcultural capital, who Kiwan and Meinhof (2011) call 'human hubs'.[49] Partnering with spatial hubs (cities and neighbourhoods key for migration flows) and institutional hubs (the LMR and organisations that connect artists with civil society), rich networks arose that counteracted the top-down nationalist impositions of normative integration. The list of LMR programme goals for 2022 reflected this transformation:

1. Establish fora and opportunities for making music together
2. Enable access to the region's music scene
3. Support language learning through music
4. Foster social connection
5. Provide performance funding and increase ensembles' visibility
6. Increase the proportion of forced-migrant leaders in projects.

These criteria lay bare the target outcome of this particular diversity initiative. Diverse personnel and participants are paramount. There is no mention of programmatic diversity.

While these goals represented a big shift in the programme's political orientation, they only became reality thanks to the tireless efforts of project manager Sandra Hoch. The diversification of project leaders and participants transpired because Sandra went above and beyond the duties outlined in her job description to support applicants through the funding process. Sandra cultivates relationships with each applicant helping them put together a fundable project over many phone calls and email exchanges. She will go through the forms, help applicants find appropriate venues, and facilitate networking. The way she sees it, this is time invested in project leaders who can pass on knowledge to others. It helps close the gap in access to funding for certain socio-cultural groups. While the goal of equity seems more like an integration outcome than process, the way she goes about achieving this more closely resembles the process-orientation outlined by Spencer and

[49] For more on transcultural capital, see section 5.2.3

Charsley (2021). One example is the biannual network events that Sandra organises which bring together project leaders and participants in her funding stream to exchange knowledge, present their music, and build connections for future collaborations. Indeed, a few crossover projects and ensembles have already arisen from these events.

Sandra Hoch and the LMR point to this focus on forced migrant empowerment, as well as the continued arrival of forced migrants in NRW, as justification for continued funding of this project. The profile of asylum-seekers arriving in Germany has shifted since the programme began in 2015; the 2021 Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and to a lesser extent, the 2023 escalation of violence in Sudan have changed the landscape for migrant integration. The projects which receive funding have adapted to address the needs of these newcomers. In 2022, the MKW allocated the LMR additional funding for projects with Ukrainians. The focus was on projects which proposed to incorporate newly arrived musicians from Ukraine into existing music groups with other forced migrants and migranticised people, as well as enable Ukrainians to carry out projects themselves.

Despite the continued demand for such work, this funding programme faces structural difficulties. Sandra justifies her work in its responsive, future-oriented approach to forced migrant integration. However, its political relevance paradoxically means that funding is subject to annual review based on the state's perceived need for such work. Compared to other funding initiatives at the LMR which have multi-year guarantees, this funding stream must apply anew during each budget cycle. This uncertainty does not facilitate long-term planning.

In times of budget cuts and shifting political outlooks on migration and diversity, this programme has twice been threatened with defunding. Now the funding stream itself is subject to an integration process within the LMR. At the end of 2025 this programme will be subsumed under general amateur music funding, with Sandra still managing existing cases. Instead of its standalone status, the initiative once known as Music Projects for Refugees will now be just another constitutive element of NRW's amateur musical landscape.

As she told me this, I thought back to WBB and all the concerts they had performed with the help of Sandra and this funding scheme – for primary school students, young immigrants, and elderly white hippies at multicultural festivals. These performances served to manifest the social value of diversity on stage and in the audience. For Ali, Behruz, and Bruno, such concerts represented 'the importance of their own actions to themselves', but also had the 'importance of being recognized by someone else' (Graeber, 2001, p. 45).

4.4 Intercultural dialogue, labour, and diversity at the NRW Kultursekretariat

The KS takes a different approach to supporting diversity in their music funding compared to the LMR. Rather, the KS focuses more on diverse programming than personnel or participants. As introduced in section 4.2.2, the Musikkulturen programme offers two funding opportunities: the catalogue of subsidised ensembles (see section 3.4.2 and Appendix 1, p. 359) and the Dialogue Project. This section will explore how diversity policies manifest through intercultural dialogue in the Dialogue Project. In section 4.4.1, I introduce the 2023 project group Amira Sultana Ensemble as well as the theoretical basis for intercultural dialogue. In section 4.4.2, I unpack the different

drivers of interculturalism in the project. In section 4.4.3, I look more at how the dialogue unfolded within existing power structures and resource constraints. Section 4.4.4 weaves together the musical and social affordances of dialogue in telling the story of Amira Sultana's premiere performance.

4.4.1 Intercultural dialogue at the Kultursekretariat

In the Dialogue Project, the KS calls for 'concepts that explore musical avenues for intercultural encounters and the testing of new artistic approaches'.[50] The primary applicant must be based in NRW, but the KS encourages projects to recruit artists from abroad for a multi-day intensive workshop period. The dialogue which unfolds should generate 'both techniques and inspiration for joint musical ideas'.[51] The results of the exchange are presented in a public format in one of the 20 member cities of the KS. They should,

> convey the experimental nature and ideas behind the exchange, as well as the musical cultures involved and any unusual instrumentation. The audience should have the opportunity to better understand the experimental nature of the performance and gain insight into intercultural processes.[52]

The multiple uses of the word 'experimental' foreground the innovative and uncertain nature of intercultural dialogue in this manifestation. Here, 'the focus is on intercultural dialogue through musical exchange and the exploration of new artistic approaches'.[53]

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[50] 'Gesucht werden Konzepte, mit welchen nach musikalischen Wegen interkultureller Begegnung und der Erprobung neuer künstlerischer Ansätze geforscht wird' (from the call for funding 2025).
[51] 'In mehrtägigen Workshops der Dialogpartner:innen gilt es, sich intensiv auszutauschen und sowohl Techniken als auch Inspirationen für gemeinsame musikalische Ideen zu gewinnen'.
[52] 'Dieser Auftritt soll den experimentellen Charakter und die Ideen des Austauschs sowie die beteiligten Musikkulturen und ggf. ungewöhnliche Instrumentierungen vermitteln. Das Publikum sollte die Chance haben, den experimentellen Charakter der Darbietung besser zu verstehen und einen Einblick in interkulturelle Prozesse zu bekommen'.
[53] 'Der Fokus liegt auf einem interkulturellen Dialog durch musikalischen Austausch und der Erprobung neuer künstlerischer Ansätze'.

In this project, music is the basis on which intercultural dialogue (ICD) should transpire. "Intercultural dialogue" was once a key phrase in European cultural policy in the 2000s, particularly in relation to social cohesion and cultural diversity (Ratzmann, 2019; Triandafyllidou, 2011). Prior to "dialogue", legislation was grounded in contact theory, which posited that bringing diverse groups of people together leads to strong social bonding through encounters in public spaces (Allport, 1954). Scholars have since argued that social cohesion requires meaningful, long-term exchange, not just contact (Amin, 2002). With this in mind, many political entities now advocate for increased dialogue. This formulation goes beyond just spatial proximity and instead encourages meaningful exchange and empowerment of marginalised groups, as the Council of Europe wrote in its seminal 2008 paper on the topic:

> Among its aims are: to develop a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and practices; to increase participation and the freedom and ability to make choices; to foster equality; and to enhance creative processes (White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, 2008, p. 10).

This definition sets out the prerequisites for dialogue: exchange on equal footing across perceived differences. Goals for such initiatives focus on personal and societal transformation. Dialogue should increase equality, encourage democratic participation, and spark creativity. Given this understanding of ICD's potential, it's not surprising that many initiatives primarily take place in arts and culture projects and exchange programmes (Ratzmann, 2019).

Yet not all ICD initiatives operate under the same definition, nor pursue the same goals. This terminological imprecision often renders ICD 'an idealised diplomatic tool and rhetorical discourse without much effect' (Ratzmann, 2019, p. 36). Policies mobilising this concept therefore 'necessitate rigorous evaluations' and 'an analysis of underlying power dynamics' (p. 2).

I took up this call for rigorous evaluation in my report on the Dialogue Project which I produced for the KS (Campion, 2023). Each year, the programme contracts an academic (usually an ethnomusicologist) to accompany the musicians and produce a text examining the dialogic processes and musical output. These reports should ground the project in broader discourses on intercultural exchange and contribute to musicological discussions. I conducted participant observation and interviews within the context of my DPhil research, and produced the final report as a paid consultant for the KS. All interlocutors' have given their permission to be named.

The 2023 Dialogue Project was awarded to the Amira Sultana Ensemble. This group explored the connections between Indian Raga, the Maqam system in the SWANA region, and contemporary European avant-garde improvisation. Six musicians worked together in an intensive rehearsal period to develop a repertoire exploring these cultures. The ensemble met online a number of times to get to know one another and lay the groundwork for the dialogue. This included introducing their respective music systems as well as discussing specific pieces to explore in the dialogue. In April 2023, the six performers converged on Hagen, a small post-industrial city on the Ruhr river, for a week of intense rehearsing capped by a concert premiere on Friday evening. The project ultimately culminated in three performances, a video documentation, a live concert recording, and the report I produced.

This ensemble formed specifically for this project, bringing together unlikely band members. The project was initiated by Maren Lueg, a well-established wind player in the NRW world music scene. After completing a bachelor's degree in jazz and saxophone in Scotland, she began learning music genres from the SWANA region through studies in Cairo, Istanbul, and London before

returning to her hometown of Hagen in the mid 2010s after 26 years of living abroad. She has had much success with grants for her projects in this space, including for the EastWest-Pacem Orchestra, an homage to the twentieth-century Egyptian singer Oum Kalthoum, and the electronic-world music crossover project Kosmotronix. Maren developed the project and submitted the application together with cellist Ludger Schmit. Ludger uses his basis in avant-garde music to venture across genres, including winning prestigious awards in NRW with ensembles The Dorf (*WDR Jazzpreis* 2020) and The Sephardics (*Creole NRW* 2017).

After designing the project concept, Maren and Ludger invited two NRW-based singers to join the project and curate the repertoire: Prashanthi Sankaran and Güler Bulgurcu. Prashanthi works as an engineering consultant while simultaneously pursuing a career in Carnatic and Hindustani music, as well as electronic music production. In 2024 she released *Shrilogy,* her first EP blending these genres. Güler works in cultural-political education, formerly at the award-winning centre Bahnhof Langerdeer in Bochum. In this project she contributed knowledge of Kurdish music which she learned growing up in Istanbul.

The ensemble also boasts two legendary professional musicians. Shashank Subramanyam is a virtuosic master of the *Bansuri*.[54] He tours extensively around the world performing not only Indian classical music, but also blending Western classical, contemporary art music, and diverse world music genres. He has received national honours in France and India, and has been nominated for a Grammy. Finally, Ramesh Shotham is a world-renowned percussionist based in Cologne who is at home in many genres including rock, jazz, Indian classical, and diverse world music genres. He has toured extensively with his many bands over the years, including Human

[54] A South Asian bamboo flute.

Bondage, Jazz Yatra Septet, Bhavani, Khanda, and Madras Special. In 2014 he led his own KS dialogue project called "Global Tala".

These short biographical sketches highlight project members' varied musical backgrounds and professional experiences. These differences posed inherent challenges to conducting dialogue in this configuration. The group had no shared language, music genre, nor professional status. Within these parameters, the ensemble needed to perform considerable work to create the conditions for ICD to transpire.

4.4.2 Three drivers of interculturalism

Following Ratzmann's call for rigorous evaluation of these initiatives, I will now examine how ICD principles manifested in the KS's Dialogue Project. First, I will focus on the many meanings of "interculturalism" as a policy category. Interculturalism has been the subject of many academic and policy discussions in the past 20 years, sparking debates about the exact meaning of the term and how it relates to other terms, such as multiculturalism.[55]

Zapata-Barrero (2015) differentiates understandings of interculturalism into three domains, or 'policy drivers'. Political theory tends to focus on *vertical interculturalism*, or relations between marginalised groups and the state. *Horizontal interculturalism* promotes social cohesion between cultural groups. The creative potential of *intrapersonal interculturalism* is highlighted in the third strand, which focuses on transformation within a single individual. In this project all three of Zapata-Barrero's strands came together. On the horizontal level, representatives of different

[55] There has been much work debating the diving lines between multiculturalism, interculturalism, transculturalism, and, at least in the German-speaking realm, *Hyperkulturalität* [hyperculturality] (Han, 2005). I use these terms throughout the dissertation in their relevant policy contexts (for a more theoretical investigation of these terms and how they relate to one another Cantle, 2012; Meer, 2016; Modood, 2018; Welsch, 2024).



Figure 5: The Amira Sultana Ensemble performing at the Katakomben Theatre (May 2023). L-R: Prashanthi Sankaran, Shashank Subramanyam, Maren Lueg, Güler Bulgurcu, Ludger Schmidt, Ramesh Shotham. Seated is guest performer: Anushaant Nayinai Wijayan

cultural backgrounds entered into a dialogue. This exchange impacted each individual's relationship to larger institutions (vertical) and to their own musical practice (intrapersonal). The KS, as a publicly-funded institution, plays an important role in granting recognition of minority cultures and musics through their programming. Even though the organisation is an independent body and not officially affiliated with the state, many actors in the scene nevertheless regard them as a public cultural institution, and thus part of the vertical interculturalism axis. Therefore, the (lack of) recognition they confer can have significant impact, especially for actors in the world music scene. Such programmes distribute not only economic capital, but also symbolic capital, which musicians can use to convert into future opportunities (see chapter five).

In a similar way, the KS also promotes horizontal interculturalism with its dialogue project. Here, groups enter into a process of mutual learning and exchange across cultural divides. Such identity markers are not just limited to ethnic/national distinctions (although this is the dominant

paradigm), but also age, class, education, gender, religion, and migration status. Interculturalism (as well as multiculturalism) foregrounds these group level interactions as manifested through encounters between individuals.[56] The driving force behind these encounters is to promote better intercultural understanding and social cohesion. In this Dialogue Project, for example, the musical exchange between maqam, raga, and the European avant garde functions both as an artistic experiment as well as an occasion to bring together people from different cultural backgrounds. Güler expressed such a discovery with the cross-cultural emotional meaning of the word *aman,* an Arabic word meaning 'safety, security, tranquillity' that has entered numerous languages and is sung in free improvisations from the Balkans across the SWANA region to Iran and India:

> Prashanthi sings an improvisation with the word "aman", which is such a sad sound... And then you think, 'Okay, I don't know what she's singing about, but I know how she feels right now.' And I think that's very beautiful.

This comment embodies the core of music's dialogic potential to facilitate a connection between people enculturated in different places.

However, many critiques have been made against interculturalism's formulation of cultural belonging along monolithic lines. First, it fails to engage with the mixture of cultural influences carried within each individual.[57] Second, a group-level approach homogenises different experiences of individuals within each group, ignoring intersectionality and internal debates over how a cultural entity should be recognised (Philips, 2011).

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[56] Proponents of interculturalism claim that its bi-focal lens – or moving between group-level politics and individual exchange – has an advantage over multiculturalism's sole focus on broader group relations. This characterisation is not always accepted by defenders of multiculturalism (Modood, 2017).

[57] This is a key critique of interculturalism and multiculturalism by Wolfgang Welsch, who instead promotes transculturalism (1999, 2024).

This is where Zapata-Barrero's third policy driver comes into play. This perspective on interculturalism centres on the capabilities of individuals to develop creativity and innovation through exchange. As opposed to horizontal and vertical orientations, which try to maintain a status quo of social cohesion, cultural theories recognise the productive disruption that arises from diversity and the mutual development it can foster. This theory puts individuals and their creative capacities – not broader identity categories – at the forefront of intercultural policies.

Given this perspective, it is not surprising that the majority of intercultural dialogue projects are found in arts and culture, and the KS is no exception. These moments of creative friction sparked new insights for project members. For example, Prashanthi said that looking for similarities between Indian Classical and the Kurdish singing techniques prompted insights about her own singing practice:

> Indian classical music is very improvisation based – we know a set structure of how to do things. And [in this project] I have to rethink some of the phrases I do or some of the songs that I choose. Do I want to use that part of the song? Or does something else fit in better?... I became more self-aware of my own music system through this actually, because I wasn't aware that it was so universal or could even jam with another culture.

It was only in this dialogue with the other musicians that these insights about her own musical practice emerged.

These three strands come together to establish the basis for an intercultural exchange that transpires across levels and within individuals. In the next section I will unpack the basis for dialogue and how it manifested (or failed to manifest) in this project.

4.4.3 Dialogue and labour

On the first day of the intensive workshop week and after a relaxed breakfast, we filed into the rehearsal space – a room awash in bright light with high ceilings (Figure 6, p. 195). The peeling paint on the walls reminded us of the socio-cultural centre's former glory as a gathering place for Hagen's leftist scene, as well as its current financial difficulties after the Covid-19 lockdowns. We positioned our chairs in a circle facing one another, taking out our tools of the trade. Maren surrounded herself with two saxophones and a suitcase of Turkish neys. Ramesh was similarly outfitted with an array of instruments from two continents. Ludger entangled himself in a web of cables for his electric cello, pedalboard, and amplifier. Prashanthi and Güler sat across from them, arranging sheet music on the stands. Shashank would join us only after the lunch break, so I took his place in the circle, notebook and pen in hand.

The ensemble began the day with a group improvisation, but struggled to settle on a key and scale that suited all the instruments and voices. Someone suggested A as a starting pitch, another countered with G-sharp. There was some brief translation confusion as someone mixed up the words for G-sharp and G-flat [*gis* and *ges* in German]. Finally, the group settled on G-natural. With the key established, Maren suggested Maqam Bayat/Raga Bhairav as a basis for improvisation. Everyone nodded, translating what this decision meant for them – either thinking in letters (G), sargam syllables (sa), or solfege syllables (sol). This led into a discussion on tuning where both Maren and Ludger claimed to be "in-tune" according to their instruments. Ramesh stepped in to explain that Maren's flutes were not tempered, and thus would not match Ludger's tuning in the tempered system. Instead, Ramesh suggests a rhythmic exercise using Konnakol, a percussion



Figure 6: Rehearsal space in a socio-cultural centre in Hagen (April 2023)

language used in south Indian Carnatic music.[58] This was a particularly clever way to solve the tuning issue for the moment by instead inviting everyone to clap.

But this exercise also brought about difficulties for the group. He built up to a 10/8 pattern with an uneven meter (3+2+2+3). One person excitedly jumped in, pleased to show their pre-existing

[58] In Konnakol, the syllables are vocalised while the *tala*, or the meter, is counted by touching fingers successively to the hand.

knowledge of Konnakol learned in a weekend *Brückenklang* workshop offered by the LMA.[59] Two others struggled to follow the rhythm. After a few attempts to match the syllables, one of them took a pen and paper and tried to write them down, asking Ramesh to voice the pattern more slowly. He struggled to accommodate this request, as it broke the natural flow of the rhythm. They finally managed to translate the syllables into a written pattern that these musicians could read.

With the rhythm established, the group could practice two of the songs which they had previously identified in this time signature. While both the Kurdish and Carnatic tunes followed the same meter, each song placed the emphasis on different beats, which threw off one of the singers when she prepared to enter with her verse. After she made a few unsuccessful attempts to start singing at the right point, Ramesh identified the source of the confusion and changed his playing to accommodate her. After at least ten minutes of settling into this groove, the group's playing still felt very laboured and awkward. The uncoordinated foot-tapping around the circle confirmed my suspicion that some of the musicians had not quite internalised the meter.

This process of 'tuning in' (Schütz, 1951), described in detail above, applied not only to the musical dialogue, but the social dialogue as well. When I asked each member which character traits were needed for dialogue to transpire, they identified similar qualities. First and foremost was open-mindedness and a willingness to listen. This is similarly foregrounded in literature on intercultural dialogue (Grillo, 2018). Yet alongside this willingness to engage, project members noted that one needs to offer something in return: a prerequisite for intercultural dialogue is understanding one's own culture first:

[59] For more on Brückenklang, see Appendix 1 (p. 355)

> Prashanthi: 'Knowledge about one's own culture and a willingness to know another, to ask the right questions'.
>
> Güler: 'Dialogue means sensitivity and listening, a mutual exchange of experiences... Because dialogue means to learn things that one maybe did not know so well before.'
>
> Maren: 'Openness – the group needs to understand their own subject and be open to dialogue'.

In short, both sides need to bring something to the table and be willing to exchange.

Everyone felt that some form of dialogue was able to take place over the course of the project, yet pointed to different moments when it transpired. Ludger and Ramesh connected over stints of free improvisation using extended techniques on their instruments. Prashanthi applied her knowledge of music theory in Indian and Western classical systems to *maqamat*.[60] Maren heard Shashank bending the pitches on his bamboo flute to match the microtonality in Maqam Bayat.[61]

These moments of dialogue were able to take place despite the many biographical differences between project members outlined in 4.4.1. These were not only based on their cultural backgrounds, but also musical ability, age, language, and gender. The project members located the primary challenge to dialogue in the group's varying professional statuses and skill levels. These ranged from an award-winning virtuoso to aspiring professionals with little to no formal training. Without addressing these differences, the group conceded, no meaningful two-way exchange could take place.

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[60] Pl. maqam

[61] Microtonality is the use of intervals smaller than a semitone (half-step), which are the smallest units of measurement in Western art music. The term suggests a deviation from the "norm" of 12-tone equal temperament, which most Western instruments use. The more common German term *Vierteltöne* [quarter tones] is even more misleading, as microtones' position relative to the Western semitone vary and rarely just bisect a half-step.

The ensemble took steps to diminish this hierarchy. Maren, Ludger, Prashanthi, and Güler met often, both online and in person, before the intensive rehearsal week. In these meetings, they discussed and played different songs, shared basic knowledge about their music, and practised techniques for improvisation. Prashanthi also met with Shashank online before he arrived in Germany. The lessons were helpful for Prashanthi not only to learn concrete skills, but also to establish a connection with this star performer before they were expected to work in the project together as equals. This extra time allowed the less-experienced members to engage with the material and for the group to establish productive working relationships before the intensive rehearsal period began.

During the rehearsal week, the different levels of musical skill proved to be less of a challenge than the project members expected. They attributed this mainly to the graciousness of the more established musicians who cultivated an encouraging setting for experimentation. Maren appreciated how Shashank made the effort to tailor his playing to the maqam system: 'For example, Shashank moved into other rhythms that we played together. He was flexible and engaging'. Ramesh similarly worked to put everyone on an equal playing-field. He shaped the rhythmic emphasis to cue the singers to enter. He taught the group how to count a particularly complicated rhythm. When one person lost the structure or the chord changed, he followed them seamlessly and kept the piece going. His encouragement and easy-going manner established a supportive environment for everyone to easily work together across skill levels.

Another intercultural divide to overcome was that of gender. This manifested in encounters both on and off stage. As project members noted above, dialogue requires everyone to feel equally

capable of contributing to the performance. But this often takes on a gendered bias in musical performance, especially in improvisation, where women and girls on average feel less capable to assert themselves creatively (L. Green, 1997; Wehr-Flowers, 2006). Prashanthi reiterated these findings in her own experience:

> I've often seen that women are less willing to come out confidently and improvise, and I think that's hugely underplayed in the music scene as well. And I'm experiencing through this project why. I have to prepare myself mentally a lot to just go on stage. I can see why women need more support. We need strong people in the industry who are willing to coach us through this.

Maren knows these challenges and deliberately built in this support throughout the project. She specifically sought out women ensemble members. But finding the right performers for this project was surprisingly difficult, as illustrated by how Prashanthi came to join:

> I knew a dancer who knew that Maren was looking for an Indian classical musician and preferably a woman. And Maren called me and said, “I can't find anyone who is a woman!” And that was interesting for me. I know so many people around me who sing. But yeah, all of them are male. I didn't realise that before.

Just as in addressing the hierarchy between skill levels, gender imbalances require extra effort to ensure equal participation. Maren knew this from her previous experiences managing projects:

> I didn't want to go back to the default mechanism of just inviting a man. There were many male musicians I have worked with who would have liked to be part of this project and are used to being on stage. So this was really, really difficult. Even of the women I know who are good singers and professional quality, it would have been very difficult for many of them to take that time off because they have children. They have commitments, and to take a whole week off to do this project – I don't know if that would have worked. I was really pleased that we found Güler and Prashanthi. They put a lot of time and commitment into the project.

Maren supported the women in the project by arranging additional lessons and mentoring throughout the planning and rehearsal process. I also played a role in Maren's vision for a gender-aware Dialogue Project: Maren recommended me to KS for the academic report partly because she thought the women in the group would be more comfortable opening up to a woman researcher.

Even with this heightened sensitivity to gender-specific needs, they nonetheless manifested in an unequal division of unpaid labour – primarily in care work during the rehearsal period. Before the beginning of the intensive week, no plans were made to provide the group with snacks, drinks, or meals. When the group realised that these tasks had not been done, the three women musicians (and to an extent myself as well) procured food for the group with their own money, used their breaks to prepare meals and warm drinks, and cleaned it up at the end of the day. This was done largely without discussion. One of the women saw this as a sign of respect for the older, more senior musicians (who just happened to be men): 'We don't need to do this, nobody is forcing us to make tea. It's just a nice thing to do for the group'. But as the week wore on, this imbalance (especially the financial cost) was raised in a group discussion. Following this intervention, the costs and time for meal preparation were more fairly shared. The project members agreed that this exchange exemplified successful dialogue.

Yet not all of the gendered divisions of labour could be so easily resolved through one-off discussions. These gendered issues are in fact embedded into the very structures of public funding. One key example is the *Eigenanteil* system in nearly all state-funded arts programmes. This clause demands that project applicants must contribute 10% of overall budget costs from their own

funds. Many musicians get around this requirement by crediting organisational hours as "volunteer time", billed at 15-25 Euros per hour.

While many musicians prefer sacrificing organisational work and not their artist fees to volunteer hours, this solution presents two issues. First, it ignores how this organisational work is crucial for successful performances. Such tasks include preparing the repertoire and sheet music, finding rehearsal and performance venues, coordinating with musicians, and advertising. As Garland (2022) shows, without this work, neither the social nor the aesthetic value of a musical performance can manifest. Second, this work is, in my experience, overwhelmingly performed by women. Even in ensembles with mixed-gender leadership teams, in the majority of cases men perform the artistic direction and women the organisational work. Similarly in this project, women completed most of the organisational heavy lifting. While Ludger did organise the first concert, Maren prepared the music, liaised with the audio engineers, arranged the subsequent two concerts, and managed contracts, payments, and accommodation for the musicians. Prashanthi developed the advertising materials and coordinated travel. These gendered divisions would perhaps be less of an issue if the labour were valued more equally – expressed both in compensation and group recognition.

To achieve this, the project needed two key resources: money and time. But these are hard to come by in publicly-funded arts projects, even those which claim to promote intercultural dialogue. The first hurdle is the financial limitations. The KS offers successful applicants 10,000 Euros for the project. This should compensate musicians for the rehearsal process, as well as pay for booking the

rehearsal space, travel, accommodation, tech rentals, and associated costs for the first concert.[62] While organisation and catering are nominally compensated here, the small budget (as well as the need to devote 10% for the *Eigenanteil*) often mean that these items are the first to go unremunerated. For 2026, when the minimum concert fee takes effect across all state-funded projects in NRW (see section 3.4.3), an even smaller part of the budget will be available for these expenditures and organisational work.

The second resource – time – is even more scarce, partially because of this lack of funding. Most dialogue projects unfold over an intensive rehearsal week because of the demanding costs. These include not only the concrete expenditures (such as rehearsal space, accommodation, and travel), but also the opportunity cost for musicians, who must put their weekly commitments on pause to participate. These costs include performance engagements, teaching, rehearsals, personal practice, creative development, and any non-musical work. The demands of freelance musicians outlined in chapter three do not evaporate during a week-long retreat. Prashanthi and Güler both used annual vacation leave from their day jobs to participate. Maren had only returned from England the week before where she was recording music for a film project. Shashank squeezed this project in while touring Europe to make the most out of the travel costs incurred flying from India.

All of these factors push dialogue projects to pack long rehearsals into short periods of time. But this does not create the ideal conditions for dialogue to unfold. As noted by project members, dialogue requires time for mutual exchange, experimentation, and exploration. In particular, there

[62] The total costs of the project are much higher. The KS covers costs of filming, the academic consultant report, and subsidies for subsequent concerts in member cities. Projects then cost the KS approximately 17,000 Euros per year. Up to 1,000 Euros comes from the musicians through their *Eigenanteil.*

was no time for members to process this input and come up with creative responses, as Prashanthi commented after the project concluded:

> I think a more spread out timeline would have been better. So not five days in a row. I think each person would have taken something home, thought about it, and came back with a different perspective if we had spaced it over several weeks. You go back, you internalise the song, you come up with new ideas, you come back, you listen more. I think the internalising process would have made it richer.

This aligns with Zapata-Barrero's intrapersonal strand of interculturalism – personal transformation through new encounters. But one could also argue that this time for reflection is crucial for both intergroup interculturalism (horizontal strand) and institutional interculturalism (vertical strand). This could be seen in how traditional gender roles manifested in the project structure. It was not pre-determined that the women should perform meal-preparation or organisational work, but the tasks nevertheless fell into this division of labour. It took an observant individual and a discussion with the entire group to address these issues and redistribute the workload.

Overall, the time for reflection that Prashanthi called for was not possible given the constraints of the project premiere, which took place five days after the intensive rehearsal period began. The musicians all noted the challenge of putting together a 90-minute programme from scratch, especially when performing together for the first time. These challenges came to a head in the first concert, in which all of the dissonances which had built up over the week played out on stage.

4.4.4 Musical dialogue and the white ear

Up until the time of the concert, the ensemble was worried about audience attendance. Ludger arranged for the Amira Sultana Ensemble's concert premiere to take place in a school auditorium in Hagen (Figure 7, p. 205). Ludger sold this idea to the group as a way to participate in the school's long history of bringing non-Western performers to the city and engaging in cultural education. The rest of the ensemble saw the venue in its current, material form: a run-down multi-purpose room with bad lighting and acoustics, and no backstage area for the musicians to prepare. These issues were figuratively and literally amplified by the semi-professional sound engineer team which had been engaged. During the soundcheck the pair ran back and forth from the stage to their make-shift "sound booth" – little more than two wobbly plastic tables with weighty equipment perched on top. One of the engineers (an amateur sound enthusiast who worked as a policeman by day) tried to tell Shashank how to position the mic. We all exchanged looks, anxious to see how this award-winning flutist would react, but he simply shrugged and repositioned the mic. Ramesh chuckled and whispered to me, 'That's the difference between a professional and an amateur. Pros never insult the sound guys, because they can really screw you over'.

While this was going on, the ensemble were still ironing out the rougher patches in their songs. The group added "Dhatuvardhani", an instrumental piece by Charlie Mariano, to the programme at the end of the week. The melody was intricate, fast-paced, and full of counter-intuitive rests and restarts; anything less than perfection would immediately stick out. The group continued to rehearse the melody during the sound check. This time invested came at the expense of exploring improvised solos – the creative dialogic elements in which the musicians could explore the



Figure 7: View of the stage before Amira Sultana's premiere concert in Hagen (April 2023)

connections between musical traditions. After the frustration of working through these intricate passages for 20 minutes, the group rehearsed "Narin", another piece where they felt unsure. Only 30 minutes remained before the doors opened to the audience. Güler began with a *mawwal*[63] to set the reflective tone of the piece. Her improvised solo matched the lyrics which, as Güler explained to the ensemble, described a love story that professed hope within the melancholic minor tonality. After a few verses, Ludger and Ramesh took a combined solo which contrasted with the previous mood, instead moving into an accelerated avant-garde jazz swing. Ludger's angular and erratic cello riffs with heavy distortion bounced off Ramesh's be-bop drumming, steadily growing in volume. Ludger had turned up his own bass amp to the maximum level and Ramesh followed pace. The other project members were alternatively furious and distraught. The group did not have time to fully resolve the issue as the audience's chatter could already be heard beyond the double doors.

They were encouraged to keep the tenor of their solo 'proportional' to the song in which it was

[63] "Mawwal" (or mawwāl) is a form of improvised, affect-laden singing in the SWANA region that often precedes a song.

embedded.

But even before Amira Sultana reached Narin in the programme, they struggled with proportionality. Already in the first song, the bass dominated the sound, reverberating the walls and anything not fastened to the ground. The others cast pointed glances at the culprit, trying to catch his attention, but to no avail. This came to a head once again in "Narin" when the avant-garde solo reached even more extreme dynamic and atonal heights.

The concert was seemingly well-received by the circa 80 people in the audience, but not all musicians shared this sentiment. The group discussed afterwards the implications of the solo on the piece. Some thought that the solo counteracted the meaning of the song's text. Ludger pointed out that this solo was his one opportunity in the programme still open for his proposed contribution to the project. As Ludger noted with increasing frustration throughout the week, there was no way for "his music" to meaningfully integrate into this format: 'We have to see to it that we get some sort of balance between the musicians', he had told me during a break in the rehearsals.

To a certain extent, Ludger had a point. In their application, Amira Sultana proposed a trialogue to explore the intersections between raga, maqamat, and *neue Musik,* or avant-garde Western art music. Putting all three of these cultures on equal footing and exploring them constituted a novel approach. Most intercultural projects explore bilateral relationships between the majority culture and a minority culture. Often intercultural studies neglect to understand the complicated dynamics between minority cultures in countries of destination (Søholt & Lynnebakke, 2015). Such trialogues have had more traction in Germany through interfaith work. By bringing together

primarily Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities, these programmes try to decentre the dominant Christian culture and facilitate more open discussions (Körs et al., 2020).[64]

The Amira Sultana project took a similar approach, relativising the Western art music tradition as just one of three cultures. The group proposed to explore the three systems as independently valuable musical cultures and to investigate the connections between them. This served to take away some of the historically accumulated hegemony. With this approach, such projects try to break out of the "West and the rest" paradigm implicit in the term "world music".

Yet, such entrenched perspectives are rarely deconstructed with words alone. While the theoretical apparatus was there in the project application, the time and money allocated did not allow the ensemble to fully explore what it would mean to conduct a trialogue between these three genres. In the end, the other two exoticised genres were more visible – both in the working process and the final product. On the surface, one might agree with Ludger's comments that the third pillar was edged out by the other two exoticised traditions.

However, this alleged invisibility should not be confused for a lack of representation. In such initiatives, the dominant Western framework becomes the default mechanism against which other cultures are compared. In this project, raga and maqam were positioned as foreign cultures while the Western tradition possessed a pre-ordained legitimacy and familiarity with musicians and audiences. Bourdieu warned against such structural differences as they contribute to 'symbolic violence', or the imposition of symbols and meaning in such a way that they are seen to be pre-ordained and immutable (1984, 1991). A similar reading can be drawn from critical race studies in

[64] These interfaith councils have suffered in Germany since the October 7th attack by Hamas in 2023 and the subsequent genocidal military intervention by the Israeli state in Gaza (for a researcher's reflections on interfaith work in this time, see Hathroubi, 2025).

which the 'white gaze' creates a hypervisible, racialised other who is deemed deviant, exotic, or threatening (Fanon, 1952/2008). These processes render whiteness invisible and put "the other" under a spotlight of scrutiny.

Again, such an imbalanced trialogue was not the intention of the group. But the pressure of premiering a new repertoire within a five-day period demanded efficient, results-oriented rehearsals, not the kind of open-ended experimentation of an intercultural dialogue. I saw the impact of this in the music transmission process. To streamline learning, group members reverted to systems which the majority of them knew: Western classical notation, vocabulary, and harmonisation. In practice, this meant defaulting to lettered names (Bb, C, Db, etc.), Italian words (e.g. *ritardando, crescendo*), and assigning chord progressions to non-harmonised songs using the circle of fifths. With time, the means of music transmission in other cultural contexts could have been explored, for example learning the building blocks of *jins* in the maqam system to then create a solo. Instead, the maqam was translated into staff notation and letter names so that everyone could participate as quickly as possible. The same happened with the rhythms, as shown in the ethnographic anecdote from the first rehearsal together (section 4.4.3). Maren remarked on this, comparing how she herself learned the maqam system: '[Such methods] are much longer and more open, but that's because of the transmission style. When you learn by ear, you have to repeat it a lot of times to get it in your ear and in your fingers'.

Instead, the sheet music was prepared in advance (primarily by Maren, who functioned as a translator between the different styles) and learned separately at home. The musicians for the most part arrived at the rehearsal week ready to construct the concert programme out of each

individual's contribution. This functioned more like a puzzle with a pre-determined final product, and less like a communal, generative, experimental process. One staff member from the KS criticised how this project unfolded at the concert, arguing that it did not align with the KS's conception of dialogue:

> It sounds like they already did the exchange and this is the final product. We want to hear the exchange happening on the stage. For such a project you need to emphasise that it's all newly arisen and that it is an experiment in the end, to prime the audience that it's not a concert by a pre-existing group.

When I took these comments back to Amira Sultana, I was met with exasperation: 'What do they expect? That I'm going to present a half-baked concert here?' The others shared this sentiment: it was simply too risky to go into the concert without a polished programme. So instead of spending more time experimenting with dialogue during the week, they used their time to produce a programme as efficiently as possible. This decision came not only because the concert was funded by a major public organisation, but also that the recordings (both in the video documentation and the audio recordings) would capture this experiment on tape. Especially for the aspiring professionals, they wanted to put their best foot forward.

The other factor which shaped the process, if only subconsciously, was audience addressivity. Here the white gaze manifests in the ensemble's imagined audience for the first concerts. Given the setting, as well as Maren and Ludger functioning as joint "hosts" in Hagen, it was assumed that the audience would also consist of mostly older, cosmopolitan white people – historically the audience for "world music" in Europe. These expectations manifested in a few ways. First, the concert flyer only advertised maqam and raga, not avant-garde improvisation. This set the tone for the evening before the audience even arrived.



Figure 8: Flyer for the Amira Sultana Ensemble (April 2023)

The moderation reflected this foregrounding of the 'exotic' cultures. Maren took time to explain how the systems worked between the pieces, pointing out various similarities and historical connections. Nothing was said about Ludger's contributions with new improvisational techniques. This difference in treatment had a bordering effect. Maqamat and raga were posed as an interesting and exotic "other" which required clarification, while the European genre needed no introduction. That the avant-garde improvisation was not fully explored bespeaks its *a priori* belonging on a German stage.[65] And while Ludger rightfully pointed out this imbalance, he did not note the ways in which "his music" was actually so deeply embedded in the project that it ceased to be visible – in the way they learned the music, the materials and language available, even the sounds of the pieces.

Indeed, the white gaze – or as I call it in this context, the *white ear* – can even be located in the recordings. The microtonality of the maqamat posed a significant challenge throughout the week for those who had not worked in these sound worlds before. Maren proved through her practiced

[65] For more on whiteness and the banality of belonging, see Cox 2025.

saxophone playing that even keyed instruments can produce microtonal pitches with the right techniques. Some of the ensemble members made an effort to do the same, others failed to do so. The same applied to the songs and their texts; some project members sought to match their playing to the meaning of the songs, but not all. Güler felt that "Narin", for example, was not only mis-represented, but completely hijacked through the dialogue process, not honoured by it. The musicians identified many of these issues themselves, pointing again to the lack of time and resources made available to facilitate the dialogue.

Instead, routine heuristics took over and reproduced many structural biases. Market forces exert this pressure, even in publicly-funded projects. Within this capitalist system, colonial and patriarchal structures still prefigure ways of doing business. Projects that seek to dismantle these systems face an uphill battle, a challenge which this ensemble undertook. The musicians entered this dialogue over cultural representation in which little room was given for experimentation. In the end, programmatic diversity was nominally presented on stage, but the underlying process by which it was achieved called into question any claims for a successful trialogue.

At least these dissonances were not heard on the recording – because there was none. After the concert I went to the sound engineer to ask for a copy. His face fell as he looked at the screen. '*Scheiße*,' he whispered, 'it didn't save'.

4.5 E(value)ating diversity programming in NRW

The diversity initiatives in NRW's music sector demonstrate both the promise and complexity of cultural policy in this field. Across the programmes reviewed in this chapter – whether aimed at

diversifying personnel, programming, or participants – it becomes clear that "diversity" is not a monolithic goal. Instead, it is a contested terrain shaped by political discourse, market forces, and musicians' strategic engagement. These processes manifest in struggles over different systems of value – economic, social, symbolic, and aesthetic. While many policies claim to support inclusion and cultural pluralism, the mechanisms through which they are implemented often betray underlying tensions: between representation and participation, symbolic recognition and material support, political statements and lived experiences, and value and values.

Evaluating the programmes in this way allows us to ask: who defines value in these projects and who benefits? Such a framing reveals how policies are implemented, interpreted, and negotiated. I began in section 4.4.2 by disaggregating this policy landscape with the three P's of diversity: personnel, programme, and participants. This analysis was further unpacked and nuanced through the ethnographic research in sections 4.3 and 4.4.

The case of the LMR's programming for forced migrants exemplifies the shift in discourses of integration over who determines value. Its initial form reproduced a widespread value in 2015 to integrate asylum seekers into German cultural life. This changed over the years to recognise the contributions of racialised forced migrants themselves and align the funding to their needs and values. As illustrated at the beginning of section 4.3.1, the value generated by such projects does not only lie in the musical skills transferred, but also in the act of building community and performing cultural identity on one's own terms. Sandra Hoch played an important role in this change. She helped build the mechanisms for value conversion through the biannual networking meetings and helping project leaders translate their ideas into the language legible in diversity

funding applications. Such investments in social and cultural capital have helped recipients of this funding be able to convert these resources into other forms of value. This includes both economic and social value, as WBB's experience leading a double concert life shows. The value derived from these diversity policies does not always align with how policymakers intend it. In this way, racialised musicians can subvert or divert the intended values of such policies for their own benefit.

The Dialogue Project, by contrast, foregrounds programmatic diversity. But in this case as well, participants contested how this value emerged in artistic practice. The analysis of this programme illustrated the friction between the stated values of intercultural dialogue and the market logic underpinning its implementation. The extraction of gendered labour and the demands of economic efficiency ultimately hampered the project's potential to generate meaningful, reciprocal value. Reverting to routinised patterns for creative practice not only undermined the basis for intercultural dialogue, but also reproduced colonial and capitalist hierarchies. While the sounds themselves might be construed as diverse, they were created under the white gaze, or the white ear as I propose. This is a mechanism of symbolic violence whereby the dominant culture is positioned as the natural reference point and an invisible standard against which other practices are measured. The framing of the white ear helps explain why a programme that seemingly values other cultures might contribute to its devaluation. Taking the sounds of maqam and raga out of their performance and transmission contexts for the sake of diversity may in the end contribute to their exoticisation, not alleviate it. In Graeberian terms, the audience did not reflect back the value of this genre's culturally-situated transmission and performance contexts. Here, the value of diverse musical programming did not extend to the conditions for its production, which remained firmly situated in the logics of the neoliberal market.

Throughout, one can also trace how racialised musicians shaped the values in these programmes – or how such values shaped the musicians' ability to engage. For example, the LMR's push to increase the diversity of forced migrant project leaders was spurred by this funding scheme's jury members, themselves overwhelmingly migrants and people who are racialised in Germany. Musicians, including WBB, use these Multikulti gigs to hone their skills and afford other concerts with more personal value. In these examples musicians generate and convert different forms of capital to pursue their own agendas – whether it is to sing Fairuz together or create innovative new artistic products.

Alongside all of the strategies exhibited by these musicians, we also see the ways in which logics of the market and the state prefigure their engagement with diversity discourses. The Dialogue Project framed this exchange as transpiring between exotic genres. Paradoxically, foregrounding their value amplified their exoticisation and power asymmetries, especially in comparison to Western art music. The LMR's mandate to fund primarily amateur music-making limits its capacity to promote the professional careers of forced migrants.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate that fostering cultural diversity requires careful and responsive policy design. As this chapter has shown, the value of diversity in music lies not only in its representation on stage, but also in the networks, infrastructures, relationships, and labour that make such representation possible. These efforts not only produce artistic output, but also in part the individuals, 'who recreate themselves and each other in the very process of acting on the world' (Graeber, 2013, p. 219). It is in such projects where an amorphous "society" is 'momentarily brought into being: generally, so one can manipulate or change it' (Graeber, 2013, p. 227). The

cases here show how such manifestations of value in practice open up the possibility for change – as well as reproducing the same structures. The following chapter builds on this policy analysis by exploring another diversity-oriented programme in NRW mentioned in this chapter: the ZLG.



Figure 9: Global Flash 2023 at the Odonien, Cologne. L-R: Ulaş Özağaç, Erdem Saraçoğlu, Hovhannes Margaryan, and Mehmet Filiz (photo by Mara von Ungern-Sternberg)

Chapter 5: Qualifications, professionalisation, and the location of value in the world music scene

Sheyda had invited me over to her apartment for dinner. While serving me a heaping portion of *tahdig* [crispy rice with saffron], she asked me how to apply for the music education degree at the University of Cologne. This was not the first time she had expressed interest in beginning a bachelor's degree, nor the first time I had questioned the logic of this decision. After all, she had a decade of performing experience, taught privately, and received state funding for her projects. Given that she already worked as a musician, spending three years studying Western music theory and history hardly seemed like a worthwhile investment. In her reply, she emphasised that it wasn't about the skills, but rather about the piece of paper itself. Despite her previous successes, not having a degree had limited her career.

This fact was cruelly made apparent to her again the previous week. She had been invited to participate in a project about empowering women active in the "oriental" music scene.[66] The project, which received funding from the MKW's *Diversitätsfonds* programme, brought together women to share their experiences, build networks, and foster solidarity. The sessions culminated in a performance with an intercultural concert programme. I had introduced Sheyda to Doris*, the project leader, at a concert in Essen in May 2023, indicating that she might be a good fit for this empowerment project. They exchanged a few messages, and Doris brought Sheyda into the project, promising 400 Euros for the concert. This artist fee was standard for professionals performing at a medium-sized venue in the world music scene, not taking into account the weekly

[66] In German *orientalisch* refers to people and cultures of Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. While this Eurocentric term has been replaced in many settings in the English-speaking world, it is still commonly used in German discourses.

meet-ups and rehearsals that preceded the concert. This time was not compensated, but was nevertheless mandatory in order to perform in the concert. While Sheyda thought the artist fee did not quite live up to the effort required, she went along for other reasons. Besides networking with the musicians, she hoped to establish a stronger connection with Doris. She was a big name in the state's world music scene and could potentially bring Sheyda on to her other projects.

The first rehearsals seemed to go fine. Afterwards, however, Sheyda received the following voice message from Doris:

> Hi Sheyda, it's great that you're in the project. However, before you joined I thought you had a master's degree in music. After the rehearsal yesterday, I found out that you don't even have a bachelor's degree. Unfortunately that means I'll have to pay you less – I can only offer you 100 Euros per concert. That's what I'm paying the other amateur musicians. I hope you can understand.

This message shocked me. Not only did it violate their verbal agreement – recognised as a binding legal contract in most cases – but the grounds on which Doris justified the decision hardly aligned with the goal of female empowerment. Later, I heard from other project members that everyone's fees had been reduced in order to bring on an additional musician who demanded an extraordinarily high sum. This meant that Sheyda's treatment was not necessarily based on her education, but rather on poor budgeting. Nevertheless, Doris resorting to this argument revealed its perceived legitimacy within the scene more broadly. Doris knew that cutting the payments would not be a popular decision, and yet doing so on the basis of degrees seemingly justified the action and deflected from her own financial miscalculations. Yet Doris's message understandably shook Sheyda's confidence: 'It's not even about the money, you know? It just means that no

matter how much experience I have or how well I sing, I'll never be able to get around the fact that I don't have a degree'.

Sheyda's encounter with Doris brought to light many struggles over qualifications that take place behind closed doors. While artists are supposedly valued for their aesthetic capabilities and not just based on their degrees, qualifications nevertheless play a key role in professional success. This often manifests in more subtle differences. For example, musicians who trained in conservatories often benefit from the networks forged during one's studies or the habitus cultivated through formal education. Other times, the power of the degree is more blatant, such as in Sheyda's encounter with Doris.

Sheyda was even more frustrated in this instance because, as she pointed out, she does have a certificate in Germany. In 2022 she completed the *Zertifikatslehrgang Musikpädagogik für Musiker*innen verschiedener Kulturen* (ZLG) [Certification Programme in Music Education for Musicians of Different Cultures]. This continuing education course targets people like Sheyda who, because of their background and chosen genre of music, cannot study at German conservatories. Although the part-time course is as of yet unaccredited, it has made waves in NRW as the first comprehensive credential for world music practitioners (albeit with a focus on education).

I asked Sheyda what she got out of the programme: 'Oh I learned a lot that year. Orchestra conducting, improvisation, music theory, reading sheet music, lots of new methods that I use in my workshops, all that'. She talked about the teachers – how helpful two in particular were and how they have been good contacts for getting gigs in subsequent years. She has since used the

qualification to acquire teaching jobs in the winter months when there are fewer concerts, but nothing permanent as of yet. Sheyda is still trying to make the most out of this piece of paper.

This chapter explores how qualifications generate value in the world music scene for racialised musicians such as Sheyda. I use the ZLG as a case study to unpack the ways various actors use this certificate across different regimes of value. First, I present the ZLG as a response to Germany's limited qualification recognition system. Many migrants and racialised musicians within Germany are unable to complete a course of study in their chosen genre, which excludes them from decent employment. In section 5.2 I expand on this view of the ZLG to show how the curriculum ideally fosters bi-directional labour market integration (Brücker et al., 2024); participants learn the requisite (trans)cultural capital to thrive in the German education system and music schools are encouraged to diversify their hiring practices. Section 5.3 complicates this rosy view of the ZLG by unpacking the programme's hidden curriculum and its underlying assimilatory logic of imposing a Eurocentric cultural framework. Yet, participants are not passive actors in this programme and make the certificate work for them, as section 5.4 shows. Participant intentions differ significantly from the stated programme objectives, but these musicians nevertheless manage to gain the social capital and recognition they seek from this qualification. Section 5.5 presents one final lens through which to view the ZLG, namely as part of a broader professionalisation effort within the world music scene. I show how ZLG staff have established the certificate as a token of value within the broader music landscape. In the conclusion I draw these paradigms together to show how such qualifications can become fetishised. I ultimately argue that the dominant way the certificate is valued obscures the social relations and labour that undergird it.

5.1. Issues in qualification recognition in Germany

This section explores salient issues in qualification recognition in Germany's papers-based economy through the experiences of racialised musicians. The ZLG addresses a challenge in the German world music landscape: limited opportunities for obtaining recognised music qualifications in the country. Until recently, no conservatory in Germany offered bachelor's degrees in performance of non-Western instruments or genres.[67] This lack of opportunity pushes some performers to go abroad. A few of my interlocutors studied at conservatories renowned for world music, such as the Codarts in Rotterdam or the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. Others studied these musical cultures in context, pursuing certificates and degrees in Turkey, Egypt, and Iran, or studying with renowned masters in India, Senegal, and Brazil (among others). These experiences outside of Germany confer a certain amount of symbolic capital by nature of their perceived "authenticity". But this capital often cannot be translated into recognised, institutional cultural capital in Germany. Such qualifications are awarded only limited equivalency with those obtained in Germany, especially when it comes to music education.

Aeham Ahmad, the Syrian-Palestinian pianist introduced in chapter three, explained this process to me. He studied music pedagogy in Homs before coming to Germany. In this degree he learned theories and methods in music education and took piano lessons from a rigorous instructor on the side without earning credits. However, without this official component on his transcripts, his degree was not deemed equivalent to the German bachelor's degree in music education [*BA*

[67] The Popakademie Baden-Württemberg inaugurated its BA in World Music (now Global Music) in 2015. They offer emphases in Turkish, Arab, and West African music. With this degree, one can work in music schools, but not as a teacher in the state school system. The HfMTK admitted its first cohort of bağlama students to their BA programme in music education in 2024. In 2011 the Center for World Music in Hildesheim began offering a part-time MA in "cultural diversity in music education", for which one must have a bachelor's degree recognised in Germany.

Lehramt Musik], which require a secondary focus on instrumental performance. Tariq* faced the same equivalency issue with his performance degree from Damascus, which only translated to a general music degree in the German system.[68] With no recognised pedagogical component of the degree, he is not qualified to teach in public schools or music schools.

Those without evidence of tertiary qualifications have even more issues in equivalency. While many universities around the world undergo international accreditation processes, this is not the case for secondary education. The diversity of secondary school pathways even within a country, as well as the necessary documentation demanded by German institutions to prove their legitimacy, present roadblocks for those seeking recognition. This is felt acutely by persecuted ethnic and religious minorities, such as Kurdish people who have systematically been denied educational opportunities in many countries.

Sheyda's pursuit of continuing education opportunities in Germany illustrates how intersectional challenges to accessing qualifications can be compounded in displacement. Since coming to Germany, Sheyda has sought to continue her educational journey. She finished her upper secondary school certificate in Iran before completing a vocational course in fashion design. After working at a wedding dress design firm, she pursued her musical studies in the Kurdish autonomous region of Iraq. At the conservatory in Erbil she focused on learning Kurdish traditional music and undertook all the courses needed for the degree. However, when it came time for the exams, she was unable to register without valid identity documents. She had been living in Iraq irregularly because she was unable to obtain a passport as a Kurd living in Iran. Most of her

[68] "Idjaza fi l-musiqa" is recognised as a BA in music, according to Anabin, the state's portal for foreign qualification equivalency: www.anabin.kmk.org/db/hochschulabschluesse .

family still do not have travel documents. Therefore she returned to Iran having completed the coursework for an official degree, but without the piece of paper.

In Germany, Sheyda has tried again to earn a university degree, but faced further stumbling blocks. She tried to get her vocational certificate recognised, but in order to do so, her case worker required Sheyda to present a school leaving certificate as well, which she did not bring with her to Europe when she suddenly fled Iran (see p. 16). She contacted her sister to find the document in the family house in Sanandaj, but to no avail. Requesting a new copy of the document from the government was out of the question. So without the certificate, she went back to school. For three years she attended night school, sitting through high-school level courses in a language she was still learning in order to obtain the German equivalent of a UK GCSE. While it did help her learn German, this time could have been invested in more targeted educational outcomes than repeating school level coursework. As if resitting these exams at age 37 wasn't absurd enough, mere weeks afterward, her family found her Iranian school leaving certificate in a forgotten box in the basement. This paper would have saved her three years of time attending night school. When I expressed my incredulity at this cruel twist of fate, she shrugged casually, 'So it goes. What else could I have done? I needed the certificate'.

By the time Sheyda and I met, she had her eyes on the next goal: university studies. We investigated her options to start a bachelor's degree in music at the University of Cologne. She still needed to pass multiple eligibility checks, including a C1 German certificate, a standardised cognitive aptitude test for international students in Germany (TestAS), and a one semester preparation course for university studies. Only once these had been completed could she apply for the degree

course. We calculated that the combined total of these steps would take at least a year before she could even think about applying. When confronted with this fact, I again asked Sheyda if she really needed this degree for her career. After all, she already had a full calendar of performances and teaching engagements. She seemed to be succeeding as a freelancer without the qualification. But she wouldn't budge: 'It's going to make my life easier. I can't rest as a musician until I have my bachelor's degree'.

Sheyda's case illustrates many issues that forced migrants face in qualification recognition in Germany. Not only were her previous accomplishments not recognised for lack of papers, but the hurdles to obtaining additional certificates in Germany have so far proved insurmountable. She began the process of applying for university in fall 2023. In October 2025, she will begin her preparation semester. Altogether, Sheyda has worked for eight years to prove her eligibility to repeat a degree for which she had already done the coursework in Erbil. To echo Sheyda's earlier comment – so it goes.

Like many bureaucratic processes in Germany profiled to this point, degree recognition is constructed less by rigid laws, and more by interpretation that can be flexibly adjusted to suit different demands. Sociologist Ilka Sommer (2021) illustrates the emergent nature of recognition through interviews with caseworkers in the German system. In particular, for qualifications obtained outside the EU, administrators judge the comparability of the certificate based not only on credit hours and the curriculum, but also based on broader contextual information available about the educational system. Forced migrants are often more disadvantaged in this process, as many bring qualifications from countries that have poor diplomatic and information-sharing

relationships with Germany. In addition, the German market also affects the threshold for recognition – either lowering it to expand the pool of available workers or raising it to inflate the value of German qualifications. As Sommer writes, the process of finding equivalence across vastly different education systems and cultures is necessarily a subjective process that is forced into a bureaucratised structure. The constellations of power and negotiation of value play a large role in shaping these outcomes.

The limitations of the degree recognition system come to the fore when one looks at the skilled worker deficit in Germany. One might see the problem not necessarily as a lack of skilled workers, but rather the over-qualification rate of migrants already in the country.[69] Skills obtained without formal documentation contribute to a high rate of overqualification among migrants (Donlevy et al., 2016). Yet even if foreign qualifications and skills are formally recognised by the state, that does not guarantee that employers will honour them in hiring processes. Employers may still prefer qualifications obtained domestically to their foreign equivalents (Tan & Cebulla, 2023). This may be due to mistrust in the recognition system and biases against immigrant populations (Boucher, 2020; Damelang & Abraham, 2016).

This final factor in qualification recognition – whether employers recognise these documents as equally valid – is often overlooked in labour market integration processes. Even with formally recognised qualifications and skills, migrants might still be at a disadvantage and face discrimination. The ultimate value of a degree or certificate is whether it translates into desirable opportunities; in Bourdieusian terms, how cultural capital can be exchanged for economic capital.

[69] In 2024, more than 30% of employed migrants in Germany were overqualified for their current job, compared with 17% of German citizens (*Migrant Integration Statistics*, 2025). Furthermore, people with skills obtained through informal or non formal education (Villalba-García, 2021), as well as those who have partially-completed degrees or lack documents like Sheyda, are not included in these statistics.

For Sheyda and many other job-seekers in Germany, employer recognition is more important than bureaucratic qualification recognition. After all, the majority of employed people in Germany do not work in a regulated profession requiring qualification and licensing equivalency.[70] In creative industries especially, one would expect degrees to hold little significance in comparison with artistic skill (Tsioulakis, 2020). But as my interlocutors in NRW shared, degrees facilitate entrance to the labour market, even in fields where the piece of paper seemingly does not matter.

I asked myself why this might be the case. One potential answer could lie in the distinction between institutionalised and embodied cultural capital. While some degrees have currency on the job market by nature of being 'legally guaranteed qualifications, formally independent of the person of their bearer' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 247), this does not extend to all degrees and industries. In sectors which rely more on networks and knowing "the rules of the game", qualification programmes play an important role in cultivating one's *habitus*, the collection of dispositions that structure one's thoughts and behaviours. This form of embodied cultural capital can prove more useful than institutionalised cultural capital in securing employment. With it, one can perform belonging to a class or profession through a deeper understanding of the social field it occupies. This power, amplified by the social capital nurtured during a degree programme, often facilitates entry into creative industries, whether it is in television (Lee, 2011), music technology (Born & Devine, 2015), visual arts (Grenfell & Hardy, 2003), publishing (Townley & Gulledge, 2015), or media more broadly (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011). These soft skills or elements of a "hidden curriculum" (Giroux & Penna, 1979) confer the cultural and social capital migrants need to flourish in a competitive job market.

[70] A study conducted in 2011-12 estimated that only 14.6% of the working population was employed across the country's 433 regulated professions (Haupt, 2016).

But how does habitus-cultivation unfold in the context of displacement? When a person is transplanted into a new social field, to what degree can they ever fully adopt the dispositions of someone who grew up in the environment? This is a central question underlying many migrant integration processes that seek to shape values and behaviour of both new arrivals and long-term residents. The ZLG in NRW is one such programme that explores the extent to which an inclusive, part-time credentialing programme may do just that.

5.2 The ZLG as a two-way labour market integration programme

In this section I outline the ZLG's official curriculum and the philosophy behind it. The ZLG is unique among labour market integration programmes in that it works bi-directionally: conferring capital on participants while simultaneously trying to create jobs within the sector for these musicians' specific set of skills. The programme professes a strong commitment to 'lived diversity' and mutual learning between staff and participants. The ZLG focuses in particular on participants' (trans)cultural capital as the bridge between musicians of 'different cultures' and homogenous German music education institutions.

5.2.1 Credentialing musicians of 'different cultures'

In June 2023 we gathered in a chamber music hall in Wuppertal for the ZLG certificate award ceremony. While I did not receive a certificate that day, I felt just as invested in the event as the participants did. After spending the previous nine months with this cohort through their seminars, on weekend retreats, and standing around the coffee machine in the HfMTK lobby, I knew just how much time and effort had been invested into reaching this award ceremony.



Figure 10: ZLG participants and staff at the 2023 award ceremony in Wuppertal

Once the audience had taken their seats, five members of the cohort stepped on to the stage and settled in to perform. Javier* evoked an introspective mood with his guitar, using rich extended chords and open voicings. Dilovan* and Emre*, playing violin and bağlama respectively, joined in. The two soloed together in the same maqam, not shying away from the microtonal inflections.[71] Played on top of Javier's soothing bossa nova foundation, these different tonal systems alternated between creating rich colour palettes and painful dissonances. Javier occasionally winced when Dilovan leaned into his microtones. Only when Samira* began to sing did I realise that they were performing an English-language folk tune I knew. As the verses unfolded, Kerem*, fully immersed in his groove on the djembe, did not notice the perturbed looks from the other instrumentalists who had been overshadowed by his loud and complex drumming patterns. They followed this

[71] For a definition of microtonality see footnote 61 (p. 197)

song with a similarly transcultural creation: a Turkish pop song (which went unnamed) and the 'Habanera' aria from Georges Bizet's opera *Carmen*.

Ruddi Sodemann, then-director of the ZLG, stepped on the stage. He is a spritely septuagenarian who rarely leaves the house without a flamboyant paisley button-down shirt on and a twinkle in his eye. As violinist, ensemble director, and pedagogue, Ruddi has promoted intercultural music in Germany across his 50-year career. Ruddi took the microphone and gestured to the musicians: 'This is the sound of Germany'. He and the other staff members proceeded to expound variations on the same theme: we needed to diversify our music schools, and these prospective teachers were going to achieve this goal. Quoting former German president Johannes Rau, Ruddi called these musicians 'the yeast in the bread, not the icing on the cake', emphasising the fundamental importance of musical diversity not only to the music profession, but to German society more broadly. Antje Valentin, then director of the *Landesmusikakademie NRW* (LMA), echoed these sentiments: 'The city of Cologne and the cultural ministry know that a new cohort of graduates are here and ready to work – the world is waiting for you to get out there!'

These grand statements might have come across as more believable if there were not so many empty chairs in the room. Beyond the 16 musicians there to receive the certificate, there were 13 guests in the audience, six instructors, two cameramen, and one faculty member of the HfMTK. Representatives from various music education institutions, including public music schools, conservatories, and funding organisations were invited, but none attended.

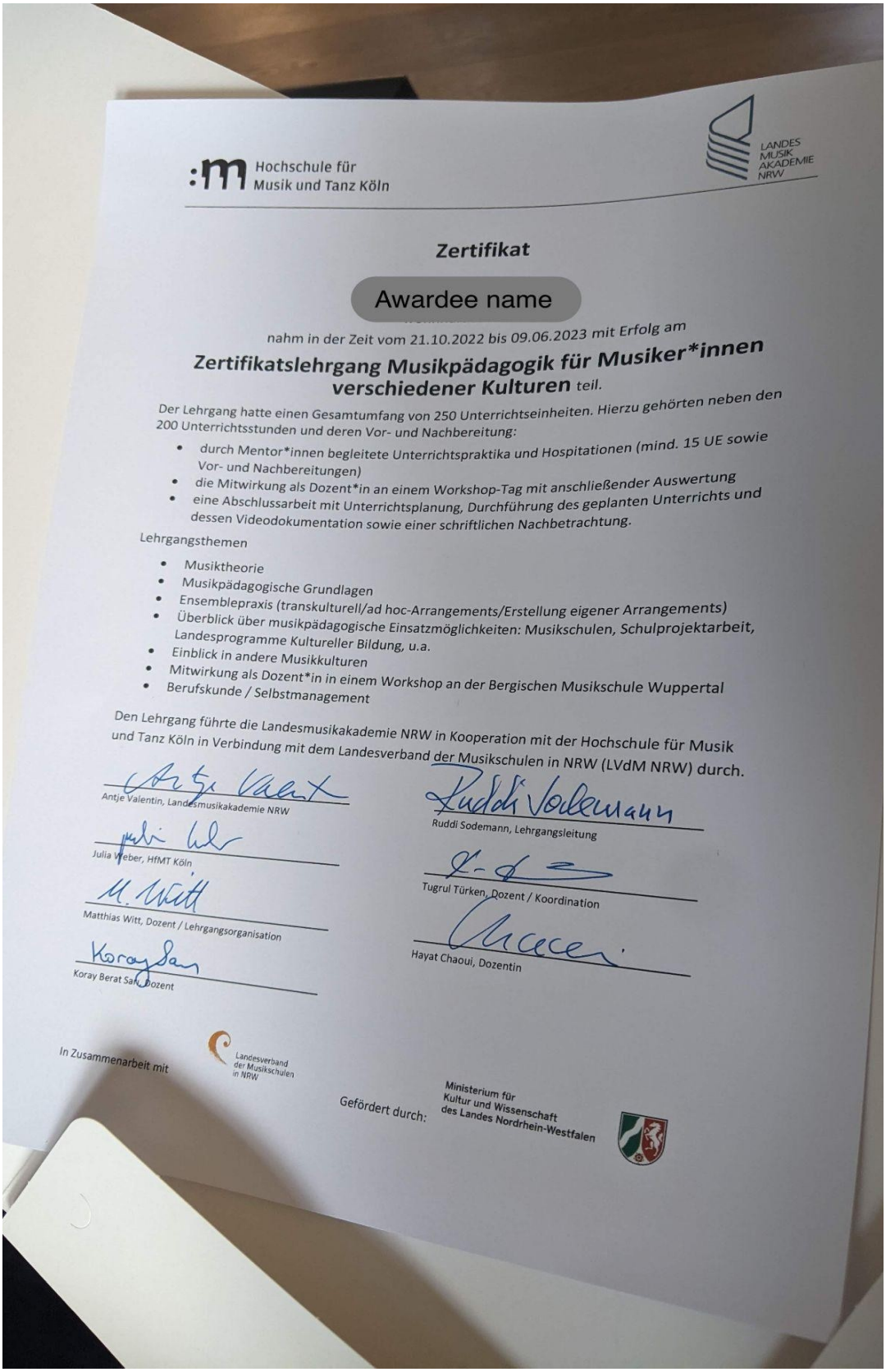
Nevertheless, participants celebrated their achievement. Halfway through the concert programme, Ruddi gave out the certificates. In turn, each awardee approached the podium and shook hands

with all the members of the ZLG teaching staff. The document itself is adorned with institutional logos and a collection of signatures at the bottom (Figure 11, p. 231). The heavy weight of the cardstock mirrors the symbolic weight of this token of value; the LMA hopes that the certificate will create opportunities for its holders in the future.

The certificate broadly outlines the curriculum of the course, what participants did in order to pass, and indirectly signals what holders of the award can be expected to do. This includes leading ensembles, conducting workshops, giving private lessons, working in schools, and undertaking broader cultural education projects. The emphasis here is on their transcultural knowledge and skills.

The comprehensive scope of the programme and its curriculum has been honed over the course of the ZLG's seven iterations. This course was one of the first of its kind to arise in Germany's qualification-based economy. The LMA inaugurated its first certification program for non-Western music in 2015 with a bağlama course, expanding to all non-Western instruments in 2018 and to singers in 2021 (Valentin & Mujkanović, 2022). This certification course is one of many offered by the LMA, a publicly-funded institution which supports music teaching and learning across all ages and skill levels in the state. However, it is the only course in their offerings that specifically addresses diverse practitioners (see Appendix 1, p.355)

Each year, the ZLG teaching staff selects 20 participants from an application pool of professional musicians with personal and artistic roots from around the world. The majority of participants have ties to the SWANA region – primarily Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Kurdish regions. Other participants generally stem from Latin America, South Asia, and Africa along with the occasional



Hochschule für Musik und Tanz Köln

LANDES MUSIK AKADEMIE NRW

Zertifikat

Awardee name

nahm in der Zeit vom 21.10.2022 bis 09.06.2023 mit Erfolg am

Zertifikatslehrgang Musikpädagogik für Musiker*innen verschiedener Kulturen teil.

Der Lehrgang hatte einen Gesamtumfang von 250 Unterrichtseinheiten. Hierzu gehörten neben den 200 Unterrichtsstunden und deren Vor- und Nachbereitung:

- durch Mentor*innen begleitete Unterrichtspraktika und Hospitationen (mind. 15 UE sowie Vor- und Nachbereitungen)
- die Mitwirkung als Dozent*in an einem Workshop-Tag mit anschließender Auswertung
- eine Abschlussarbeit mit Unterrichtsplanung, Durchführung des geplanten Unterrichts und dessen Videodokumentation sowie einer schriftlichen Nachbetrachtung.

Lehrgangsthemen

- Musiktheorie
- Musikpädagogische Grundlagen
- Ensemblepraxis (transkulturell/ad hoc-Arrangements/Erstellung eigener Arrangements)
- Überblick über musikpädagogische Einsatzmöglichkeiten: Musikschulen, Schulprojektarbeit, Landesprogramme Kultureller Bildung, u.a.
- Einblick in andere Musikkulturen
- Mitwirkung als Dozent*in in einem Workshop an der Bergischen Musikschule Wuppertal
- Berufskunde / Selbstmanagement

Den Lehrgang führte die Landesmusikakademie NRW in Kooperation mit der Hochschule für Musik und Tanz Köln in Verbindung mit dem Landesverband der Musikschulen in NRW (LVdM NRW) durch.

Antje Valentin, Landesmusikakademie NRW

Julia Weber, HfMT Köln

Matthias Witt, Dozent / Lehrgangsorganisation

Koray Berat Sak, Dozent

Ruddi Sodemann, Lehrgangsleitung

Tugrul Türken, Dozent / Koordination

Hayat Chaoui, Dozentin

In Zusammenarbeit mit Landesverband der Musikschulen in NRW

Gefördert durch: Ministerium für Kultur und Wissenschaft des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen

Figure 11: 2023 ZLG participant certificate (anonymised)

white European who performs in world music genres. Since the course began admitting singers, more women have taken part. In the 2022-23 cohort, three of the 20 participants were women, two of whom were vocalists.[72]

The staff are similarly diverse. Of the five primary staff members, four of them have parents who were born outside Germany. Collectively, they speak four languages at native levels (German, Turkish, Kurmancî, Arabic) as well as three others at a professional level (Spanish, French, and English). While all the staff members grew up in Germany, they also all have ties to non-Western cultures and profess strong intercultural sensibilities in their work. This transculturality is reflected in their musical practice as well. Most have degrees in classical music performance and education, which they pursued along with private tuition in other instruments, such as bağlama.

Public institutions celebrate the diversity of the ZLG, especially for its potential as a refugee integration programme. However, this view does not accurately characterise how the LMA conceived the certificate. Firstly, the course itself is not restricted to forced migrants, but rather targets all performers in world music. Past participants have included many forced migrants who recently arrived in Germany, but also longtime residents with varying migration statuses, and German-born people with and without the so-called "migration background". Nevertheless, foreign-born musicians do constitute the majority of each cohort, many of whom arrived in the country as forced migrants. Approximately 50% of participants have had asylum or Duldung status in Germany at some point in the past.

[72] On the relationship between gender and instrumental music, see the 2008 special issue of *Ethnomusicology Forum* (Doubleday, 2008).

A second misconception surrounds the primary beneficiaries of the programme. While the format of the course seems to target professional musicians in the world music scene, the LMA actually developed the programme with public music schools in mind. Their primary goal is to provide these institutions with diverse teachers. Recent cultural and political work by the LMA and other music education organisations has made such diversification possible.[73] Yet, the core structural problem remains: in order to offer permanent contracts, public music schools almost always demand a university degree in music pedagogy and instrumental/vocal performance. This policy presents a problem for practitioners of non-Western instruments or genres, who until recently could not study their chosen instruments at German conservatories.[74] To solve this qualification issue, the LMA developed the ZLG to increase the number of teachers who can work in public music schools. Through this reverse economic engineering, the LMA hopes to create more demand for non-Western instrumental instruction by increasing the supply of available teachers.

The LMA designed the ZLG curriculum with this goal in mind. The nine-month program combines multiple theoretical and practical components to prepare participants for work in public music schools. The course convenes every Friday afternoon during the school year. Fortnightly online lessons in Western music theory alternate with seminars at the HfMTK. These in-person meetings engage with topics including pedagogy, didactics, lesson planning, and individual and group instruction (Figure 12, p. 235). The cohorts explore these areas more in-depth during three overnight weekend retreats at the LMA's main campus in Heek, a small village near the Dutch

[73] This work began with multiple programmes integrating bağlama into standard music curricula, including the 2005 initiative *Bağlama für alle* in NRW's public music schools, *Jedem Kind ein Instrument* in schools (which began in NRW in 2003 and later instituted a quota for instruments connected to Germany's migration history), and the 2009 addition of the instrument to the national competition *Jugend musiziert* (Valentin & Mujkanović, 2022).
[74] See footnote 67 (p. 221)

border. At these intensive seminars, participants also prepare for their three practical components combining teaching and performance (Figure 13, p. 235). These are staggered across the course and foster connections with different music education institutions. In month four they complete a short internship at a local music school, shadowing a teacher and delivering lessons under observation. In the second practical element, they build on these experiences to conceptualise and conduct a community music workshop at a large urban music school in month eight. In the 2022-23 cohort which I followed, groups of four to five participants each designed an hour-long workshop that engaged with an element of cultural diversity and drew on their respective musical backgrounds.

This day of workshops was advertised in the LMA's course catalogue and brought together a broad range of participants, from young aspiring professional performers to pensioners active in the amateur music scene. The third practical element consists of the two final performances put on by the participants themselves: one at their certificate award ceremony (detailed above) and another publicly-oriented concert in Cologne. Participants are grouped together by the staff and must develop a short programme of transcultural pieces.

The weekly homework assignments in music theory and lesson-planning throughout the course should prepare participants for the final project: a robust and detailed lesson plan, a video recording of delivering the lesson with a student, and a written self-reflection on their performance. Participants put together a first version of this portfolio midway through the course which is evaluated by teaching staff at one of the weekend retreats. They are then given the opportunity to revise (and in many cases completely reconceptualise) it for the final submission. At the end of the

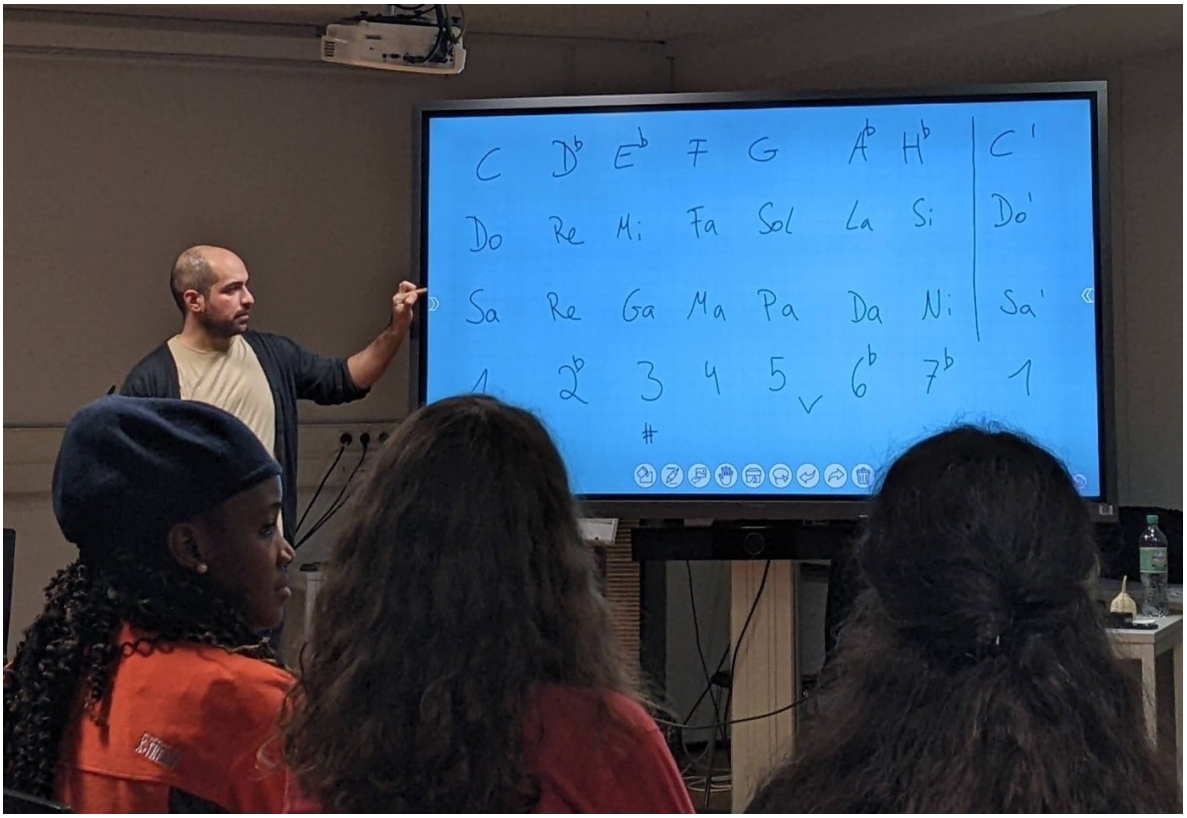


Figure 12: Koray Berat Sarı teaching a lesson at the HfMTK (2024)



Figure 13: ZLG participants and staff at a weekend retreat in Heek (2022)

course, participants are expected to possess a strong understanding of music pedagogy and Western music theory, as well as a repertoire of exercises, songs, and arrangements to use in their teaching careers. Ultimately, this mix of theory and practice, reinforced by an institutional certificate, should ideally increase participants' chances of finding gainful, long term employment in the music education system.

5.2.2 Lived diversity: 'We are not an assimilation programme'

On the first day of the 2022-23 academic year, I stood waiting at the entrance to the HfMTK with the ZLG teaching staff to welcome the new cohort. The seminar officially started at 2:30 PM, but the teachers had planned a 30-minute buffer to accommodate those with train delays or "a more flexible cultural relationship to punctuality", as they told me. They planned for a soft-welcome outside the imposing concrete institution – enough time for a cigarette, coffee, and informal introductions. Contrary to expectations, however, nearly all the participants arrived right on time, instruments in hand, notebooks and pens at the ready. When the staff expressed their surprise at this eagerness, one course participant replied, 'This is Germany you know, they expect you to be on time down to the minute'. This attentiveness to punctuality is often taught as a supposed German value in state-mandated language and integration courses (Schulte, 2021). By explicitly countering this expectation, the LMA signalled its openness to cultural difference and reluctance to impose German norms. This early example of bi-directional intercultural understanding and accommodation was welcomed with a laugh on all sides.

The instructors see their intercultural approach as a strength of the ZLG over traditional degrees. 'We are not an assimilation programme', one course administrator stressed, 'We recognise the

benefits that diverse perspectives bring to music education'. The programme foregrounds the different cultural backgrounds of its participants as a strength in Germany's music education system. The staff emphasise throughout this opening seminar that the participants will learn as much from each other as from the instructors. The LMA's perception of the programme was confirmed by some participants to me. Nidhi Udupa Raghava, a singer trained in various North Indian genres, has enrolled in various continuing education programmes in the past years as she seeks to transition from a career in engineering to music. Compared to other courses she has done, the ZLG is far less 'assimilatory', according to her: 'The course values everyone's contribution and doesn't just come in and tell you "here's how to do this"'.

Such a *niedrigschwelliger* [easy-access or low barriers to entry] approach is reflected in the structure of the certificate designed to accommodate participants' varying capabilities and backgrounds. This manifests primarily in the generous and forgiving grading system (by German standards). On paper, the participants must fulfil five criteria to earn the certificate: (1) attend at least 80% of the seminars, (2) complete a fifteen-hour internship at a music school in their city, (3) complete the weekly homework assignments (i.e. arrange a piece of music, write lesson plans), (4) film and analyse a video of their teaching, and (5) complete the final portfolio project. While these requirements may come across as demanding for a part-time course that many are completing in a non-native language, these criteria are relatively flexible in practice. For example, the weekly homework assignments are always optional; no participant has been expelled to my knowledge for failure to submit the fortnightly music theory worksheets. Even for the final two assignments (video analysis and portfolio project) all participants submit multiple drafts to the instructors for feedback and group discussion.

Throughout the course, the fellow participants serve as both sources for intercultural methods and test subjects on which to practice them. For example, during the intensive weekends, one person leads the group through a warm-up exercise of their choosing at the beginning of each session. Through this, each individual can share a music pedagogical technique, song, or activity with the group, as well as gain practice in leading intercultural music-making.

This mutual sharing does not always generate consistent pedagogic insights, but the ZLG staff nevertheless see the value of a flat hierarchy to the course – both methodologically and symbolically. On a deeper level, this coming together on equal footing enacts the kind of lived interculturalism that the programme seeks to bring about in music schools. Here, musicians with different cultural backgrounds, genres, and migration statuses come together as equals to learn from one another. This mirrors the kind of society that the ZLG staff would like to see in Germany more broadly – one that celebrates diversity instead of segregating it. This connection is made most explicit in the way the LMA presents the ZLG externally, such as how instructor Hayat Chaoui addressed the audience and participants at the certificate ceremony:

> I am pleased that today we are creating a small connection to the existing reality in NRW, in Germany in general, and, of course, especially here in Wuppertal. That this diversity is visible and also gradually becoming more visible in music schools... One day these musical cultures will meet more at eye level [*auf Augenhöhe*]... So, let's make it happen. Help me with this. Help us to carry this further out into the world.

At the workshop day Antje Valentin made a similar comment in her opening address, noting that 'this diversity is already present in NRW', so these course participants are part of a larger 'societal change' to make it visible in music schools.

Such comments reproduce Graeber's location of value in actions that materialise imagined totalities. According to Graeber, 'actions become meaningful to the actor by being incorporated in some larger, social totality' (2001, p. xii). In this case, Hayat spoke simultaneously of Germany, NRW, and Wuppertal as imagined totalities. From this perspective, '"society" simply consists of that potential audience, of everyone whose opinion of you matters in some way' (p. 76). These imagined totalities including "German society" are made material and visible in acts of value creation, such as the ZLG award ceremony. Through such moments of performing value for an audience, 'one is necessarily seeing "society" as to some degree an intentional thing' (p. 230). Once they are made visible, they can be moulded by our own actions.

The LMA itself materialises Graeber's theory by enacting their goal of "lived diversity" [*gelebte Vielfalt*] through the ZLG's curriculum and course structure. This manifests in two concrete ways: their approach to linguistic diversity and intercultural music production. In the first instance, the teaching staff does not divide the cohort into groups based on German language ability or previous educational experience. Instead, the majority of seminars convene the entire group of 20 participants together in one room. They prefer this approach because it treats all participants as equals, regardless of their ethnic or educational background. As the teaching staff emphasised, everyone learns together and from one another on equal footing, including the instructors. I was doubtful after the admissions interviews that some of these people would fully understand what was happening in the course. This feeling only grew after listening to some of the teachers, who spoke quickly and used niche vocabulary and turns of phrase.

Nevertheless, the participants found their own strategies to keep up in the course. Some relied on *Multiplikatoren* – multipliers, or participants who translated or explained the most important parts of an activity in a more comfortable language or at least in simpler German terms. Others pieced together meaning from multiple sources, such as the spoken instructions, handouts and presentations, gestures and activities, and asking follow up questions after the seminar. Given the wide range of language abilities and cultural capital in the room, I was surprised that this language policy functioned as well as it did.

This approach to mixing languages is mirrored in the course's intercultural music making, the second way by which this idea of "lived diversity" is enacted. The staff tried to build group music-making into every seminar, even if that meant just adding a jam session to the final 15 minutes of the evening. This emphasis on music making also arose from the first cohort, during which the participant Ayham (who we met in sections 3.5 and 4.3.1) brought everyone together during the weekend retreats for jam sessions that extended long into the night. Since then, this activity has been integrated into the broader curriculum. The ZLG sees the value in inter-/transcultural ensemble work, as demand for such groups within music education is increasing. Koray Berat Sarı, a ZLG staff member since the course's first iteration, leads one of NRW's first institutionalised youth transcultural ensembles Mondo Muziko, established in 2021.[75] And in the ZLG, he helps participants cultivate the necessary skills to lead such groups.

Beyond the informal jam sessions, these learning goals are established in the curriculum in two practical components: through the workshop day and in the final concert. The staff divides each cohort into groups with different instruments, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, musical genres,

[75] For more on this ensemble, see Appendix 1 (p. 356) and www.heimat-musik.de/ensemble.

and genders. This produces groups such as the one described at the opening of section 5.2.1, in which bağlamas, violins, guitars, and *tombaks*[76] find common musical ground. Course participants are treated as equal members in these constellations, and no one musical culture represented should take precedence over others. This approach to valuing different cultures resonated with many participants. A percussionist from an early cohort praised the Multikulti mindset. He found it beneficial to meet and learn from people from around the world. Another former participant who I spoke with commented, 'I love that everyone gets a chance to show what they got'.

A further strength of the programme is its focus on both sides of labour market integration. Most initiatives tend to focus on only one side of the integration process: either upskilling migrants or opening up job markets for them and their credentials. The ZLG is unique in that it targets both policy goals. While the weekly seminars prepare participants to undertake lessons in German music schools, the ZLG staff works beyond the seminar room to pave the way into public music schools.

Ruddi and Antje's expertise and networks play a crucial role in this process. As a former director of the public music school in Hürth (a city near Cologne) and holder of various leadership positions in state and national music school associations, Ruddi understands how these institutions operate. Then-LMA director Antje Valentin possesses a similar resume of music school leadership positions and later became the general secretary of the German Music Council (DMR). Together they developed the ZLG's short internship scheme with various music schools in NRW. Anjte and Ruddi not only facilitate connections with music schools in their local area, but also try to match participants with suitable teachers and staff members who express interest in diversifying their cultural offerings. Ideally, this short placement would lead to future employment at the music

[76] A Persian goblet drum.

school. The *Landesverband der Musikschulen in NRW* (LVdMS), the association representing music schools in NRW, has been an official cooperation partner of the ZLG since the first cohort. This alliance fits well within the LMA's goal to increase participants' social capital through institutional networking.

Yet this cooperation also served the other direction of integration, namely to encourage more German music schools to diversify their offerings. Through strategic partnerships with open-minded LVdMS staff, the LMA could strengthen the case for more diversity initiatives in NRW's music schools. Not all music schools set this as a priority, Ruddi told me. Therefore, they choose carefully in which contexts to place participants. They focus on schools with strong profiles in musical diversity who can offer mentors with transcultural capital and the possibility for future employment. When participants make the most of these connections, positive outcomes can arise, such as in Nidhi's case, who is still working with a music school in Leverkusen. Others reported less effective partnerships or even active disinterest from music schools and their students. Aras was placed with a violin teacher at a famously conservative music school in Essen. He tried to teach some of the students some of the techniques he learned in Syria, which elicited a defence of the classical style of playing. He was shocked when they told him his playing *klingt falsch* [sounds wrong]: 'I just couldn't understand, because it doesn't sound wrong to me!' His interactions with his mentor did not make him feel any more welcome. When a student cancelled at the last minute and they had an unexpectedly free hour together, the teacher subjected Aras to what he described as an "interrogation": 'How long have you been in Germany? Where in Syria are you from? Are you going to go back at some point?' Even though they played the same instrument, Aras did not

feel like they met on equal footing in this encounter. He played the exoticised guest; the teacher, the gracious host.

This type of exchange is not uncommon in these placement experiences, and the ZLG staff has reservations about how it will progress in the future. In a conversation after the 2025 general elections in Germany, Ruddi sighed and commented, 'if 20% of the populace is voting for the AfD, we have to assume some of those people work in public music schools'. With this statement, he painted a rather discouraging outlook for the future of pro-diversity initiatives in Germany's musical landscape. 'All the more important that we continue with this work', he concluded.

5.2.3 Transcultural capital as the bridge in two-way integration

On a Friday in early May 2023, I joined Ruddi and four participants in a seminar room. They were developing the 60-minute workshop that they would deliver the following week at the Bergische Musikschule in Wuppertal. Ruddi sat to one side and occasionally offered tips like 'speak less, play more'. Syavash, Erdem, Deniz*, and Sahbi brainstormed different themes to unify their different musical instruments and styles, ranging from Persian percussion to Turkish stringed instruments, to North African Oud. Erdem suggested singing "Happy Birthday" in different microtonal maqamat and uneven time signatures such as 8/8 (3+3+2). Sahbi took up this idea and developed a complex reinterpretation of the melody in these various guises. The others immediately joined in, effortlessly finding their place in the groove. The resulting sound felt more like a Turkish tea bar than a child's birthday party.

Still smiling and clapping along, Ruddi cut in. 'Great idea, but how do you think your workshop participants will manage? Who do you imagine will be there next week?' This question prompted

an “aha” moment for the group. They brainstormed which kind of person would sign up for an intercultural music workshop day, imagining what instruments and skills they would bring, what preconceptions about “oriental” music they might have, whether they could play by ear. Some had an easier time putting themselves into participants’ shoes than others. Ruddi gently guided them through the discussion, referencing statistics from past years. The group was surprised to learn that the participants were almost always over 50 years old, mostly women, and belonged to the category of ‘enthusiastic amateurs’. This prompted the foursome to completely redo their approach.

On the workshop day, Ruddi’s prediction came true. In total four people (all pensioners, all women) chose their course titled Cultural Chameleons. The small room, filled with excess chairs and large instruments, pushed the two groups together so that they sat directly across from one another in two lines. The rather confrontational positioning of the bodies was not diminished through the type of pedagogy on show. One of the ZLG participants struggled to teach his version of the German children’s song ‘*Auf der Mauer*’. He wrote out a scale on the board in notation, turning it into a Maqam Hijaz by changing the accidentals. Only after talking for five minutes in rapid-fire German did it come to his attention that the participants had not taken in any of this information; two were playing drums (and therefore did not need to learn scales for a melody) and the other two did not read sheet music. After this was brought to his attention, he changed gears and switched to his instrument, commenting, ‘That’s right, we should be doing more playing, less talking’. But again, his method of transmission did not address the workshop participants. He cued changes in the song with hand gestures that the other musicians could not see behind the flock of music stands separating the workshop teachers and participants.

Through this experience, these participants learned important lessons that extended beyond the official curriculum of the ZLG. According to the requirements of the exercise, they fulfilled their duty to create a thorough lesson plan on their chosen music repertoire. But the experience of delivering it brought the realisation that working in a music school demands more than just presenting their music on a platter; good pedagogy addresses the target audience in a way that they can engage with the material.

This insight on its own seems self-evident, especially for a certificate in music education. But this need to address the right "imagined totality" is all the more important in intercultural work. If participants want to work in music school contexts like the one illustrated above, then they must learn how to appropriately translate their knowledge in a way that is meaningful to the students. To use Graeber's terms, these performers generate more value for themselves and others by tailoring their actions to the audience in front of them.

To do so, these musicians must acquire the cultural capital and habitus of German educators. A qualification programme presents one such way to garner these resources, as higher education is often the place where career cultural capital is transferred and an understanding of "the rules of the game" develops (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984). Music teaching and learning overall plays an important role in conferring cultural capital (Born & Devine, 2015; L. Green, 2011). This fact extends to music teacher education as well (Perkins & Triantafyllaki, 2013), in particular intercultural music teacher education (Westerlund et al., 2020). Given that the ZLG is a part-time, nine-month course, the LMA is under no illusion that participants' habituses will be completely transformed to that of a fully-enculturated educator in Germany. Instead, the ZLG teaches participants the underlying

logic of this field and how they can best get a foot in the door. In this context, cultural capital can help secure a permanent contract at a music school, which in turn generates economic capital – or at least the LMA hopes so.

Part of the LMA's approach includes teaching participants how to leverage pre-existing capital accumulated through their transnational biographies. In Bourdieusian language, such cross-border resources are called "transcultural capital", or 'the strategic use of knowledge, skills and networks acquired by migrants through connections with their country and cultures of origin that are made active at their new places of residence' (Triandafyllidou, 2009, p. 102). This framing highlights how cultural capital circulates in different contexts, especially between the Global South and Global North. Transcultural capital should not be understood as 'an essentializing concept through which artists are frozen into their ethnic niches', but rather a tool to foreground the strategies that artists use to bring their careers forward (Kiwan & Meinhof, 2011, p. 20).

The LMA seeks to adopt this view of transcultural capital in their two-way integrative programming. If the LMA can sensitise music schools to the value of transcultural capital, then these racialised musicians can more easily convert it on the job market. The value of this capital, such as language skills and cultural competencies, is evident. More surprising is the recognition garnered simply by having learned music abroad (as noted in section 5.1). The LMA tries to position these resources as especially valuable assets to music schools. In their argumentation, these musicians not only bring diverse, "authentic" content from abroad, but also reach a broader population of students, especially those with so-called "migration backgrounds".

From this perspective, the LMA's strategy seems to implement a balanced approach to labour market integration grounded in increasing the value of transcultural capital. But a closer look at the ZLG curriculum complicates this reading. Specifically, it questions whether the way in which the LMA uses transcultural capital skews more towards the aforementioned ethnicised niches and less towards cultivating strategies of self-empowerment. This process can lead to a more uni-directional form of integration placing the onus on the migrants. Looking at the ZLG in this way illustrates the fine line between shining a light on unequal structures and reinforcing them. In this example, providing migrants with strategies to operate in an unjust system may actually condition them to reproduce their own marginalisation.

5.3 The ZLG as a one-way assimilation programme

Whilst the ZLG has touted itself as an egalitarian, intercultural certificate based on mutual learning, in this section I analyse the shortcomings and sinister side of the approach outlined above. I unpack gaps in the ZLG's philosophy, as well as how the type of transcultural capital fostered in the programme might further marginalise these musicians. Elements of the programme that I explore include the undifferentiated language approach, strategies of self-exoticisation, and rejection of non-Western pedagogies. I argue that from this perspective, the ZLG could indeed be viewed as more of a German education assimilation programme than that of two-way mutual learning.

5.3.1 Imposing intercultural values in a one-size-fits-all classroom

After the soft welcome outside the HfMTK on the first seminar day, we gathered in a crowded classroom to review the course outline, including the music school placement. A participant raised his hand and asked, 'What if we get one of those people who just can't make music... You work for months and months and they only want to play pop songs. You can drop them as students, right? If it's clear they are just incapable?' This produced a strong reaction from the teaching staff: 'Everyone is capable of making music. It is our job to cultivate their skills and their creativity'. Another instructor explicitly connected tolerating diverse musical styles to tolerating diversity in the population: 'We also have to apply this approach to each other, right? Because every music is equal and all of you play different music... It also extends to people as well. Don't you want to be accepted for who you are?' This type of intercultural tolerance differed strongly from that exhibited in front of the conservatory just an hour before. In that instance, the staff mobilised intercultural understanding to accommodate different cultural perspectives. In contrast, their response in the classroom deployed a pro-diversity message ('don't you want to be accepted for who you are?') in order to refute the participant's opinion ('there are some people who just can't make music').

This initial outburst signalled the first of many extra-musical values imposed by the staff. While the values themselves promote a dialogic, intercultural outlook, they were implemented in a decidedly top-down fashion. Said another way, the message reflects the LMA's commitment to promoting equality in music education, but the methods used to convey this position were anything but egalitarian.

Imposing a pro-diversity orientation in a monocultural way may have its justifications, especially in a qualification setting. On the one hand, it ensures that participants acquire the vocabulary and frameworks needed to operate within German cultural policy discourses, which demand demonstrable commitment to values such as intercultural awareness and mutual respect. On the other hand, the monolithic manner in which these perspectives are taught leaves little space for participants' own cultural knowledge to inform or challenge the narrative. Rather than emerging from dialogue or lived experience, the diversity-oriented philosophy underlying this curriculum is imposed from the side of German institutions. This pedagogical approach risks reinforcing the very hierarchies it aims to dismantle, by privileging German definitions of diversity over the plural, situated understandings brought by the musicians themselves (as also discussed in chapter four). While the overall ethos of the programme bespeaks a more progressive and inclusive approach to music teacher training, encounters in the seminar room challenged this reading of the ZLG.

One negative effect of this enforced intercultural opening was that it did not lead to equitable outcomes among participants. This manifested primarily via the ZLG's language policy. While the language policy enacted their broader goal of "lived diversity", this approach did not equitably address participants' diverse capabilities and needs. This went beyond just language to differences in one's overall cultural capital. Those who lacked the cultural capital to grasp the core concepts and the language skills to follow along were left behind.

Such was the case of Warda*. She rarely spoke during the seminars but nodded vigorously throughout, which the instructors interpreted as understanding – that is, until her final project and self-reflection revealed that she had failed to grasp the course's basic pedagogical concepts. Efforts

to clarify in her native language did not solve the issue. As the instructor told me, 'It seemed like this basic understanding of pedagogy and how to teach just wasn't there'. After much deliberation, they did not grant Warda a certificate at the end of the year.

A one-size-fits-all approach also disadvantaged those at the other end of the capital accumulation spectrum. Native German speakers and those with tertiary qualifications were similarly dissatisfied with the ZLG's undifferentiated language policy. One musician who grew up in Germany and has a bachelor's degree in social work sat twiddling his thumbs for most of the seminars. He often expressed annoyance at the course's inefficiencies, and in the end claimed to have learned almost nothing. This sentiment was echoed by other participants, including one who was pursuing a university degree at the same time: 'Sometimes after the days in Cologne I think, "What did I learn today?" And often the question is difficult to answer'. These participant experiences illustrate the shortcomings of implementing this narrative of belonging and inclusion via a flat hierarchy. Treating everyone as equals does not necessarily lead to equitable outcomes.[77]

5.3.2 Exoticised identities and epistemicide

Another, more problematic element of the ZLG's hidden curriculum is how it frames participants' identities and their contribution to the NRW music scene. As outlined above, the course works to amplify and increase the value of musicians' transcultural capital. As the LMA sees it, this approach represents the best way for participants to gain access to music school jobs.

Yet, the cultivation of cultural capital itself does not just fall along class lines, but also reaffirms processes of racialisation (Cartwright, 2022). Cultural capital's racialised side emerges in the ZLG

[77] (See Minow, 2021 for more on the difference between equity and equality).

through the equivocation of musicians' nationalities with their artistic practices. This framing is already present in the call for ZLG applications. For example, singers are required 'to master a style typical of their country of origin'. Participants are encouraged to recruit students from their own ethnic communities as prospective students. Elsewhere, the language positions potential participants as ambassadors for their country's "traditional culture".

Connecting performers' racialised identities to their music genre is common practice in the world music industry. Performers and record labels often capitalise on this exoticisation to increase market share (Peres da Silva, 2015; T. D. Taylor, 1997; Whitmore, 2016). Many of the ZLG musicians have discovered this fact as well. A violinist in the program explained that he stands little chance of winning a classical orchestra job in Germany. Instead, he can earn money by gigging as an 'oriental violinist' with these same orchestras. By aligning himself with world music rather than classical, he sees better odds at "making it" as a musician, even if it is not in his preferred genre. This type of 'strategic essentialism' does not resemble the way which Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak initially theorised it, in which marginalised groups temporarily promote distilled identities in the struggle for equal rights (2006). Rather, it manifests exactly what Spivak warned against, namely the endorsement of essentialist identity politics that keep the subaltern on the periphery.

This essentialisation not only transpires along racial lines, but also along the forced migration spectrum. The teaching staff, through their connections beyond the LMA, encourage forced migrants to capitalise on positive public sentiment to get gigs where possible. With such career guidance, some staff members have presented this path as a viable way to establish a music career in Germany. Nevertheless, this formulation mobilises transcultural capital in the very way that Kiwan

and Meinhof reject. Here, transcultural capital functions less as a strategy for liberatory self-empowerment and more as a pigeonhole in an 'ethnicized niche' (2011, p. 20).

From the LMA's perspective, mobilising these identity politics in the migrants' favour facilitates the end result of diversifying music schools and thereby creating better opportunities for musicians in the future. But not all participants accept the self-exoticisation that this strategy demands. This is especially true of second-generation migrants or long-term residents, who in general take more critical positions towards the country of destination and experiences of discrimination than those in the first-generation (El-Mafaalani, 2018; Sürig & Wilmes, 2015; Yazdiha, 2019).

This resistance came to the fore one Friday seminar. Seated around the tables in the cramped seminar room, we listened to a guest lecturer extol the benefits of working at music schools: 'You'll have to start with one-off workshops and move up to fixed-term contracts, but one day we'll be able to offer permanent positions'. Participants eagerly took notes and offered cloying statements of gratitude, but one person was thoroughly displeased. Farhad* raised his hand:

> You all need to check your language. First of all, how should this music school know if I'm qualified enough on my instrument to be teaching others? How do they have the skills to judge if I'm a good performer? Second, yes, this is a good chance for us, but we also represent a chance for you all. With us you can broaden your offerings and win some real masters for your music school. It's you who should be thankful, not us.

The speaker acknowledged his comment and agreed – partly: 'Yes, this situation is a win-win-win: for teachers, music schools, and students'. Farhad, still dissatisfied, crossed his arms and sat through the remainder of the presentation in silence.

During the break, we met at the kiosk across the street over a cup of coffee. Farhad explained that he is worried about being valued for the wrong reasons. As he expressed bluntly to the music school representatives, do they want him for his musical skill or because he fulfils a quota? For him, these strategies that the ZLG tacitly promoted seemed to restrict his options, not multiply them. His frustration only grew as the course continued. After the workshop day in Wuppertal, he came to me and sighed exasperatedly, 'If I have to cram the 2,000-year history of my instrument into another five-minute lecture for people who don't really care, I'm going to vomit'.

Through these conflicts over representation we see how the ZLG veers between providing strategies to racialised musicians and perpetuating stereotypes about them. Compounding these issues in self-exoticisation is the way in which the LMA encourages participants to channel these strategies into pedagogical settings. While the curriculum encourages intercultural content, it nevertheless should be taught using German methods. Once again, given the LMA's goal of placing these musicians in public institutions, cultivating an understanding of local practices hardly seems out of place. But their concept of what constitutes 'good' pedagogy generated friction between instructors and participants.

A central learning outcome of the ZLG is to emphasise the importance of a student-centred approach to teaching. This philosophy foregrounds students' holistic needs when planning lessons, not strictly adhering to what the instructor thinks is best. Participants gradually adopted this attitude during the seminars but did not shy away from criticising it in private discussions with me outside of the classroom. Many chafed at the implication that this student-centred approach in German pedagogy is superior to what happens in other countries. 'I can't believe what these

students get away with here,' one participant commented to me, 'If I didn't practice or just wanted to play film music in my lessons, my teacher would have thrown me out'. He accompanied this remark with a violent backhand motion and added, 'And I turned out just fine!' Despite this strong opposition I encountered outside the classroom, participants generally kept these thoughts to themselves in front of instructors.

This proved to be a good decision for many, as signalling an understanding of the student-centred approach proved critical to earning the certificate. Those who did not faced challenges at the end of the course. This discrepancy often revealed itself when final projects failed to reproduce this teaching philosophy. A ZLG staff member described a participant from one of the first cohorts:

> At the end of the course – he did over 150 hours of music didactic training and pedagogy – he said, "Yes, I also have a few methods that you do not know about in the West. They are a bit more stringent. The teacher sits in the front, and the students do as they're told". [The entire ZLG course] just went completely over his head. He did not intend it to be mean, but he really thought… that we did not know anything.

This participant held this teaching method as equally valid and was offended when the instructors called it ineffective and outdated. This staff member defended the LMA's position to me by citing decades of music education research in Germany. He contrasted this evidence-based practice with his understanding of how the word 'method' is conceived in other contexts:

> One would define method as "the way how" and think surely it must have the same meaning in other cultures, but every path is different… Cultures in the Middle East developed other methods which are just as modern, but are not the ones we prefer here… There is no science behind it.

Demonstrating this understanding in the self-reflections and final project is a key component of earning the certificate. As Warda's case shows, failure to do so can result in leaving the course empty-handed.

And yet, these practices ignore some key discussions in intercultural music transmission (Campbell, 2017; Schippers, 2009; Westerlund et al., 2020). Music schools often seek out diverse content without recognising the broader cultural setting in which it has been historically embedded. This flattens the rich social worlds of music teaching and learning when different traditions are recontextualised into Western practices. Such occurrences, though well-intentioned, can reinforce colonial hierarchies instead of dismantling them.

The ZLG can be criticised on these grounds. While the course claims to value diverse contributions, participants are nevertheless expected to deliver them within existing German practices. The comment above about 'Middle Eastern pedagogies' not being grounded in science reveals a much more insidious colonial undertow to the curriculum. Mobilising academic research to discredit indigenous knowledge systems is a hallmark of epistemicide (de Sousa Santos, 2014) and epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007). Thereby the "exotic" elements of a foreign culture remain desirable, but not the context in which they are found or produced.

Some participants graduated from the programme with heavy critiques about the certificate they held in their hands. As Farhad indicated with his comments, he did not want to play the "grateful refugee" (Buxton & Gibney, 2025). Organisations that promote the inclusion of forced migrants often fall into this trap, creating an idealised version of a "good refugee" which in the end limits the degree to which they can forge their own identities (Ortlieb et al., 2021). Such processes engage in

complicated negotiations over value. The transcultural capital and strategies of self-exoticisation cultivated in the programme might lead toward secure music school jobs, which provide significant economic capital. However, this might transpire at the expense of one's artistic and personal identity. Racialised musicians must balance these decisions within a complex moral economy.

5.4 The ZLG as mechanism of recognition for racialised musicians

The previous section viewed the ZLG through the seminar's everyday interactions, which revealed gaps and contradictions in the LMA's professed approach to lived diversity and mutual learning. However, to evaluate the ZLG solely based on the curricula (hidden or otherwise) ignores how participants, staff, and external actors are shaping the value of the certificate itself outside the classroom. By learning the "rules of the game" within the ZLG, racialised musicians can use this knowledge for their own ends beyond the field of music education. Indeed, this certificate might play a bigger role in conferring value on the world music scene overall, which the LMA did not anticipate when it inaugurated this programme. This section analyses where participants located the value of the certificate for them both personally and professionally. In contrast to the ZLG's curriculum which primarily focused on cultural capital, participants sought to gain social and symbolic capital with the certificate. I show how these motivations manifested in a broader conception of multicultural recognition for racialised musicians' actions within the imagined totality of world music.

I began to uncover these perspectives during the first weekend retreat in Heek when I sat down with five participants in the cafeteria. After a long morning of reviewing the basics of lesson planning and learning more about work in music schools, we eagerly tucked into the meal. I

casually asked the table about their plans after the certification course, and nearly dropped my fork in surprise at the answers. One replied, 'I don't really want to become a teacher or anything, I just want to play'. Another agreed, describing his dream of touring with a trio playing world music and jazz fusion. Others wanted to combine performance with cultural management or nonprofit work. None of the answers included education.

Further discussions with other participants revealed only a marginal interest in music education, but not as the LMA conceived of this work. Like many musicians, the participants largely saw teaching as a way to support performance careers, or as a fallback plan for later in life. Two people separately told me that they were 'not getting any younger', adding that a comfortable teaching job would be important later on when they wanted more stability and retirement benefits. For now, they planned to focus on performing and only take on students when they need the money. Of those with an interest in pedagogy, most described futures leading ensembles, teaching private instruction, or running the occasional workshop. Only two people expressed immediate interest in a full-time music school job.

Given the seeming mismatch between motivations and qualifications, I was all the more surprised that these musicians enrolled considering the costs of participation. Many people used vacation day allowances from their jobs to make sure they could attend. This was the case for Dilovan, who worked full time at a hotel and often put in shifts over the weekend to make up for his time at the ZLG. Another person postponed dental surgery despite being in significant pain to make sure he did not miss a Friday seminar.

The value of the certificate can also be viewed through the associated financial burden. Participants paid out of pocket for the overnight retreats, as well as travel costs to and from Cologne. For Julio coming from Hamburg every other week or Kasem from rural Hessen, these train and accommodation costs added up over the nine-month period. The cost of childcare was also a factor for many, although this was discussed less openly among the participants. A simple cost-benefit analysis based on these factors would not explain why so many musicians with no interest in education put themselves through a nine-month pedagogy course.

After hearing these comments at the lunch table, I was left wondering why performers would undergo a nine-month course, sacrificing time and money, to train for a career they didn't even want. In subsequent discussions, the answer was clear. When asked why he enrolled in the programme, one person held up his hands, saying, 'I'm just here to network with musicians'. Farhad added, 'Yeah, it's good to be on the radar of the LMA. They can do a lot for your performing career'. Mardan* corroborated this claim with an anecdote. Previously he had applied to a publicly-funded grant that sponsors concerts in the world music scene. In his rejection letter, they suggested Mardan would have better odds in the future with a ZLG certificate. At first he was confused: 'I don't want to teach, I want to perform! What good would that do?' But a discussion with a ZLG alumnus changed Mardan's mind: 'He said the certificate would help. I can meet important people. I don't even have to teach afterwards, really! So I applied for the course'.

The fact that most musicians would rather perform than teach did not come as a surprise. Professional musicians across genres and countries often approach music teaching primarily as a way to support their performance careers (Parkes et al., 2015; Sacchetti & Salustri, 2023). What

stood out in these discussions, however, was how the musicians planned to use this qualification in pursuit of their career goals. While classical and jazz musicians often study performance before transitioning into education, ZLG participants aimed to do the opposite: leverage a music education certificate to launch performing careers. With the existing competition in the creative industries – even for those with accredited degrees – this pathway into a performance career seemed rather difficult.

As evidenced by the comments here, participants sought a mixture of social and institutionalised cultural capital from the ZLG. These intentions contrasted with the LMA's focus on conferring embodied (trans)cultural capital (section 5.2.3). In terms of social capital, while a few participants sought connections with fellow musicians, the majority were more interested in gaining access to important, well-connected people. Then-LMA director Antje Valentin and ZLG director Ruddi Sodemann have been the primary draw for many participants. Ruddi is a particularly important contact as he leads the political advocacy group Globale Musik Köln e.V. (GMK), which organises many concerts in the city. To fill these stages, he often draws on ZLG participants and alumni, which has not escaped the notice of musicians in the scene. A handful of participants claimed that they enrolled in the ZLG primarily to gain access to Ruddi, one saying, 'I want to be on his list of people to call for gigs'. A similar sentiment was shared with regard to Antje and the LMA, sharing that 'it's good to be on their radar for jobs'.

Second to networking, most participants cited "the papers" as a motivating factor for enrolling in the ZLG. Interestingly, many distinguished between the value of the certificate itself and the knowledge and skills conferred through the course. This distinction arose in comments balancing

the relative worth of the certificate. One person told me, 'It's nice to learn about lots of different cultures and everything. I need the certificate to work though'. Another shared, 'I've learned some methods for my choir, but the certificate will help us get funding'. In such formulations, the content of the course is presented as a "nice" additional benefit in comparison to the real advantage of the certificate: an institutional stamp of legitimacy. Through these comments, musicians demonstrate an understanding of 'the performative magic of the power of instituting', or the capacity of qualifications to 'impose recognition' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 247).

Given Germany's culture of qualifications and the issues surrounding recognition and access to higher education, this certificate represents a real chance for musicians to access new opportunities in the labour market. Some have used it to pursue positions in education, such as jobs at music schools and at the LMA itself. But the majority are applying it to a wider field, such as Mardan's experience trying to obtain concert funding. As a member of various concert and workshop funding juries, I have seen not only the number of ZLG alumni applying to these programmes, but also the way in which they mobilise this certificate to demonstrate their worthiness of public investment. For example, some equate it with a four-year accredited degree to justify better hourly rates for teaching. It also has been used to signal eligibility for certain funding schemes only open to professional musicians.[78]

For others, the ZLG is a stepping stone on the way to further educational goals. Sheyda used her time in the programme to learn more about how German education works and strengthen her application for a four-year degree programme. Papa Jo similarly enrolled in the ZLG partly to get

[78] Determining who qualifies as a professional for the purposes of funding presents certain challenges, as outlined in section 3.4.1

closer to the HfMTK. He revealed this fact to me at the award ceremony. When I questioned if the ZLG would increase his odds of being accepted for a bachelor's degree, he chuckled and patted me on the shoulder, 'Perhaps not, but it certainly didn't hurt. With this certificate I can go to the Conservatory with a bit more standing'. He pointed at the LMA logo on his certificate, his face now serious: 'These people will vouch for me'.

Uniting all these hopes is a belief that this piece of paper will grant recognition in both personal and professional aspirations. In Bourdieusian terms, the pursuit of recognition falls under "symbolic capital", understood as reputation, authority, or prestige (Bourdieu, 1993). Recognition, in this sense, may come across as a hollow good whose value is solely based on the esteem of others.

While one could view this desire for recognition through Bourdieu's lens of symbolic capital and power, recognition in this case could just as well be explained through political theories of multiculturalism. Recognition is a powerful tool for social structures to reflect minority identities and the inherent worth of individuals. Franz Fanon identified the psychological harms inflicted by nonrecognition in the dominating frame of colonial whiteness (1952/2008). Charles Taylor (1994) and Axel Honneth (1996) take this framing up in their respective theories of recognition as an ethical foundation for a just society. Because identity-formation unfolds in a dialogical process between individuals and the social worlds they occupy, misrecognition can inflict injustice not only materially, but also in disaffirming social worth. Both Taylor's formulation in terms of recognition for cultural minorities and Honneth's differentiation between affective, legal, and

social recognition come to the fore in how participants spoke about the ZLG. At its core, the certificate recognises the value of an individual's actions in an institutionalised form.

Just as in Graeber's theory of value, some participants saw the certificate as recognising the cumulative value of their past efforts. Such efforts include learning their instruments and music, establishing an artistic career, and managing life in Germany. For example, many participants first pointed to the aesthetic validation that admittance to the programme already gave them. Even though the ZLG focuses on music education, the selection process purports to only take the most talented musicians in this field. Even before the certification programme begins, the participants receive an important signal of their artistic worth in the eyes of important stakeholders.

The reputation of the ZLG and the LMA more broadly play a key role in this recognition process. These institutions must possess a certain standing in the scene themselves for their aesthetic judgement to carry any meaning. Admittedly, not everyone in the world music scene is convinced by the capabilities of the ZLG staff to recognise talent, as was expressed to me in a few interviews with critics of the programme. However, enough people regard this selection process as rigorous enough to grant it sufficient value within institutional structures, such as in certain funding processes. And participants have noted this as well, such as Kasem when he told me that, 'the ZLG gives you legitimacy as a performer'.

But this legitimacy does not always locate its value externally; it also signals musicians' own value to themselves. It provides the external confirmation that they belong to this world music scene and contribute some value to it. Kasem's reasons for enrolling highlight this perspective. As he explained to me, he had already invested so much time and effort to learn the oud: why not push

himself a little bit more to receive a certificate that recognises his work? He does not plan to become a professional musician. At the time of the ZLG he was studying for a Master's degree in Organic Agriculture at the University of Kassel and took the train for five hours each way to attend the Friday seminars in Cologne. When I asked about his motivation, he conceded that he might use the ZLG to take a few students on the side, but he didn't expect to make any money from that. He just wanted to pursue his musical learning to some form of certified completion. This sentiment was shared by others, in particular those whose studies were interrupted. This applied not only to those who fled wars or persecution, but also women who put their studies on hold to raise children. Such was the case for Laleh and Warda, whose degrees were both interrupted by the birth of their children. This certificate represented the opportunity for them to finish what they had once started.

The deep personal value conferred by the ZLG showed itself in the certificate awarding ceremony. Alhousseini Anivolla, a well-established desert-blues musician who is signed to a prominent label and has toured across Europe and Africa, expressed genuine excitement when he approached the stage and received his certificate. He embraced each instructor in turn before facing the audience, grinning from ear to ear. He held the paper above his head and jogged around the room – a veritable victory lap celebrating his accomplishment. Later, he showed me the paper, with emotion in his voice, 'This is the first certificate I've had in my hands'. The affective value of the ZLG showed itself in other ways before the award ceremony as well. Mehmet Akbaş acknowledged the professional value of the course, but emphasised that the social bonding was just as important to him: 'After Covid, it's just good for me to be around other people and making music. Just getting out of the house and singing with others has helped me significantly'.

Mehmet's comment encapsulates the potential of the ZLG to create value beyond the professional sphere. In addition to the programme's goals of building career capital and improving employment prospects, the course itself generates value by simply bringing together people who love their music. Foregrounding the social ties that the ZLG creates and not the certificate itself centres the ZLG's value in its actions, not the token used to represent it. But as Graeber emphasises, these actions require an audience to recognise this value. Using the ZLG to help build world music's "imagined totality" is a central concern of the LMA and the subject of the following section.

5.5 The ZLG as professionalisation programme

In this section, I present one final reading of the ZLG: a tool in the world music scene's efforts to professionalise. This genre has been on a decades-long quest to establish itself as a recognised, professional genre. But the degree to which such a disparate field – both in terms of aesthetics and people – is able to define itself as a profession in the contested and precarious music landscape remains open. The resonances and dissonances that result uncover many of the underlying tensions in defining professional status and belonging in artistic spheres.

In order to understand how these processes are unfolding in relation to the ZLG, I posit different ways of understanding world music as a profession in section 5.5.1. To do so I draw on theories of professions from sociology and ethnomusicology that foreground professional 'skills and strategies' as well as specialist knowledge and public recognition of the profession's value. In section 5.5.2 I outline how the ZLG staff are trying to professionalise the world music scene. I argue that the organisation fosters social capital within the scene more broadly and inflates the symbolic capital of the certificate through strategic circulation.

5.5.1 Professionalisation processes in world music and Germany

In this section I draw on different theories of professionalisation from within and beyond the field of music to understand how a world music profession might emerge. I ask what defines a profession and who regulates it?

In answer to the first question, social scientists have produced numerous checklists, which Rudi Volti consolidated in his book on the sociology of work (2011). Firstly, professions claim authority over specialist knowledge that is normally conferred by institutions of higher education. Such institutions play a key role in developing the profession by controlling admission, writing the curricula, and fostering social networks. Secondly, this work should be valued not only by professionals and their clients, but by society as a whole. In short, a profession regulates membership internally and recognition externally.

However, when applied to the music industry, it is questionable whether this form of work can even be called employment, much less a profession (Hesmondhalgh, 2018; Tsioulakis, 2020). If musical artists could ever be considered working professionals, Germany's music industry presents one of the best environments for fulfilling these criteria. The 129 publicly-funded professional orchestras in the country offered 9,770 full-time permanent positions in 2024 (*Mehr Musikerstellen*, 2024). Unions for salaried and freelance workers cover nearly all types of engagement in the music industry, including performers, sound engineers, composers, and educators. Music teachers constitute the largest of these groups. Public music schools in Germany engaged the services of 36,500 teachers in 2023 (*Beschäftigungsverhältnisse*, 2023), or roughly 100 music teachers per county [*Landkreis*]. Unions and lobby organisations have negotiated a robust

music licensing system as well as a strong social safety net and insurance apparatus.[79] These characteristics of the music profession reflect Germany's broader culture of labour protections which historically ranks highly among OECD countries (*Recent Trends*, 2020).[80]

While Germany's system of robust union representation and vocational education empower workers in many sectors of the labour market, it also leads to a two-tier system of labour protections. This is visible in employment statistics from public music schools. Of those 36,500 teachers, only 55% were employed by the schools and thereby received a salary and guaranteed insurance and pension contributions. The other 45% worked as freelancers subject to occasional contracts.[81] The protections offered to members of a profession or union workers do not always extend to the growing number of people operating in casual employment.

In fields with professions segmented in this way, belonging is often determined by "the papers" – university or vocational degrees, licenses, and membership in professional chambers. But what about in the field of music, which claims to value talent over qualifications? As Tsioulakis explains, 'The assertion "the papers won't make you a musician", instead, proposes an understanding of music professionalism independently from formalised training' (2020, p. 32).

An alternative way of distinguishing professional status in music might be financial success, or whether one can earn a living from music. However, payment alone does not define a professional. As Tsioulakis notes, high-paying gigs often correlate with low-quality music, which the so-called "real professionals" would not take. This view correlates with Negar's distinction between "events"

[79] For example, see information on GEMA & KSK in section 3.4.1.
[80] For example, unions have maintained strong negotiating positions and memberships while they have declined in other countries. Many companies work cooperatively with worker representation (through worker councils and unions) instead of adversarially, as in the USA (Godard & Frege, 2014).
[81] The percentage of freelance teachers in tertiary music education is roughly similar (*Lehrbeauftragte*, 2023).

and "concerts" (section 3.2). Based on this valuation of money and concert register, Tsioulakis proposes that artist fees do not create success alone, but are rather strategically shared to support one's claims to professional status: 'Payment rates are not only the result of professional success, often they are the means through which a social status of "successfulness" is publicly claimed' (2020, p. 46). I saw evidence of this strategy in how my interlocutors talked about not only the fees they demanded from event organisers, but also how they discussed others' fees and negotiating tactics (see section 3.3.3).

Yet even this idea of financial success indexing professionalism is challenged in the world music scene. Firstly, the terms "professional" and "amateur" 'acquire variable meanings not only across but also within cultures' (Tsioulakis, 2020, p. 28). Other music cultures may allocate professional status along different lines, such as through family ties or conferral by one's teacher. Secondly, earning money with non-Western genres in Germany faces significant contextual challenges. These two limitations came out in an interview with Birgit Ellinghaus, a prominent cultural manager, curator and consultant in the world music scene:

> Rose: What does a successful professional career look like here?
>
> Birgit: First of all, what does success mean?
>
> Rose: How about making a living from music?
>
> Birgit: Sure, but that already presents a problem, because a lot of these kinds of music don't actually exist as professional music forms at their core. Rather, they are ritual music. These are presented on certain occasions by certain musicians in certain contexts. They are neither historical in their original form nor are they actually part of the professional scene that lives from them to this day. So why should I try to insert something in our structure that doesn't fit? But you still have to make a living from it.

If financial success does not necessarily map onto professional status, an alternative marker might be what Tsioulakis calls 'skills and strategies'. Skills refers to a musician's artistic capabilities. These are not necessarily measured by qualifications, but are rather based on social recognition and the quality of one's gigs. Tsioulakis summed this combination up pithily: 'Skill is only valuable if their colleagues are constantly made aware of its existence' (2020, p. 38). Crucially, 'skill is publicised and socially recognised through a set of strategies with which, in their pursuit of a career, musicians are often more preoccupied than the development of the skill itself' (2020, p. 36). Many musicians in the NRW world music scene also see such strategies as a necessary element of professionalisation, as outlined in sections 3.3 and 3.4.

Tsioulakis notes a number of strategies, including inviting other musicians to one's gigs, often on the guest list to grant free entry. This practice is common in Germany as well, reinforcing the core tenets of a gift economy: 'It is seen as an offering that results in obligation of the other party, which can only be resolved by reciprocation' (2020, p. 41). While presented as an act of generosity, this practice also serves to perform one's skills and value, as well as strengthening the social fabric of the scene.

Shannon Garland (2022) similarly highlighted the importance of circulation in creating value. While musicians will locate the value of their work in its aesthetics (skills), artistic value is largely determined socially through circulation (strategies). In Graeber's framing, it is actually these social acts (for example, the reciprocal attendance of concerts) which create the environment for value production. Even Volti's formulation of professions more generally foregrounds the necessity of

broad societal value of the work. In all of these framings, the potential value of these professional skills can only be realised through social recognition.

And yet taking "skills and strategies" as the basis for professionalism faces two primary challenges in Germany's world music scene: (1) what skills are valued and by whom and (2) what strategies generate value for the scene more broadly? The issue of skill recognition and evaluation arises often in this genre, particularly at the semi-professional level. How can a musical genre as diverse as world music possibly recognise and compare musicians' relative skills, in particular when it comes to allocating limited resources? Even those who have been active in the global music industry for years often do not possess all the contextual knowledge to assess to what degree a musician performs the culturally-situated skills in their genre. In other fields – such as Tsioulakis's work on the popular music industry or Garland's analysis of the indie music scene – the standards of professional quality that have emerged are more commonly shared by members within the field. World music, itself characterised by what it *is not* rather than by what it is, does not have this advantage. To return to Volti's characteristics, how can this group claim authority over a repertoire of specialist knowledge when the knowledge itself is so diffuse? Compounding this issue, as Birgit identified previously (section 3.4.3), is the relative unsuitability of the current system to equip decision-makers with this specialist knowledge. As she noted, higher education in Germany does not adequately prepare those in cultural institutions with the aesthetic discernment to evaluate world music genres.

Volti's checklist poses a second problem for calling world music a profession: a deficit in broader societal recognition for the profession's value. German institutions often highlight the importance

of independent creative expression for healthy democracies and communal well-being (Tinius, 2023). But professionals often express dissatisfaction at how the supposed societal value of their work is reflected in remuneration, policy, and public support. For example, state intervention to support the industries and scenes via public funding and minimum concert fee regulation have been ambivalently embraced, as explored in sections 3.4.3.

The current solution to both of the challenges above is, surprisingly, to turn to qualification programmes. Indeed, as Sheyda's experiences and comments by ZLG participants illustrate, the papers do indeed matter when determining who is a professional. Yet adjudicating skills based on qualifications poses a problem in this field; few accredited programmes admit performers of global genres and many are inaccessible to migrants and those with foreign qualifications. The ZLG is currently trying to fill this gap in the field: to not only provide racialised musicians with accessible qualifications, but to use this qualification to professionalise the world music scene and improve its position relative to other genres.

5.5.2 Skills and strategies of professionalisation in the ZLG

This section explores how the ZLG is used to coalesce the world music scene into a socially-recognised profession of value. I show how the ZLG staff confer knowledge beyond the official curriculum, cultivate social capital among participants, and regulate the symbolic capital of the certificate. I show how these efforts to strengthen world music's position might in the end reify this certificate and alienate musicians from their labour.

First, I will present how the staff provided relevant information for musicians' performing careers in the ZLG. This knowledge transfer transpired primarily in exchanges outside the classroom. One

such encounter unfolded in the car of Tuğrul Türken, a ZLG teaching staff member who drove two participants and me to the weekend retreats in Heek. In the first of those two-hour trips, Tuğrul tried to impart some wisdom on the musicians in the car. First, he sang the praises of the Bochum public music school, which has a robust interest in non-Western music genres, especially stringed instruments from the SWANA region. 'It's a good place to try to get a job afterwards. Not all music schools here are so open,' he said pointedly, looking in the rearview mirror at the backseat passengers. Tuğrul continued, 'You also have to know where the good venues are to play, Bahnhof Langendreer in Bochum, Domicil in Dortmund, Katakomben in Essen. You have to know which ones are open to this style of music'. One of the other passengers attempted to offer up his own knowledge about how the scene works, but mixed up the LMA and LMR in the jumble of acronyms. Tuğrul interjected, 'You have to keep all the names straight, especially when it comes to applying for funding. You have to know what each organisation does'. Such advice does not explicitly align with the ZLG's curriculum, but often happens on the edges of the course's meetings. ZLG staff members impart these extra-curricular skills and strategies to help graduates establish themselves as performers as well as educators.

This specialist, tactical knowledge can be amplified through stronger social capital, a second cornerstone of establishing a profession. As Ruddi shared with me outside of the ZLG context, this course serves as an important place for musicians to network within this disparate scene. Indeed, I have seen over the years how connections forged in the course can extend into subsequent professional collaborations. Yet beyond such strong ties, Ruddi also sees the ZLG as an institution that cultivates weak ties within the scene more broadly. Part of Ruddi's goals with the ZLG is to encourage a stronger sense of social cohesion within world music. In particular, he wants musicians

across cohorts to view each other as colleagues and not as competitors. In contrast to strong ties, weak ties do not have to be emotionally robust or based on frequent interactions (Granovetter, 1973). Rather, they serve as a bridge between different social groups. Weak ties are important to not only share information and opportunities, but to expand the reach of world music beyond its own insular bubble.

This goal arose out of Ruddi's own political experiences. In-fighting between the two world music advocacy groups in Cologne has given them a negative reputation, in particular with the city's cultural ministry, a key source of funding.[82] Part of the reconciliation process is to present the global music scene as a harmonious, cohesive social entity that can be trusted with public money. Within this context, Ruddi sees the ZLG as playing a key role in fostering a sense of community.

Indeed, higher education institutions play an important role in cultivating both strong and weak ties, especially in the arts. Thomas Gläßer, chairman of Initiative Freie Musik Köln e.V. (IFM), an advocacy organisation for the freelance music scene, noted this fact in his work. That conservatories do not offer programmes in world music genres is not just an issue of unequal public investment, but also one of professional marginalisation. The social bonds which classical and jazz musicians establish during their studies serve them throughout their career.[83] Global musicians – many of whom migrate to Germany later in life and do not have a central institution to foster social ties – do not possess the same breadth and depth of networks as their peers in other genres.

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[82] The conflict arose when some members of GMK broke away and established their own political advocacy organisation *Plattform Aktuelle Musikkulturen* [Platform for Contemporary Music Cultures]. Both organisations claim to represent the interests of Cologne's world music scene.

[83] Indeed, this principle applies across creative industries, including music, television and publishing (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011) as well as fashion (McRobbie, 2018).

The LMA is trying to change this. During the ZLG, Ruddi invites alumni from previous cohorts to meet the current group of musicians. These networking tasks have been taken up by *In.Di.E Musik*, a project based at the LMA which offers workshops and networking events to support music educators with diverse backgrounds.[84] They have close ties to the ZLG; two of the three project managers so far have been graduates of the programme. Through the combination of cultivating specialist skills and strengthening networks, the LMA are trying to close the education gap in world music.

This approach aligns with Bourdieu's formulation of social capital's worth. The network itself does not necessarily provide value; instead, it is the capital that can be mobilised through these connections that generates benefits for members. Therefore, social capital not only relies on the size of one's network, but also the potential value each member can offer. In this way, the LMA (through both the ZLG and In.Di.E Musik) invests in both cultural and social capital to maximise this 'multiplier effect' for racialised musicians (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248).

All of the efforts made by the LMA and ZLG so far align with how qualifications are generally used in the professionalisation process. The skills and strategies, as well as the network to amplify them, lay the foundations for a profession to establish itself in a given field. However, these efforts to increase the value of the certificate through cultural and social capital alone can only go so far. To further amplify the value of the ZLG, the LMA simultaneously works to increase its symbolic capital in the music field as well.

Understood as reputation, authority, or prestige, symbolic capital is not often cited as one of Bourdieu's three main forms of capital. This is because social fields often treat symbolic capital as

[84] For more on In.Di.E Musik, see Appendix 1 (p. 355).

an inherent quality (such as merit or charisma) and not as a resource that can be passed on and exchanged. But because symbolic capital dissembles its true origins, Bourdieu sees it as one of the most potent forms of capital. Through the accompanying process of symbolic violence, the structures of social stratification are not only reaffirmed, but presented as organic, naturally-occurring, and unchangeable. Symbolic violence is often perpetuated through educational institutions (Bourdieu, 1990) and is used to commit racial violence (Wacquant, 2024).

Nevertheless, these same tactics which reaffirm structures of symbolic capital can also be used to try to change them. The ZLG is working in this way to generate symbolic capital for course alumni. Like all qualification programmes, the ZLG wants to establish its certificate as a token of value that can be exchanged within the cultural labour market. I first encountered these practices while working for the LMR in 2021. I was building the networking platform Musikwelten NRW and asked the LMA if I could share the platform with the ZLG-alumni network. This request was denied, citing data protection concerns; apparently in previous cohorts they had not asked participants for the right to share contact information, so they could not send me the list of email-addresses. I found this fact strange for an organisation that claimed to be an institutional hub for these musicians. My contact later asserted that he was protecting forced migrants from outside actors continually contacting them. These safeguarding concerns play an important role in work with forced migrants, especially in research, but can veer into paternalistic treatment that paradoxically limits forced migrants' agency (see Clark-Kazak, 2017, 2021; also section 1.2.3). In this case, my LMA contact saw himself as working in the musicians' interests, but in doing so denied them potential opportunities they would have otherwise taken.

Only later when I had embedded myself into the ZLG cohort did I realise that this gatekeeping might have had nothing to do with protecting vulnerable musicians, but rather was conducted to protect the reputation of the certificate. This was revealed to me after the workshop day in Wuppertal. I stood at the back of the auditorium with the same LMA administrator who denied me the contact information in 2021. He whispered, 'I saw some workshops today that I would book immediately. Others? Not in a million years'. He critiqued many of the participants for not putting any effort or thought into their teaching, commenting 'this reflects poorly on us all'. I heard similar concerns from other ZLG-associated partners. They were reluctant to let ZLG alumni contact music schools directly, as 'some of them might leave a bad impression' and discourage these institutions from diversifying their hiring practices.

Indeed, this concern for the market value of the certificate seemingly explains their uneven treatment of alumni. While they have been credentialing 15-20 musicians per year since 2019, not all of the participants mastered the skills and teaching philosophy that the LMA promotes in the course. While this is true of any credentialing programme (Oxford DPhils included), this problem is acutely felt by those programmes trying to establish their legitimacy externally. Because the ZLG is still relatively new and unaccredited, they face significant hurdles in trying to establish themselves as a qualification of value. Distancing themselves from graduates who do not reflect the LMA's pedagogic philosophy constitutes one strategy to increase their symbolic capital.

Another approach to capturing symbolic capital is to recruit ZLG participants who *do* reflect well on the programme. One example from the 2022-23 cohort is Emre*. Not only was Emre a forerunner in integrating bağlama into Germany's music curriculum with more than 30 years of

teaching experience, he also taught two of the ZLG teaching staff themselves how to play the instrument. For most areas of the curriculum, Emre could have taught the modules himself. Indeed, in one of Emre's observed teaching demonstrations, an LMA staff member actually took notes on Emre's methods, instead of the other way around. I was baffled by his commitment to attending the course every week as well as the weekend retreats.

I later heard that the LMA explicitly invited him to enrol in the programme, even offering to lower the requirements for him to obtain the certificate. Given his previous success as a music educator and decades of teaching in Germany, I surmised that from the LMA's perspective, counting Emre as a ZLG alumnus would elevate the profile of the certificate. In this way, symbolic capital could be reverse-engineered for the course by recruiting prominent participants. When I asked Emre about this, he claimed to also derive benefits from the certificate: 'I'm getting old. I need the papers. I want to get a comfortable music school job before I retire'. And there is some evidence that he succeeded in this. At the end of 2023 Emre was awarded a permanent job at a music school in Essen. This constituted a win for both parties – Emre found a position that gave him the security he wanted, and the LMA could boast a salaried music school employee among their graduates.

Emre's case sheds light onto the role of higher education programmes in cultivating value. In comparison with accredited, well-established institutions such as Germany's music conservatories, the LMA must pursue different avenues to generate recognition for their credentials. Nevertheless, such strategies seemingly displace the location of the certificate's value. Instead of arising from the content of the curriculum or the strong social ties forged through the course, value is affirmed through the pre-existing public recognition generated through circulation among weak ties. As

Shannon Garland wrote about Fora de Eixo (2022), such processes shift the locus of value from labour to representation. In this way the value of the certificate is constructed not only through the collective labour exerted in the course, but how the products of this labour circulate thereafter.

These efforts to establish ZLG alumni as members of the professional world music scene have been rendered visible through the open-air concert series Global Flash. The first concert was held at Ebertplatz in Cologne in the summer of 2022 and has been repeated annually since then. In the first year, Ruddi received state funding from the city's cultural office and the LMR in order to increase the visibility of that year's ZLG graduates. From the musicians' perspective, this concert represented the chance to present themselves on stage in association with Ruddi, an important figure in the scene. Others mentioned the personal significance of performing their music alongside all these other musicians on a public stage in Cologne.

Ruddi and the LMA staff approached the value of this concert with the broader field in mind. On the one hand, he saw the potential for such large events to establish connections between musicians and develop a cohesive social identity within the scene. To this end, he invited alumni from the programme and other key actors in the world music scene to perform as well. On the other hand, however, Global Flash is just as much about representing the scene to external actors. As Ruddi wrote in one funding application, it should not only 'introduce the ZLG alumni as teachers and musicians' to the general public but also to event organisers, educators, and from 2023, university members. During my first and third semesters teaching at the University of Cologne, students in my master's seminar on musical diversity in NRW helped put on the annual Global Flash event at the Odonien, a beloved open-air concert space in Cologne. They performed much of the labour to

enable the event to transpire, including marketing and promotion, coordinating the acts, setting up the stage, taking videos and photos (including some of those in this dissertation), performing as master of ceremonies, and making music alongside ZLG participants and alumni.[85]

In 2023 and 2024, Global Flash – haphazardly planned with no budget – produced very little aesthetic or economic value. At some point in each concert, 20 musicians were on the stage who had never made music together in that constellation. There were no rehearsals beforehand, just a nebulous setlist with more annotations and corrections on the page than typed text. Loud and easily-amplified instruments overpowered the acoustic ones. As one performer told me later, 'I had no idea what was going on. I just stood there and mouthed some words'. Sheyda, who performed at the inaugural Global Flash concert in 2022, was frustrated by the lack of musical engagement from the other performers: 'Nobody was willing to play my music. I was completely drowned out'. These efforts were certainly not financially compensated, as the musicians shared the earnings from a donation hat that was passed around the audience. Divided between the 20+ performers and my six students, most could barely cover the subway fare to the venue.

The true value of the event came from the symbolic capital it provided. For musicians, it marked the end of the ZLG and, for some, status as working professionals. For the scene more broadly, the event asserted world music's presence in Cologne and demonstrated the ZLG's legitimacy as a marker for talented, diverse musicians. The photographs and videos from this event underwrite this message, illustrating not only a world music scene harmoniously brought together on stage,

[85] This experience prompted a discussion with students about the value of unpaid labour in university work experiences. As previously noted in section 4.4.3, such work is necessary to prop up this music scene, but often goes uncompensated. At the same time, many of them need such experiences in order to get their first paid jobs after graduation. While this discussion reached an ambivalent end without a solution to the conundrum, it prompted me to recognise my own role in upholding such labour practices in university settings.

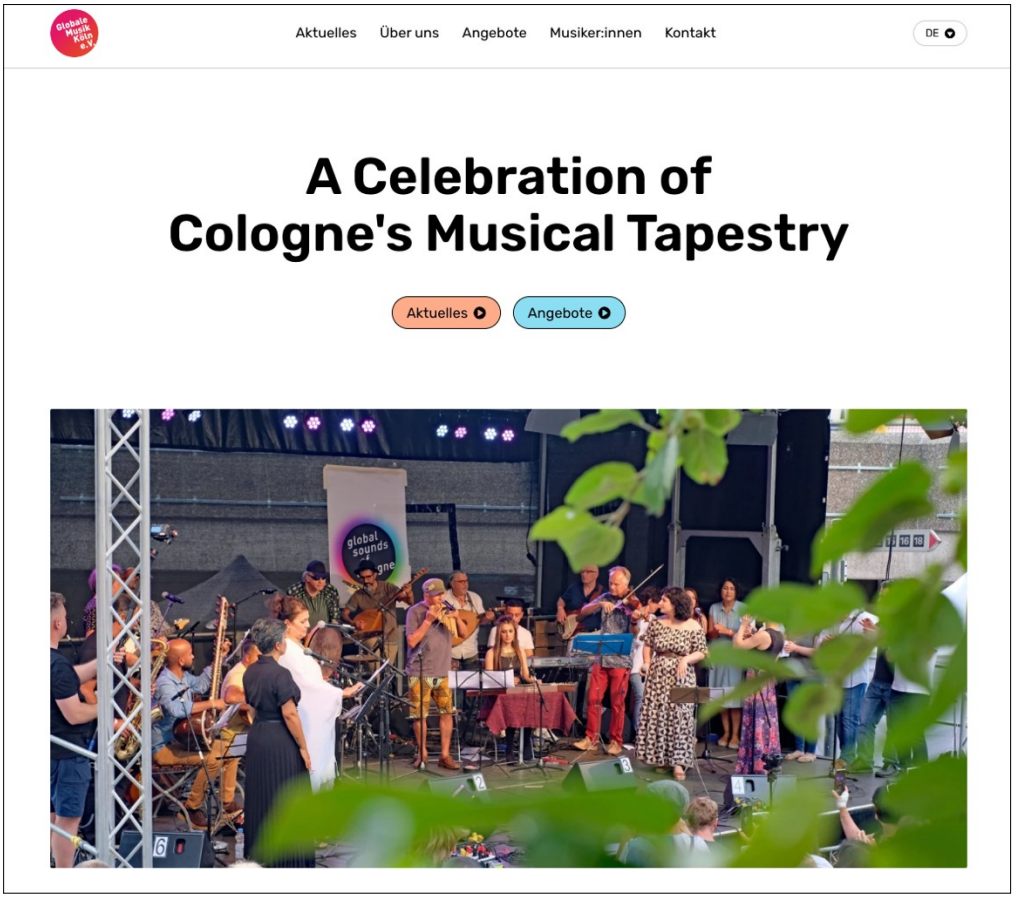


Figure 14: Screenshot of the Globale Musik Köln e.V. homepage featuring a photograph of the 2022 Global Flash concert



Figure 15: Global Flash 2023 at the Odonien, Cologne (photo by Mara von Ungern-Sternberg)

but also Ruddi's (and to a certain extent my own) capacity to organise such an event (Figure 14 and Figure 15, p. 279). This symbolic value has been appropriated not only for the benefit of the ZLG and its alumni, but also for the world music scene more broadly. This value was channelled primarily by Ruddi in his dual roles as music educator and chairman of GMK. Through his work with the ZLG, he built his own authority to represent the world music scene within its broader cultural-political field in the city. This is important in the Cologne musical landscape, as each genre in the freelance music scene has its own advocacy group.[86] Through these events, Ruddi proves his and the GMK's capacity to represent the interests of these musicians.

Such a figure is important in any network trying to build its symbolic and social capital. As Bourdieu wrote, 'Every group has its more or less institutionalized forms of delegation which enable it to concentrate the totality of the social capital... in the hands of a single agent or a small group of agents' to 'represent the group, to speak and act in its name' (1986, p. 250). The world music scene lacks such institutions to represent the interests of this scene. Previous attempts either failed to establish themselves within the broader music landscape or to secure a legitimate mandate from the musicians they sought to represent. Through his efforts, Ruddi has begun to establish himself, the ZLG, and GMK as institutions that can speak on behalf of the scene. Ruddi himself acknowledged that the ZLG has helped him to more effectively advocate for these interests in his political work. Through the course he has gotten to know over 100 musicians scattered throughout NRW and other regions of Germany. This has established him as a central node or a 'human hub' in this network (Kiwan & Meinhof, 2011). Therefore the ZLG has played a central

[86] Within the freelance music scene, this cultural and political work transpires mostly via IFM. This umbrella organisation is subdivided into six streams, one of which is global music, represented by GMK and Plattform Aktuelle Musikkulturen.

role in not only expanding the social capital in the scene, but also granting more legitimacy to those who "act in its name".

Returning to the Global Flash concert, most of the participants agreed that the event was socially rewarding. The professional musicians enjoyed meeting new people and expanding their networks. My students from the University of Cologne were touched by the musicians' stories and performing skills, as well as their warmth and generosity. But some were unhappy with the fact that they gave up their Friday night to play a disorganised gig for next to no money. This performance did not improve their own reputation, nor was it aesthetically validating. Instead, it seems like the value of such events derived from its ability to increase the circulating power of the ZLG and GMK, primarily channelled through Ruddi. This concert underscores Garland's argument that value within music scenes is often generated through circulation and social recognition rather than the "sounds themselves". Similarly to Fora de Eixo's experimentation with Card, the primary value was symbolic and accrued to the organisers as representatives of the scene.

Overall, while the event strove to serve the interests of the world music scene as a whole, such professionalisation strategies do little to bring forward the careers of the individual musicians, as the following section will unpack in more detail.

5.6 The value of qualification recognition – or the fetishisation of the ZLG certificate

In this chapter conclusion, I bring together the preceding readings of the ZLG. I first framed the ZLG as a practical solution to a common problem in this scene: a dearth of certification programmes for world music within a qualification-based economy. Section 5.2 outlined how it

aims to address this problem within music education through a two-way integration mechanism enacting the LMA's ideal version of lived diversity. Participants learn the requisite (trans)cultural capital to work within public music schools, and the LMA works to open up these institutions to more diverse hiring practices. I complicated this reading in section 5.3 by outlining the ways in which the programme resembled more of an assimilation programme. The top-down imposition of intercultural values, implicit hierarchies between staff and participants, strategies of self-exoticisation, and discreditation of non-Western methodologies pointed to a much more uni-directional flow of knowledge. However, participants did not always accept these lessons and found alternative means of deriving meaning from this course to suit their own agendas as performers. Section 5.4 detailed participants' motivations for enrolling in the certificate through the lens of social capital and multicultural recognition. Finally, section 5.5 looked at how ZLG staff used the certificate to support world music's aim of professionalisation. I argue that the skills and strategies cultivated during the programme, as well as how ZLG staff control the circulation of the certificate, is intended to build world music's claims as a profession within Germany's musical landscape. Analysing the ZLG through these different frames teased out the value and values being generated and contested through the programme.

In the remainder of this chapter, I argue that the pursuit of legitimacy and conversion value of the certificate has contributed to its commodification and ultimately, fetishisation. Much like Marx's commodity, which obscures the social labour of its production, the ZLG certificate comes to be seen as possessing value in itself, a magical token that confers legitimacy, thereby masking the social, political, and pedagogical negotiations that determine its worth. Graeber takes up this symbolic analysis in his own theories of value, noting that tokens of value not only represent the

labour that produced it, but in turn become a source of further labour (2013). Money exemplifies this dualism as it simultaneously symbolises past labour and becomes the means to enable future labour (Marx, 1890/1976). The same can be said for the ZLG certificate as a token of value, which both represents the work done to obtain the qualification and can be converted to create further opportunities.

Commodification is perhaps a necessary evil in today's music industry, in particular if a musician wants to scale up their production (see section 3.3). Shannon Garland notes this phenomenon in her study of Brazil's indie music scene in which musicians struggle to 'convert their own valorization of their acts of music making, which includes the "sounds themselves"... into a medium of exchange' (2022, p. 1). Such a medium should both represent the symbolic value of the music, but also allow for its reproduction. In short, musicians grapple with the seeming necessity of commodification of these aesthetic and social products in order to enable them to continue creating. While Garland explored how a novel currency led to commodification, in the German world music scene, I see it happening through qualifications. As a newly-established certificate in this field, the ZLG lays bare how these processes emerge.

The goal of establishing a world music profession seemingly necessitated a degree of commodification. To compete with musicians in other genres who rely on infrastructures of degrees, competitions, prizes, and state-funded ensembles to prove their professional status, the world music scene needs its own institution to regulate belonging and cultivate habitus. Specifically, these institutions have the power to transform non-formal learning and diverse practices into a semi-formal credential. This process of abstraction and standardisation makes these

skills and strategies legible outside of the scene and facilitates comparison and exchange. The logic of the certificate mirrors this approach. With this qualification, musicians could justify their belonging in higher salary brackets and apply for permanent positions, thus converting their skills into the means of materially reproducing themselves (Garland, 2022). This required a certain commodification of their socially and aesthetically embedded skills.

Whereas commodification usually hides this rich context of production, in this instance the ZLG actually highlighted previously invisible labour in the world music scene. The certificate has come to represent not just the work and knowledge invested in the course itself, but all the efforts made even before the course began. This includes not only the decades invested in learning an instrument and specific genre of music, but for many participants also the journey to Germany and the efforts made to establish themselves in this new context: learning the language and culture, managing the bureaucracy, and navigating the structures which enable a career in the arts. The selection and qualification process of the ZLG signals not only an understanding of German music pedagogy, but also denotes a musician of aesthetic and social value to the world music scene.

In various jury processes, I witnessed how the ZLG certificate came to stand in as a proxy for these broader values. Indeed, I was initially sceptical that the certificate would hold any value outside the sphere of intercultural music education. But behind the closed doors of funding allocation for state-sponsored concerts and projects, I saw how the ZLG came to index other values of worth to the scene. In the most explicit case, one funding round gave ZLG certificate holders preferential treatment over those without it. But it also emerged in more subtle ways in other programmes with comments such as, ‘Well they are a graduate of the ZLG, so they must know at least a little bit how

to work interculturally', or 'If they were in the ZLG, then they must know this person, so that will be fine'. I now sit on the jury which had previously rejected Mardan for his lack of a certificate. During the 2024 funding process in which I took part, such comments emerged again. Those with the ZLG certificate were singled out and (barring any disqualifying mistakes in the application) pushed through to the final round. I found this puzzling. Why was a part-time, unaccredited music pedagogy certificate a deciding factor in a purely performance-oriented programme?

These examples show the ambivalent nature of commodifying musical practice. On the one hand, the certificate does not adequately capture these musicians' diverse artistic practices, nor the labour that went into honing their craft. But on the other hand, it enables this value to be represented in a form that can be recognised in the German labour market. Furthermore, it became a way through which racialised musicians could seek public recognition for their creative labour. Such value was conferred even upon admission, overshadowing the value supposedly generated in the rest of the programme. This commodification allows such values to attain visibility and commensurability where it did not exist before.

Yet with commodification comes the risk of fetishisation. As outlined above, acceptance into the ZLG has functioned as a subjective proxy for musicianship in some funding juries. When participation alone signals value, the certificate's role as a measure of learning is undermined. The labour undertaken during the course becomes secondary; what matters is having been selected at all. This reflects a Saussurean dynamic of relational meaning: musicians derive value not from the certificate's content, but from its ability to distinguish them from others who lack it. The ZLG's value does not arise from what transpired in the programme, but rather by the contexts in which it

is found thereafter. The LMA itself has contributed to this process, as seen in the case of Emre. Here, the certificate did not add value through training or skill acquisition, but instead accrued meaning from Emre's prior prominence as an educator. The boost to the course's symbolic value came not from the course itself, but from its association with someone already considered successful.

But should the ZLG's fetishisation necessarily be viewed in a critical light? It seems as if the ZLG staff have used this boost in symbolic capital to try and strengthen the position of racialised musicians within a deeply unequal qualification market. Given that the musicians themselves fetishised the degree (i.e. "just here for the papers"), one might ask if fetishisation in this case might just represent another strategy available to advance their careers.

However, fetishisation processes often conceal individual values in the pursuit of broader political goals. Concretely, the value of the social labour that enabled this certificate to exist has been replaced by the symbolic value of the qualification. This displacement causes issues when it masks the uneven hierarchies and hidden curricula at play, as outlined in 5.3. If actors within the world music scene view the certificate as something of innate value, they do not see the ZLG as a product of situated political and social decisions made by staff and participants. As such, the certificate naturalises a particular kind of legitimacy while rendering invisible the exclusions on which it depends.

Furthermore, the hidden curriculum of the course – the expectations around self-exoticisation, adaptability to institutional norms, and alignment with the German conceptions of diversity and interculturalism – contributes to this dynamic. Participants must not only demonstrate musical

ability, but also narrate their work in terms that resonate with funders and bureaucracies. This form of social labour is rarely acknowledged in the formal narrative of what the certificate represents. Instead, the ZLG presents itself as a neutral marker of competence, rather than the outcome of a deeply situated and selective process. In this way, the certificate's apparent value displaces the very social, political, and relational work that produces it.

According to the LMA, the ZLG only represents a first step towards the overarching goal for the world music scene in generations to come. The underlying logic of the programme was explained to me by one of the course administrators: more diverse music teachers in schools and private lessons means kids will be exposed to world music from a young age, thus shaping their musical tastes. When they grow up and become cultural consumers, they will increase the demand for world music performances and thus create a market for world music in Germany. Once this economic legitimacy is established, they cannot be ignored by the political establishment – or so was the logic of the ZLG's founders. Indeed this strategy aligns broadly with how professionalisation has been theorised; in addition to holding specialist knowledge and regulating membership, a profession must provide services valued by society (Volti, 2011). If musicians claim specialist knowledge over music genres that do not attract audiences, they stand little chance of establishing a profession.

With such processes in mind, the LMA's lofty goal of professionalisation may have liberatory potential, but their implementation so far has only reinforced the subordinate role of "diverse" musicians within current structures. In order to get a foot in the door, the ZLG teaches musicians how to use their cultural background to get ahead. But, as I have seen with a handful of these

musicians, it sometimes leads down the path of ethnicised music-making in precarious circumstances (see also section 3.2).

Furthermore, one could argue that this process of fetishisation has only generated a qualification with a simulacrum of value. Poor post-graduation outcomes support this reading; according to one of the course administrators, only two of the 100+ ZLG alumni have secured permanent positions in state-run music schools to date. With these sobering statistics, the ZLG has failed to deliver its primary intended outcome: enabling certificate-holders to secure permanent, well-paid positions.

In light of this fact, the seeming success of the ZLG in other realms is also called into question. Indeed, most interlocutors who I spoke to have only successfully converted the value of the certificate into short-term project funding. There is no evidence yet that it has reduced the overall precarity of the scene through the process of professional recognition. Efforts by the LMA staff to increase the value of the certificate have, at best, only managed to reapportion existing resources in the scene to ZLG alumni. I have not seen any indicators that the ZLG's political and representational work has increased the amount of money circulating overall.

The ZLG staff will acknowledge the limits of this course – both as an ersatz-qualification for those excluded by German higher education and as a tool to assert world music's professional status. At least one staff member recognised the uncomfortable reality of pushing this self-exoticisation approach onto musicians, especially those who recently arrived: 'I ask myself sometimes, aren't we just as culpable in pushing this "othering" of musicians, even if we think we're helping them? We are teaching them to be representatives of their cultures, nothing more'. He admitted that their goal to place alumni in music schools was unrealistic given the current structural conditions: 'In

order to do that, we would have to change the music school system. And that's just not something we can accomplish'. He also conceded that they were facing some pressure from the state ministry who funds them to deliver results. Given all these limitations and failings, he still sees value in connecting musicians and creating a broader network. Another staff member shared their view, 'If we don't do it, who will? Doing something is better than doing nothing'.

Sheyda had the same opinion after finishing the ZLG in 2022. Even though the certificate took significant time and effort, she thought that it would be advantageous to have the piece of paper in the long run. Recently, however, her opinion has changed. Apparently when applying for citizenship, she submitted her ZLG certificate as evidence of her integration into the German education system. 'But they told me that the certificate doesn't count as a proper *Ausbildung* [qualification] because it was less than twelve months!', she exclaimed. 'Why couldn't [the LMA] just make it three months longer? What's the point if it doesn't even count as a real certificate?' A real certificate, indeed.



Figure 16: Inanna: Kurdish Women Musicians in Germany *concert at the University of Cologne (October 2024, photo by Sara Ghorbani)*

Chapter 6: Co-producing value in ethnographic research

Feedback screeched from the monitor, paralysing the 400 listeners in the University of Cologne auditorium. The lively *Stimmung* [atmosphere] in the air came to a halt as people covered their ears, cowered in their seats and contorted their faces in pain. The sound engineer located and eliminated the problem after three seconds of auditory onslaught, but the damage had already been done. While the audience quickly recovered, clapping and cheering in support of the performers on stage, Sheyda could only muster a forced smile that did not quite reach her eyes and continued to squint threateningly at the sound booth. This moment of friction faded as quickly as it came, but the spark ignited a tinderbox of tensions that had built up over the days and weeks prior.

Feedback – lauded in professional development and vilified by musicians – encapsulates the promises and pitfalls of dialogue. Ideally feedback delivers constructive critique, provoking exchange and productive cooperation. But feedback can also indicate a dialogue gone awry, as it did in our concert. Such screeching or humming sounds occur when amplified sounds are projected back into the microphone. This creates an auditory loop where the microphone picks up its own output signal, repeating itself without any new input and without engaging in constructive dialogue. This can reach a fever pitch that forces immediate action.

The feedback in our concert *Inanna: Kurdish Women Musicians in Germany* similarly demanded new input and constructive exchange – both in that moment and what followed. It became a focal point in which our interlocutors located interpersonal and intercultural frictions. The musicians' feedback in conversations that followed was as challenging and painful to hear at times as the

technical feedback in the concert. As with our sound design, it showed me the ways in which the project attempted to amplify interlocutors' experiences equally throughout the research process. These moments of feedback proved important for an ethical research approach that sought to shed light on the realities of co-production in knowledge creation.

This project design was informed by the history of collaborative methodologies in anthropology. While some claim that co-production has always been a cornerstone of anthropological work (Boyer & Marcus, 2021; Lassiter, 2005a), more recent theoretical directions draw on feminist and activist methodologies to manifest the decolonial, liberatory potential of ethnography (Bejarano et al., 2019; Davis & Craven, 2022; Reiter & Oslender, 2015). Calls for co-production emphasise collaboration all the way down – from the development of research questions to producing final outputs. Doing so approaches 'ethnographic subjects as the source of theory rather than merely the objects on which theory acts' (Bejarano et al., 2019, p. 11). These processes force ethnographers to confront ethical issues related to reciprocity, representation, power imbalances, and consent (among others). While these topics arise in many texts about collaboration (Lassiter, 2005b), few detail exactly how these processes unfold, especially with marginalised populations experiencing intersectional precarity. I drew inspiration from feminist ethnography (Abu-Lughod, 1993; Behar, 1993; Stacey, 1988), border thinking (Mignolo, 2000), and Kurdish gender studies (Açık et al., 2023) to navigate the challenges of conducting anthropology in the academy as equals. As this chapter explores, Sheyda and our interlocutors came to the project with their own theoretical lens that enriched and complicated anthropological methods on paper.

We began by developing research questions that encapsulated our mutual interests: (1) How do the lives and careers of Kurdish women musicians in Germany look? (2) How do these musicians address their audiences? (3) How does the scene for Kurdish music in Germany function? To answer these questions we interviewed 10 musicians who represented different Kurdish cultures and pathways. They stem from across the historical Kurdish territory (today spanning five countries: Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Armenia) and speak all the major Kurdish languages (Kurmancî, Zaza, Soranî, and Goran). They profess different religions, including Islam, Yazidism, and Alevism, and perform many musical traditions. They came to Germany at different life stages as well as in different geopolitical climates.

Sheyda and I conducted these interviews together drawing on our combined language competencies (German, Kurmancî, Soranî, Persian, Levantine Arabic, and English) and jointly analysed them. This information was put in dialogue with existing academic and grey literature that touched on Kurdish cultural production, gender studies, and diaspora politics compiled by research assistant Flora Lamberty, who also supported us with interviews. In our combined analysis, we recognised common themes and remarkable differences among the interviewees in terms of their upbringing, education, migration paths, and ways of navigating the Kurdish music scene in the diaspora as a woman. Of particular interest was how they moved within multiple identities and related to larger cultural formations.

Sheyda complemented these interviews with her own memoirs that she wrote specifically for this project. She focused on four episodes in her life: her imprisonment in Iran, journey to Europe via the dangerous Mediterranean route, encounters with the asylum system in Germany, and

production of a music video with Kurdish militants in the Qandil mountains. Through this writing process, she narrativised important moments in her life that she wanted to present to audiences both in Europe and Iran.

We brought all of this research together in our 'Song- and Storybook' (Campion & Ghavami, 2024a). The 96-page book juxtaposes songs from our contributors, excerpts from Sheyda's biography, and our research findings presented for a public audience. The companion website offers a PDF version of the book, audio recordings of the songs and lyrics, and sheet music transcriptions in editable format for download.[87] We initially printed 350 copies of the book with a grant from the LMR. 200 copies were kept by the LMR to distribute to their network of amateur choirs. Sheyda and I retained 150 copies to distribute to interested readers. This support from the LMR made the book production possible but also shaped the audience to which we addressed our work. Knowing that singers across NRW would receive copies of the book pushed us to focus on producing a German text with Western sheet music transcription of the songs. I unpack the consequences of this decision in section 6.3.1.

We launched our song- and storybook with a concert in October 2024 in which eight of our interlocutors performed alongside four additional instrumentalists (see Figure 17 and Figure 18 on p. 296). Between the pieces (most of which were drawn from the book), Sheyda and I presented excerpts from the text. The concert was financed primarily by Collegium Musicum, which organises concerts held at the University of Cologne, and the IFM (with funding from the City of Cologne's Cultural Office), with additional support from the LMR.

[87] See www.musikwelten-nrw.de/kmid

While we planned the concert as a festive conclusion to our year-long research project, in the end, the concert marked a whole new phase in the research process. Putting on the event itself provided us with some of our most insightful answers to the research questions. We witnessed how these musicians worked professionally in a concert context and how they curated their performance to suit the evening. Through putting on an event about Kurdish women musicians, I experienced first-hand many of the challenges that our interlocutors identified in the interviews.

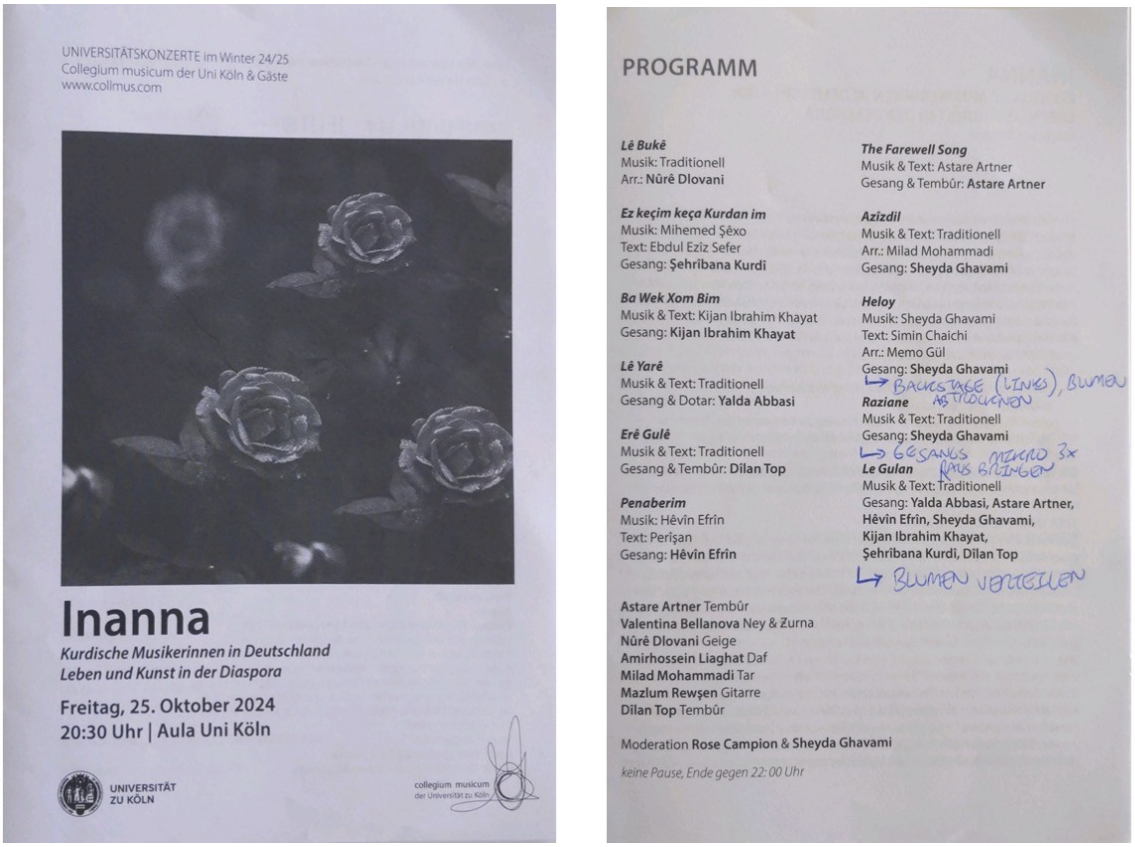
Throughout the act of collaboration, Sheyda and I often confronted the question: for whom are we conducting this research? I use this question to frame and unpack different challenges and possibilities in co-production. In section 6.1 I present excerpts from the song- and storybook in English translation to give an impression of the information, tone, and media we used to address our desired audience. In section 6.2 I explore how Sheyda and I approached this research project. Through this discussion, I unpack issues in breaking down the subject-object divide in ethnographic research. In section 6.3 I discuss the challenges of representation and reciprocity that persist in a co-produced project when working with interlocutors. In section 6.4 I ask to what degree those who consume research contribute to knowledge-production by engaging with "messy", open-ended outputs – sometimes for their own political ends. Section 6.5 ties all of these threads together through the lens of value.

6.1 Excerpts from *Kurdish Women Musicians in Germany: A Song- and Storybook*

This section reproduces excerpts translated into English from the book I created with Sheyda in summer 2024. I have included samples from each of the three sections: informational text



Figure 17: Inanna: Kurdish Women Musicians in Germany concert (October 2024). L-R: Valentina Bellanova, Sheyda Ghavami, Milad Mohammadi (photo by Sara Ghorbani)



UNIVERSITÄTSKONZERTE im Winter 24/25
Collegium musicum der Uni Köln & Gäste
www.collmus.com

Inanna

Kurdische Musikerinnen in Deutschland
Leben und Kunst in der Diaspora

Freitag, 25. Oktober 2024
20:30 Uhr | Aula Uni Köln

UNIVERSITÄT ZU KÖLN

collegium musicum der Universität zu Köln

PROGRAMM

Lê Bukê
Musik: Traditionell
Arr.: **Nûrê Dlovani**

Ez keçim keça Kurdan im
Musik: Mihemed Şêxo
Text: Ebdul Eziz Sefer
Gesang: **Şehribana Kurdi**

Ba Wek Xom Bim
Musik & Text: Kijan Ibrahim Khayat
Gesang: **Kijan Ibrahim Khayat**

Lê Yarê
Musik & Text: Traditionell
Gesang & Dotar: **Yalda Abbasi**

Erê Gulê
Musik & Text: Traditionell
Gesang & Tembûr: **Dilan Top**

Penaberim
Musik: Hêvîn Efrîn
Text: Perîşan
Gesang: **Hêvîn Efrîn**

The Farewell Song
Musik & Text: Astare Artner
Gesang & Tembûr: **Astare Artner**

Azizdil
Musik & Text: Traditionell
Arr.: Milad Mohammadi
Gesang: **Sheyda Ghavami**

Heloy
Musik: Sheyda Ghavami
Text: Simin Chaichi
Arr.: Memo Gül
Gesang: **Sheyda Ghavami**
↳ BACKSTAGE (LINKS), BLUMEN AUSTEILEN

Raziane
Musik & Text: Traditionell
Gesang: **Sheyda Ghavami**
↳ GESANGS MIKRO 3x RAUS BRINGEN

Le Gulan
Musik & Text: Traditionell
Gesang: **Yalda Abbasi, Astare Artner, Hêvîn Efrîn, Sheyda Ghavami, Kijan Ibrahim Khayat, Şehribana Kurdi, Dilan Top**
↳ BLUMEN VERTEILEN

Astare Artner Tembûr
Valentina Bellanova Ney & Zurna
Nûrê Dlovani Geige
Amirhossein Liaghat Daf
Milad Mohammadi Tar
Mazlum Rewşen Gitarre
Dilan Top Tembûr

Moderation **Rose Campion** & **Sheyda Ghavami**

keine Pause, Ende gegen 22:00 Uhr

Figure 18: Author's programme from the concert Inanna: Kurdish Women Musicians in Germany (including planning annotations)



Figure 19: Front cover of the "Song- and Storybook"

presenting findings from the project, passages from Sheyda's memoirs, and the sheet music to three songs. Sheyda has given her permission for me to share the texts that she wrote (section 6.1.2), as well as include the insights we generated together in this dissertation. Unless otherwise noted, the texts were written and prepared by me, and we retain the rights to publication.

6.1.1 presents the third and final informational text in the book about being a Kurdish woman musician (2024, p. 68-75). This section builds on previous texts in the book titled 'Who are the Kurds?' and 'Building a musical career'. The book text was written for German-speaking populations who have little pre-existing knowledge about this culture and people. Most of the protagonists have been previously introduced in the book, and some of their experiences are presented elsewhere in this dissertation. I have not made any further edits to the original text here other than translating it into English.

6.1.1 What does it mean to be a Kurdish woman musician?

'I am first and foremost a human being. I am a woman who makes music' – Astare Artner.

Is identity where you are from or where you feel at home? Is it the music you make or the passport you carry? What does it mean to be Kurdish? Is there only one way to be Kurdish? Our musicians give us some answers to these questions.

How do these women describe their cultural identity?

'Where are you from?' – this is a simple question not so easily answered. These women embody multiple identities and ways of being. While this can weigh them down, it also means that they can work interculturally, bringing together people from many different backgrounds.

Dîlan Top and Astare both talked about navigating their own identities as Alevis, Kurds, Turks and Europeans. On the one hand, none of these identities fully represents how they see themselves. This can be a source of confusion and pain, as Dîlan explained:

> I think that's a very big challenge for people who live between two cultures and especially those who have a forbidden culture like the Kurds. Because you're primarily concerned with identity... There are so many questions that you ask yourself until you come to this self-realisation: What do I actually want to do with my life?

Astare asks herself similar questions, 'Am I Kurdish? Am I Alevi? Am I Viennese? What am I actually?' At the same time, she notes that these multifaceted cultural and linguistic identities broaden her creative horizons. With her different perspectives she can collaborate with more artists.

How do these women describe their art?

Some specialise in Kurdish music, like Sheyda and Dîlan. Astare, on the other hand, positions herself more as a "world musician". Still others work across different genres. Negar Bouban considers herself a Kurd working in Persian music. The same applies to Nure Dlovani in Western art music. In short, Kurds are found in every genre.

Nevertheless, their cultural identity shapes how these women navigate Germany's music scene. Many work as mediators between different cultures and genres. This comes naturally to many, as Kurds perform cultural translation in their daily lives. On one level they mediate between Kurds and other groups, such as Germans, Turks, Arabs, and Persians. But they also work interculturally with other Kurds, connecting different linguistic, religious, and cultural groups. This second kind of intercultural work is just as important as the first: many of our women found it challenging to connect Kurdish culture across the national borders that separate Kurdish territories.

Bearer of culture versus innovative artists?

Everyone agreed that they wanted to spread knowledge about Kurdish culture through their music. But this can be a difficult burden to carry. These women are simultaneously independent artists as well as bearers of an endangered culture. They all have creative visions and dreams for themselves, but they are also charged with passing down Kurdish traditions to the next generation. These two tasks can come into conflict. Some of the women reported receiving critique from within their communities, usually for their novel interpretation of traditional forms. Dîlan shared her experiences with us:

> The people expect musicians to be political and to remain true to tradition. And there's a lot of responsibility that musicians carry along the way... And I think that's also a big challenge, that you have to scrutinise a lot of things and be very critical and take responsibility in this respect.

But it is a challenge to perform traditional Kurdish music here in Europe exactly as it is found in Kurdistan. This is partly because there are different materials available here – the venues, the instruments, the equipment are all different, and it's more costly to put on concerts in Germany. But the biggest difference is the audience.

Who is the audience for Kurdish music in Germany?

Any musician will agree – it's important to find the right audience for your music. After all, it's more rewarding to play for an enthusiastic audience than a bored one. Kijan Ibrahim Xayat noted how in Europe, 'the audience got to know my voice and I saw how positively they reacted to it. That encouraged me to continue working in this field'.

But how does one create an audience for Kurdish music in the diaspora? It is especially tricky to bring together Kurds who speak different languages and are involved in different cultural organisations. Some of these women have focused on multilingual, pan-Kurdish music that draws on different regional genres. Others focus on engaging beyond the Kurdish community. Some have had success winning over audiences, while others are frustrated by the lack of recognition in Europe. Şehrîbana Kurdî expressed her frustration at this:

> Why can't I nowadays create a programme, organise a festival and everything – but with European people? Why can't I participate, offer them our culture, our language, our music and our songs? This would be very nice.

Cologne and NRW more broadly hold a special place in these musicians' hearts. The large Kurdish community here, originating with the guestworker generation, created demand for Kurdish music. In our discussion, Aslîka Qadir reminisced about a particularly good concert in the shadow of the Cologne Cathedral. Astare also sang Cologne's praises:

> There is a lot of dynamism here. There are people who try to keep this world music scene alive, this colourful atmosphere, so that you can gain a foothold and achieve something independently of a [national] community.

What about gender?

We've talked a lot about what it means to be a Kurdish musician, but what about being a Kurdish woman musician? Şehrîbana answered this question at the beginning of our discussion with her:

> Yes, before I say anything else: Kurdish women are truly very strong. Kurdish women – our mothers – say something special: that a woman's life is freedom. Really! Women bring freedom with them.

She sings about this intersectional identity in her song 'Ez Keçim Keça Kurdan Im' or 'I am a Kurdish girl' (p. 309). Women play a central role in upholding Kurdish culture both within and outside the home. Especially in the diaspora or during times of repression, Kurdish culture is not present in the public sphere. Therefore, many Kurds learned their languages and cultures at home, mostly passed on from their mothers – lullabies and work songs play an important role in the Kurdish music repertoire. As we saw in the previous text, most of our interviewees first learned music at home, especially from female family members.

Women play an important role outside of the house as well. Kurdish institutions pride themselves on their long history of striving for gender equality in leadership positions. Women have also bravely taken up arms in the fight against the Islamic State and the Assad Regime in Syria. These female fighters have become a symbol of women's empowerment and resistance. Sheyda sings about this in her song 'Hełoy' (p. 312).

But Kurdish women still face prejudice based on their gender – in Southwest (SW) Asia and Europe alike. Gender-based harassment and violence is a sad reality for many of these women. Many are targeted with hate speech online. Kijan brought this up, saying she is harassed on social media by people who think that women have no place in art and music. Her song 'Ba wek xom bim' – 'Let me be myself' is a response to this criticism. Şehrîbana has faced similar struggles: 'Some people say "How can a woman wearing a headscarf sing??"', to which she answered, 'Why shouldn't she sing!'

In the music scene, women are underrepresented, especially among instrumentalists. Sometimes the music itself is the problem. Many of the texts in the canon of Kurdish music speak from a

masculine perspective and objectify women's bodies. Sheyda endeavours to change this by altering the lyrics to classic songs, such as in 'Ager Baranê' (Campion & Ghavami, 2024, p. 66).

Lastly, many of these women have another profession alongside being a musician: motherhood. This is not always easy to balance, working in the evenings, rehearsing on weekends, and touring internationally. When Aslîka still lived in Armenia, she had to leave her two kids behind when she was sent by the USSR to work as a translator in Afghanistan. Astare often had the feeling of needing to choose between her career and her son's well-being.

But there are also funny stories that arise from juggling the two careers. Once at a concert, Şehrîbana heard her toddler crying in the audience. Şehrîbana's solution? Bring her on stage and keep performing! It was all going well until her daughter pooped in her pants and needed to be cleaned up during the show.

So what makes a Kurdish woman musician?

These artists walk a tightrope, straddling multiple cultures, genres, politics, and dreams for the future of Kurdish culture. They connect people across national and cultural borders. They work transculturally, within and beyond Kurdish identities. They also perform transnationally, across Europe and SW Asia, in Kurdistan as well as in the diaspora.

In summary, Kurdish women musicians occupy many identities: performers and activists, culture-bearers and innovative artists, mothers and sisters in the fight for Kurdish recognition.

6.1.2 Sheyda's memoir

This is the third excerpt from Sheyda's memoirs in the book (2024, p. 82-85). The first two chapters of her memoir concern her upbringing and imprisonment in Iran, as well as her journey to Europe and initial experiences in Germany. Contextualising information in the boxes was written by me.

A Song for the Freedom Fighters

Laying in my bed in Cologne one night, in a moment between sleep and wakefulness, I had a flash of inspiration. It was three o'clock in the morning and a melody kept bouncing around my head. I immediately recorded it. This is how a song was born that I have performed across Europe. But the story of 'Heŀoy' and the feeling behind it are unique.

In 2014, when I was on my way to Europe, the war in Rojava and Syria was very hard and difficult. The city of Kobanî was completely destroyed, many people were killed and the survivors were displaced. These events had a big impact on me. The women who fought in the Rojava war stood tall and were very brave.

Info box: Sheyda references here the Syrian Civil War, which started in 2011 and continues to be an unresolved, multi-sided conflict.[88] Many groups fought back against the Assad regime and the Islamic State, notably the majority-Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces in Rojava. The Kurdish defence forces in Iraq and Syria, about whom Sheyda writes here, were instrumental to

[88] This text was written in September 2024 before the fall of the Assad regime that December.

humanitarian efforts and military campaigns coordinated by Western powers, NATO, and pro-democracy allies. The women fighting in these units have gained international fame.

At this time, the Islamic State committed horrific acts in Kurdish territories. In 2014 it besieged the city of Kobanî in Northern Syria. In Iraq, they perpetrated a genocide of the Yazidis, an ethno-religious group in Kurdistan, committing massacres, rape, and forced conversion.

However, the Turkish government opposes the US-backed Kurdish "People's Protection Units" (YPG) in Northern Syria and Iraq and has launched many military incursions into the region since the start of the war in Syria. Withdrawal of US support under President Trump weakened the YPG considerably.

In 2017, I recorded a song I had written for the women of my country. My friends Simin Chaichi and Mohammad Gol turned my thoughts into a poem and arranged the music.

I had just come to Germany and started my artistic career in Cologne. But getting contacts and work was not as easy as in my own country. A new idea came to me – I wanted to travel to Kurdistan in Iraq and create a project with the young armies who had fought against IS in Rojava. They defended not only their country, but fought for all people endangered by IS. It was a very risky journey, but as a Kurdish woman I wanted to see and experience this place with my own eyes.

I travelled for almost two days to get to Kurdistan and the mountains to meet these fighters. I wasn't sure if it was possible to carry out such a project in a war zone. But when I got there, the welcome I received from these women was so warm that I saw a completely different world with

my own eyes. It was overwhelming to experience this closeness and the beauty of these people fighting and standing up for their people.

When I met these noble and honourable people, I wanted to see and feel their lives, to understand the energy and will with which they fought for freedom. After a few days, I told them about the purpose of my visit. They were all very surprised that someone wanted to capture their lives on camera. Despite the chaos of the war zone, they welcomed me with love and helped me to record the music video.

However, after we finished the video and shared it online, all of my social media pages were taken down in Turkey. I was very upset. I had made a work of art about women whose lives are very different from those of us in the rest of the world. All my efforts and the images of the beautiful women involved in the project were destroyed. I have always tried to create songs that protest the oppression of women who suffer everywhere under nationalist, patriarchal, and capitalist systems.

Sheyda's story encompasses the contemporary Kurdish struggle: they are celebrated for their bravery and liberation of women but must still fight oppression from nationalist regimes.

During the recording of the music video for that song, amidst all the splendour and majesty of the mountains and the devoted fighters, I experienced true human love. I saw it and touched it with all my being. We are all human – the only difference being that each culture has its own language and art. It is the right of every individual to be raised with that culture and language. Unfortunately, places under the control of dictatorial governments must fight for this right.

Until today, most of my songs have been about the pains of women in SW Asia and Kurdish societies. With this song I created something more positive – about collaboration and peace.

6.1.3 Sheet music to 'Ez Keçim Keça Kurdan Im', 'Penaberim', and 'Hełoy'

We made the decision to reproduce our interlocutors' contributions in the form of sheet music. This had many advantages and disadvantages, as will be explored in section 6.3.1. I include a representative sample of songs here to give an impression of the editorial decisions I made, as well as the contextual information provided to readers about each song. For each song we include the original lyrics including transliterations in Latin script where appropriate. We did not translate texts, but rather gave a summary of their meaning. "Performance tips" are provided on topics such as microtonality, vocal and instrumental ornamentation, and the maqam system (See Figure 21, p. 309). The accompanying website brings together audio recordings of the songs and pronunciation of the texts, as well as the sheet music files (Figure 20).

6.2 Dissolving the subject-object divide in co-production

As the final notes of our concert Inanna: Kurdish Women Musicians in Germany sounded, the audience leapt to their feet and I joined the musicians on stage for one final bow. On either side of me stood our interlocutors, beaming (or rather squinting) into the spotlights. Behind me sat the band, composed of performers in the Kurdish music scene who are trying to make it as freelance musicians. In front of me stood an exuberant, kaleidoscopic audience. The majority of attendees considered themselves members of the Kurdish diaspora living in NRW and surrounding regions. I found out later that high-ranking members of prominent Kurdish political parties in Germany

Figure 20: Screenshot of the KMiD companion website: www.musikwelten-nrw.de/kmid



Figure 21: Performing tips and sheet music for 'Ez Keçim Keça Kurdan Im'

17 16

EZ KEÇIM KEÇA KURDAN IM

Musik: Mihemed Şêxo
Text: Ebdul Ezîz Sefer

Aufgeführt von: Şehrîbana Kurdî



2024: Kurdische Musikerinnen in Deutschland: Ein Song- und Storybook

PERFORMANCE- HINWEIS: WAS IST MIKROTONALITÄT?

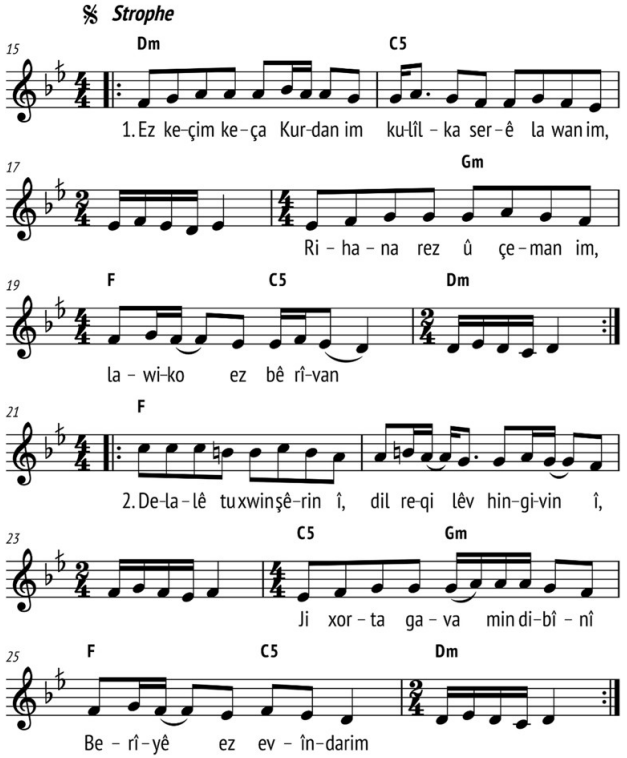
Für diejenigen, die mit dem westlichen Tonsystem aufgewachsen sind, kann andere Musik seltsam oder verstimmt klingen. Das liegt daran, dass verschiedene Kulturen **die Abstände zwischen den Noten** unterschiedlich aufteilen.

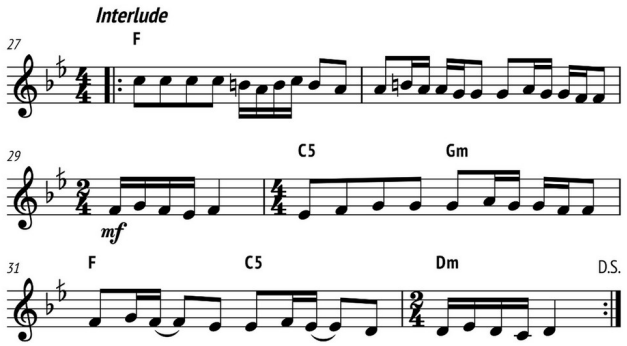
In der Musik Südwestasiens finden sich viele Töne wieder, die auch in der westlichen Musik verwendet werden. Aber es gibt auch **Mikrotöne** – Noten zwischen den weißen und schwarzen Tasten auf dem Klavier. Eine genaue Erklärung der Symbole kann man auf S. 8 finden.

Mikrotonalität ist auf westlichen Instrumenten nicht immer leicht zu spielen. Mit einer Geige, einer Posaune, oder auch mit der Gesangsstimme kann man diese Noten leichter finden, aber auch Klarinetten und Gitarren können den gleichen Effekt erzielen, indem sie die Töne nach unten oder oben biegen.

Die begleitende Website bietet zusätzliches Material, darunter Aufnahmen und Noten zum Download: www.musikwelten-nrw.de/kmid







Kurmancî

3. Ez keçim keça Kurdan im
Kulîlka serê lawan im
Rihana rez û çeman im
Lawiko ez bêrîvan im

4. Lawiko evînî şerm e
Gelek e bi tirs û sehm e
Evînî gunehe li cem me
Lawiko ez bêrîvan im

Interlude

5. Delalê bejin rihanê
Kulîlka heyva gulanê
Tu dizanî xweşiya jiyanê
Bêriyê ez evindar im

6. Ez keçim keça Kurdan im
Kulîlka serê lawan im
Rihana rez û çeman im
Lawiko ez bêrîvan im

Intro

WORUM GEHT ES IM LIED?

Das Lied drückt Stolz über die kurdische Identität aus. Die Sängerin identifiziert sich stark mit ihrer kurdischen Herkunft und ihrer Rolle als kurdische Frau, die sowohl die Herausforderungen als auch die Schönheit des Lebens verkörpert. Kurdisch zu sein wird als etwas dargestellt, das sowohl Freude als auch Leid mit sich bringt.

Figure 22: Performing tips and sheet music for 'Penaberim'

PENABERIM

Musik: Hêvîn Efrîn
Text: Perîşan

Aufgeführt von: Hêvîn Efrîn





Kurmancî

3. Çiqasî pîroze evîn
dildar dinav de dicivîn
ji bîrdibûn xem û xeyal
evîn dermanê her birîn

4.Evîna me qet namire
ne diweste ne diçire
ger em ji hev dûrnekevin
destê min û te digire



Allein schon auf Kurdisch zu singen ist ein politischer Akt.

Hêvîn Efrîn

WORUM GEHT ES IM LIED?

Das Lied „Penaberim" („Ich bin geflüchtet" oder „Ich bin eine Wanderin") drückt den Verlust aus, wenn man gezwungen ist, die Heimat zu verlassen. Die Entfernung bereitet großes Leid. Das Lied endet jedoch positiv mit: „Liebe heilt alle Wunden."

Figure 23: Performing tips and sheet music for 'Heloy'

HELOY

Musik: Sheyda Ghavami
Text: Simin Chaichi

Aufgeführt von: Sheyda Ghavami
Arr.: Memo Gül





Transliteration	**Goran**
1. Heloy Îmralî Mandelay Kurdân	هەڵۆی ئیمرالی ماندلای کوردان
Rûhî Nemrî Tarawgê û zîndan	ڕۆحی نەمری تاراوگە و زیندان
Le aydîata jin û pîaw yekesan	لە ئایدیاتا ژن و پیاو یەکسان
Herdu beranber le mafî însan	هەردوو بەرەنبەر لە مافی ئینسان
Keçî Kurd azaw parezêrî xak Hem dayik û hem jin, şerwanî bêbaq	**کچی کورد ئازاو پارێزەری خاک هەم دایک و هم ژن ، شەڕڤانی بێباک**
2. Le Rojhelat û Qendîlî Başûr	لە ڕۆژهەڵات و قەندیلی باشور
Senger Rojawa û xebetî Bakûr	سەنگەر ڕۆژئاوا و خەبەتی باکور
Hawbîrû hawdil haw ahd û pîman	هاوبیرو هاودڵ هاو عاهد و پیمان
Dêne jêr âlay yekrezî Kurdân	دێنە ژێر ئاڵای یەکرێزی کوردان
Refrain	
3. Ême rahetûin be işqew bjin	ئێمە ڕاهاتووین بە عشقەو بژین
Le rê azadî gyan bext keîn bimrîn	لە ڕێ ئازادی گیان بەخت کەین بمرین
Dij be şerle, beray hetaowîn	دژ بە شەڕلە ، بەرەی هەتاوین
Netewey mêhr û aşîtî û awîn	نەتەوەی مێهرو ، ئاشتی و ئاوین
Refrain	

WORUM GEHT ES IM LIED?

Das Lied ist eine Hommage an die Freiheitskämpferinnen, die gegen den Islamischen Staat Widerstand geleistet haben. Sheyda spricht über die Hintergrundgeschichte dieses Liedes auf S. 82-85.

(including the PKK) were also in attendance. Alongside these people sat representatives from the concert funders; the LMR, IFM, and University of Cologne were all pleased to diversify their generally Western concert offerings and white audience compositions. Other groups with no ties to Kurdish culture or its people (some of whom were my students, friends, and colleagues) had nodded their heads along to the music that night. I turned to my right, and exchanged smiles with Sheyda before initiating another bow, inspecting my shoes and counting to five before rising again.

Looking back on this final moment on stage, I realised that I had cast a glance over all the people and institutions who enabled this research. This concert manifested the "imagined totality" whom Sheyda and I addressed with this project all along: Kurdish women musicians, the diaspora, white German society, and ourselves. In the end, we needed this audience to reflect back the value of our actions in order to understand what we had accomplished (and failed to accomplish) with this project.

This remainder of this chapter contributes to the ongoing conversation about value creation in NRW's world music scene from the perspective of co-produced research. In this section, I explore how Sheyda and I conducted this project together as researchers. Sheyda and I brought a shared interest in collaboration to our working relationship, but we approached it with different motivations. I had read academic texts on the possibility of knowledge production with people beyond the academy and wanted to try it out myself. I was curious to see how it would work in practice. Sheyda wanted to learn more about different Kurdish music cultures and spread this knowledge in Germany.

Beyond these lofty goals of knowledge creation, such a project based at a university presented concrete material benefits for each of us. For me, engaging with co-production garnered attention within academic circles and provided rich ethnographic material for my dissertation. Sheyda sought more immediate and concrete benefits from the beginning. As a freelance musician and person with refugee status in Germany, working for a university project promised both economic and social capital that she could leverage in encounters with state bureaucracy. Her primary goal for 2024 was to gain German citizenship. The urgency of this goal was fuelled by the slide towards anti-migration rhetoric that took centre stage that year. Sheyda and I pursued these questions shortly after the news broke of a mass-deportation 'remigration' plot devised by right-wing political groups (Bensmann et al., 2024). Sheyda felt unsure in her precarious migration status.

We devised a plan to strengthen her citizenship application through employment with the project. Firstly, a steady monthly salary would help bridge the months with fewer concerts and workshops. Our flexible schedule meant that she could arrange her hours around teaching and performing engagements. Secondly, we anticipated that a university contract would strengthen her claims to financial independence. Germany's relatively demanding naturalisation process sets a high bar: applicants need to provide evidence of twelve consecutive months with income exceeding the minimum amount. This requirement does not take into account the fluctuating incomes of freelancers, who often receive lump-sum payments for work performed over the course of a quarter or half a year. We hoped that a contract (even if only for six months), could demonstrate her ability to create employment opportunities for herself and thus bolster her claim to citizenship.

In addition to the potential legal benefits, Sheyda also saw this project as an opportunity to advance her path towards higher education. Despite a full calendar of teaching and performance opportunities, she still felt disadvantaged in the job market without a university degree. Indeed, in Germany's qualification-based economy, educational attainment often determines job eligibility and income grading, even in the unregulated field of music (see Sheyda's experience with Doris on p. 217). With this marker of cultural capital, Sheyda hopes to fully participate in Germany's music industry and be seen as an equal among her peers.

Though we entered the project committed to mutual benefits, it soon became clear that levelling the playing field between us would not transpire quite so easily. As I wrote in a reflection early on in the project, 'since Sheyda is paid from my research budget, I wonder whether she is completely free to criticise the project or whether she feels truly equal'. Here, our roles were less fluid, given that my position at the University of Cologne afforded Sheyda's compensation and project resources.

These forces manifested themselves in our failed attempt to secure Sheyda a researcher contract. The institutional recognition of a university contract would carry more value on a citizenship application than a freelancer contract – or so Sheyda's caseworker told us. But the university human resources office claimed it could not provide a researcher contract to someone without a bachelor's degree. Here manifested a blatant example of gatekeeping in knowledge-creation; only those with qualifications within the system could be recognised as researchers and compensated as such. This inflicted more than just symbolic harm. Engaging in freelance work with the university deprives a worker of social security, retirement, and insurance contributions from the employer. In

the end, all I could provide Sheyda for her citizenship application was an official letter outlining her engagement in the project which was added to her case file. It is unlikely to make a difference in the final decision. Ultimately, our attempt to reduce Sheyda's legal and financial precarity by engaging her in university-based research work failed to reach its full liberatory potential.

This experience at the beginning of our project delivered an important lesson: despite our progressive approach, we still found ourselves embedded within the hierarchies of not only academic knowledge production, but also Germany's migration regime and neoliberal gig economy. We needed to engage more critically with structural power differences between us. This required breaking down the subject-object divide – a key step in decolonising ethnographic research. In action research methodologies, this often means that the *researched* become *researchers*. Such an approach (where populations who are historically the objects of research create knowledge themselves) holds both activist and epistemological promise. Ethnography can function as 'a tool of self-knowledge for the marginalised' which can 'contribute to popular struggles for liberation' (Bejarano et al., 2019, p. 9). Such an approach also leads to better, richer ethnographic data, emerging from the engaged and embodied participation of local collaborators in the research process.

But the subject-object dissolution works in both directions. Researchers must become the objects of knowledge production as well, as Lila Abu-Lughod writes:

> By working with the assumption of difference in sameness, of a self that participates in multiple identifications, and an other that is also partially the self, we might be moving beyond the impasse of the fixed self/other or subject/object divide (1990, pp. 25–26).

Anthropologists Paloma Gay y Blasco and Liria Hernández (2019) utilised this reciprocal approach in their joint ethnography. While Gay y Blasco interviewed Liria about her experience as a Roma woman living in Madrid, Hernández reversed the gaze and interviewed Gay y Blasco about her life and career, including experiences of abuse. This process, reflected Gay y Blasco, put her in the shoes of so many subjects of past ethnographies, baring their lives to others in interviews.

We took a similar approach to dissolving the subject-object divide. In answering the question "for whom are we conducting this research", we confronted the 'multiple identifications' and positionalities we occupied. As the project unfolded, we considered the different roles we took on in the project as 'researchers, migrants, and women' (Nowicka & Ryan, 2015). This first transpired on a practical level in which we compared our respective skills and capital. But it also meant thinking about the kind of people we wanted to become and how we wanted to relate to others, especially as two people at the beginning of their careers in Germany. We thought about this through personal reflections and discussions, which we shared and mutually analysed.

One concrete goal to ensure mutual benefit from the project was to create lasting research outputs that served both of our careers. My path demanded academic articles in English and conference presentations. Sheyda wanted performance formats such as workshops, concerts, and public-facing texts in German and Kurdish. In ethnographic work, discussions surrounding ethics and reciprocity are almost always directed at the interlocutors (Fluehr-Lobban, 2013). Indeed, many researchers would agree that it feels taboo to openly acknowledge the ethical implications of a topic's professional expediency. However, dissembling the potential benefits from this project would not only be disingenuous, but would also ignore what we offered each other: Sheyda

enriched our ethnographic work and analysis through her perspective as an insider, while I offered an outsider perspective and could better address non-Kurdish audiences in the outputs. Here, recognising each other as equal members in the project meant acknowledging what we offered and how we could support each other in reaching our respective goals.

Yet servicing two different career pathways – that of a freelance musician and aspiring German citizen, as well as that of a doctoral student – proved challenging and required more time than we expected. Sheyda spent many hours at the university doing in-depth interview analysis and even travelled to Cork, Ireland with me to present our work at the British Forum for Ethnomusicology conference (Campion & Ghavami, 2024b). Her keen observations and outsider perspective on the conference followed in the tradition of reversing the gaze of anthropological inquiry (Ntarangwi, 2010). In the other direction, I invested time learning about how the freelance music scene works in order to acquire funding and arrange the concert for Sheyda and our interlocutors at the university.

The frictions generated from these mutual forays into each other's worlds provided learning experiences in both directions. In this way, we ethnographically explored beyond just the parameters of the research questions; we enriched our understanding of each other's lifeworlds through slipping into alternative roles and subjectivities. This approach to co-production strove to dissolve the subject-object divide between us as researchers, but the problem of how to represent our interlocutors remained. After all, involving a member of an identity category in the research process does not necessarily solve the ethical implications of representing the lives of others.

6.3 Engaging with interlocutors in co-production

The moment of feedback in our concert prompted reflections from interlocutors in the days and weeks that followed. This technical failure provided a focal point through which musicians framed their experiences in the project. While the interlocutors' dissatisfaction stemmed mostly from practical challenges on the day, for one person these issues encapsulated the failure of the project to faithfully reflect her experience. In a phone call after the concert, she confided in me: 'I had a hard time in this project... I didn't see myself in it, I wasn't emotionally involved... That category "Kurdish woman musician" – that's not me'. This revelation was especially hard to swallow given the project's decolonial commitment to giving individuals space to define themselves and their music. After we hung up, I asked myself, 'How did we get here?'

While our co-productive and arts-based approach seemingly resolved long-standing issues in researching the lives of others, new challenges arose which we had not foreseen. I address two of these points in sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2: representing others in co-production and issues of reciprocity. Continuing with the guiding question, I asked myself yet again, 'For whom are we conducting this research?' The answer in this section is our interlocutors.

6.3.1 Issues in representation

We came to know the ten women involved in this project through semi-structured interviews. We selected our interlocutors based on existing networks and recommendations from those active in the scene. We strove for linguistic and geographic representation (even though this did not create a proportional representation of Kurdish populations in Germany). The spectrum of languages, nationalities, migration pathways, religions, and musical practices allowed us to highlight the



Figure 24: KMiD interlocutors at the Inanna concert. L-R: Valentina Bellanova, Hevin Afrin, Nure Dlovani, Yalda Abbasî, Sheyda Ghavami, Kijan Ibrahim Xayat, Dîlan Top, and Astare Artner.

diversity within this identity marker and simultaneously focus on individual stories. Our relatively open-ended interview format asked these women to share stories that mattered to them and represent their biographical narrative as they wished. Such life story formats contribute to 'discursive resistance', in which marginalised individuals narrativise their own lives (Kılınçoğlu, 2022; Tsioulakis, 2011).

Co-production's decolonial promise does not necessarily solve the challenge of representation for interlocutors. Gay y Blasco and Hernández (2019) openly acknowledge this issue. While the two authors engaged in a reflexive research process together, they nevertheless still wrote about other people in their lives, not all of whom were happy about how they were portrayed. A similar issue has emerged in co-produced work with indigenous people in North America (see Lassiter, 2005b). These works question whether the inclusion of a few "insider" interlocutors leads to fair representations of all community members.

From this perspective, co-production fails to solve the fundamental challenge of anthropology to create generalisable conclusions based on subjective individual experience. This problem becomes especially acute in written output. Multi-author academic publications generally strive to smooth out individual writing styles in the service of a seamless presentation of the arguments. This homogenisation not only enacts symbolic violence against linguistic diversity, but also dulls the creative capacity of language to convey knowledge.

Multivocality offers a way to preserve this subjectivity in research outputs. Feminist anthropologists pioneered the use of multivocality to present the lifeworlds of women through extensive biographical accounts of interlocutors in their own words (Abu-Lughod, 1993; Behar, 1993; Shostak, 1981). Such "speaker-centred" or phenomenological approaches may indeed better represent perspectives of marginalised women (Patai, 1988; D. L. Wolf, 1996). Even before the crisis of representation took hold in anthropology, feminist scholars of colour explored the potential of multivocality to present subjective experience. A key example is *This Bridge Called My Back* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981) in which the contributors' varying tones and registers demonstrate the myriad ways intersubjective experiences can be conveyed. The multivocality of similarly nuanced and experimental works relinquishes the authoritative single-author tone and allows for multiple voices and interpretations to exist side-by-side, even if they conflict (Bejarano et al., 2019; Castañeda, 2023; Gay y Blasco & Hernández, 2019; Hlavka & Mulla, 2021). Nevertheless, this method has been critiqued for promoting sham empowerment that does not actually cede any power over representation. "Giving" voice to women or "letting the subaltern speak" masks unequal power relations in research, as well as imbalanced material benefits (Gorelick, 1991; Spivak, 1988). This issue has become a central topic in Kurdish cultural

production by women (Galip, 2021; Schäfers, 2022) and Kurdish feminist scholarship more broadly (Açık et al., 2023).

In our project, we struggled with these same dilemmas. One the one hand, we sought to create generalisable knowledge about the intersectional experiences of Kurdish women musicians in Germany in order to challenge existing stereotypes. On the other hand, we wanted to preserve the individual voices of our 10 protagonists. In fact, the heterogeneity of their pathways and life stories became our primary finding in the project. While all of these women somehow fit within the category of "Kurdish woman musician", they understood their belonging in different ways. Some, as detailed above, rejected it outright.

These issues in representation arose in both the song- and storybook and the launch concert. The main point of friction with regard to the book emerged through the sheet music transcriptions. Each of our interlocutors submitted one piece of music to include in the book. I worked with four performers and educators (Koray Berat Sarı, Milad Mohammadi, Nure Dlovani, and Negar Bouban) to capture the spirit of the pieces in Western notation. Most of the contributors do not normally work with sheet music, instead learning music by ear. Even those who work with notation questioned the logic of translating pieces this way. For example, Negar and I discussed for some time about how to best convey her chosen piece of music. In 'The Earth and I', Negar recorded an oud improvisation in dialogue with a poem by Nader Naderpour. For the book, she favoured a somewhat complicated transcription of her improvised solo instead of simply reproducing the maqam like a Western scale with instructions on how to improvise (Figure 25, p. 323). She argued that maqamat should not be visually represented as a scale because they perform

Figure 25: Performance notes and sheet music for 'The Earth & I'

THE EARTH & I

Text: Nader Naderpour
Übersetzung: Mandana Arabi

Musik & Aufgeführt von:
Dr. Negar Boubon



PERFORMANCE-HINWEIS:

Wie in der Aufnahme zu hören ist, singt Negar den Text hauptsächlich im freien Metrum und ergänzt ihn mit einem Oud-Solo. In diesem Maqam kommt die Melodie aus dem oberen Teil des Maqam-Bereichs und steigt zur unteren Oktave hinab. Wir haben hier drei Motive von ihrem Solo als Inspiration bereitgestellt. Man kann versuchen, den Text auf verschiedene Weisen zu singen und mit anderen Instrumenten in Dialog zu kommen.

Englisch	**Farsi**
The Earth and I are two fraught with anger	زمین و من دو غضبناکیم
Silent with rage foaming in our mouth	لب از خروش فروبسته
Our pointless hassle did not end but in pain	ز گیرودار عبث رنجور
Our roundabout runs were all wasted in vain.	ز پیچ و تاب عبث خسته
I am calling to you, you speechless night!	تو ای شب ای شب بی فریاد
You are dark just like my nightmares and I	تویی که تیره چو کابوسی
Want you to leave me and never come back	برو که در تو نمی بینم
Until you light a torch to dress your pitch-black.	فروغ شعله فانوسی
I am older than you O night!	من از تو پیرترم ای شب
I am blinder than you O moon!	من از تو کورترم ای ماه
Don't you have a flicker of sun stowed	چرا چراغ نمی گیرید
To show me off this tortuous road?	مرا به پیچ و خم این راه؟



PERFORMANCE-HINWEIS:
IMPROVISATION – VON NEGAR BOUBON

Die Improvisation ist ein zentraler Bestandteil vieler Musiktraditionen in Südwestasien. Oft beginnt eine Instrumentalist:in oder Sänger:in ein Stück mit einem ziemlich langen improvisierten Solo. Dies führt die Zuhörerschaft in die tonale Basis des Stücks ein (die u. a. Maqam oder Dastgah genannt wird). Es ist auch eine Stelle, an der man sein Können zeigt und dem Publikum einen Vorgeschmack auf das geben kann, was noch kommen wird.

WAS IST DIE GRUNDSTRUKTUR EINER IMPROVISATION?

Da die sogenannten Improvisationsteile oft frei rhythmisiert sind, fragen sich viele nach ihrer Struktur. Doch genau wie komponierte Stücke entwickelt sich auch eine Improvisation nach einem Plan mit **einem Anfang, einer Mitte und einem Ende.** Je nachdem, aus welcher musikalischen Tradition des Maqam (oder Dastgah, Raga, etc.) die Musikerin kommt, kann sich die Improvisation um ein bereits bestehendes Thema gruppieren (ähnlich einer Rede, bei der man ohne Skript spricht) oder mit den Grundlagen des Maqam selbst beginnen. Die *Ajnas* sind die Bausteine der Maqams und bestehen aus 3-4 Tönen. Sie bestimmen mit ihren charakteristischen Intervallen die Stimmung des Maqams. Sie können auch auf bestimmte Weise kombiniert werden, um eine erkennbare Melodieform zu schaffen. Diese Motive werden auch in der Improvisation verwendet.

Wenn man noch wenig Erfahrung mit Improvisation hat, kann man folgendes ausprobieren: Zuerst spielt man mit den Tönen der unteren Ajnas, normalerweise vom tiefsten Ton bis zur Dominante oder Subdominante. Im zweiten Teil können die oberen Ajnas des Maqam eingeführt werden, um schließlich den höchsten Bereich, z. B. die Oktave, zu erreichen. Das Hinzufügen einiger Töne außerhalb des Maqams erhöht die Dramatik – wohin geht es als nächstes? Zum Schluss kehrt man zum ursprünglichen Maqam zurück und endet normalerweise auf der Tonika mit einer Verzierung. Dies ist nur ein Vorschlag – erprobe verschiedene Möglichkeiten, eine Geschichte durch Improvisation zu erzählen!

entirely different functions. To portray them in the same way as Western scales would create a false sense of equivalency. Negar's well-grounded criticism reflected a longstanding debate surrounding the usefulness and ethics of transcribing oral traditions (Agawu, 1995; Nettl, 2005). While notating such performances in simplified forms may facilitate broader engagement, committing these dynamic, improvisatory repertoires to ink fails to capture their true essence. Recognising this dilemma, we made our materials available in different modalities to facilitate multiple ways of engaging with the music. The printed book offers conventional reproductions of each piece in staff notation (unison and in treble clef) and performance tips on ornamentation, microtonality, and understanding maqamat. The companion website for the book offers the songs in different media. We compiled audio files and YouTube videos of the pieces performed by the contributors, as well as recordings of the spoken lyrics to facilitate accurate pronunciation. These different modalities of transmitting knowledge not only make the material more accessible to a broader audience, but also shape the knowledge itself being transmitted; we expect musicians to engage differently with the repertoire through these sonic media than through the sheet music alone.

Yet more issues in interlocutor representation arose when we put on the concert. With the event, Sheyda and I wanted to create material benefits for interlocutors, not only through concert wages, but also through building connections amongst musicians and with key stakeholders in the scene. In planning the concert, we strove to create a framework through which musicians could represent themselves as they wished, not filtered through the editorial process of the book. With this goal in mind, we sought to provide a basic framework that would address our multiple imagined audiences and still give the musicians space to perform their individuality.

To engage meaningfully with Kurdish and non-Kurdish audiences required multiple levels of narrative crafting. Therefore, we devised a broad message under which all the musicians could find themselves and which also resonated across audience groups: 'Kurdish culture demonstrates how to find strength in diversity'. To Kurds, this messaging recognised and foregrounded the cultural diversity that coexists within this identity marker. Highlighting different Kurdish languages and experiences from across national borders as well as varying migration paths drew attention to the diversity present within the Kurdish diaspora in Germany. For other audience members without a connection to Kurdish history and culture, the message was heard differently, especially given Germany's current political climate. As one of the students in my BA seminar at the University of Cologne told me after the event, 'This seemed like a message to Germany that we could learn something from the Kurds on how to do *gelebte Vielfalt* [lived diversity]'. With this multilevel messaging, Sheyda and I hoped to communicate just that: integration is a two-way street where the dominant culture also adopts values and ways of life from other cultures. The same bifocal approach applied to the musical programme. Audience members steeped in the genre could pick up on nuanced differences between the performers and traditions. Simultaneously, newcomers could sit back and enjoy an evening of shorter pieces with dynamic performers, which served as an introduction to this music.

Crucially, we wanted to thread a narrow political needle: engaging with Kurdish culture in Germany demands a certain sensitivity when positioning oneself politically, especially with relation to the PKK. One cannot align too closely with the party since its 1993 listing as a terror organisation in Germany. Despite this designation, the PKK remains the largest institution supporting Kurdish cultural practices and language learning in the diaspora. As other scholars have

shown, it is difficult to navigate public life in Kurdish circles without engaging with the party on some level (Kılınçoğlu, 2022; Kuruoğlu & Hamelink, 2017). Given its fraught political status in the EU, we decided a path of non-engagement would be best for us and our interlocutors. Therefore, we focused exclusively on Kurdish cultural production in Europe, eschewing party talking points on state politics or the situation of Kurds in SW Asia.

In this way we crafted a nuanced message for the project that both addressed certain groups and intentionally excluded others. Primarily, we hope to give our interlocutors the discursive space to tell their own story of engaging with (or rejecting) Kurdish cultural identities. Yet in practice, the concert did not create the open space for self-representation that we intended. Despite our best efforts to foreground interlocutors and their stories, the very structures that we strove to work against seeped into the project.

6.3.2 Issues in reciprocity

Issues surrounding reciprocity arose through our engagement with interlocutors as well. Sheyda and I asked ourselves how we could create mutual benefits for the women who contributed to our research. Ultimately we decided to put on the concert primarily for the benefit of their and Sheyda's careers. Yet the event did not produce the career capital for these women that we had envisioned. The reflections in this section shed light on how the conditions under which we worked and the decisions we took within these structures produced mixed results for our interlocutors.

First of all, the precarious position of both Sheyda and myself at this point predetermined the parameters of the event to some degree. My position at the University of Cologne was subject to

renewal every six months, meaning that the research funding and access to university resources (such as rehearsal spaces and concert venues) could only be secured a few weeks in advance. This fact, combined with a shortage of affordable midsize performing venues suitable for global music events in NRW, pushed us to book our concert at the university, where we could host an event cheaply and at short notice. I received a contract extension in August and within the fortnight we had booked the venue for October 25. In Germany, where concert dates for professionals can be booked up to twelve months in advance, this all came together at the last minute by comparison.

One advantage of positioning this event as a large university concert was the legitimacy it granted us, especially in the eyes of public funders. As two relatively inexperienced cultural producers, Sheyda and I would have normally struggled to gather the sums needed to put on an event of this size. But through the institutionalised cultural capital conferred by the university, as well as the social capital I acquired through my ethnographic fieldwork and previous engagement in NRW cultural politics, we could convert these resources into financial capital for the project.

Yet this legitimacy launched us into another cultural sphere, namely my transformation into a *Veranstalterin* [event organiser]. This role conferred new expectations and responsibilities onto me, including determining payment structures. Having conducted research into all the unpaid labour and (self-)exploitation on which a freelance music career is based (see section 3.3 and section 4.4.3), I insisted on providing adequate working conditions for our collaborators. We paid above-average fees for the concert and rehearsal time, covered the costs of travel, catering, and accommodation, and made insurance/pension contributions for KSK insurance fund members.

Our payments aligned with living wage recommendations made by the state of NRW, which many event organisers in the global music scene do not uphold (see section 3.4.3).

But this sudden scaling up of the project into a professional concert event altered the relationships we built with musicians during the interviews. This became apparent during the rehearsal process. We scheduled one long rehearsal day to bring together all 13 musicians and prepare the programme. While a single rehearsal was ambitious, it is not uncommon for professional project ensembles to meet for just one rehearsal before performing for the first time as a group. Yet the musicians approached the day in different ways, not all of which aligned with this time-scarce model. Those who work mostly in the freelance scene across genres are accustomed to piecing together a programme with little preparation. They have the necessary skills and experience to accomplish this, including the ability to make music with complete strangers. Such musicians came, having printed the sheet music and practised the trickier passages identified in the recordings before.

Yet the other musicians saw the rehearsal first as a basis to connect, with the actual rehearsing only happening after the group got to know each other – both personally and musically. I realised later that Sheyda had anticipated this need and coordinated a meal which brought the instrumentalists together over multilingual, half-translated conversations. While everyone expressed gratitude for the food, a few were a bit annoyed by the delay. 'Honestly, we should be rehearsing, not sitting around eating cake', one person confided in me. The pressure mounted during the rehearsal when it became clear that half of the instrumentalists had not prepared the programme at all. When one musician asked, 'So what exactly are we playing?', he received a shocked and reproachful look from

the person next to him who had been practicing for weeks. Some musicians defended this more relaxed approach, claiming that in rehearsals the ensemble should learn the pieces as a group together. In their view, developing personal relationships first can strengthen the quality of the music performed on stage. But this chafed against the expectations of others who had invested personal time to practise and expected the same from the other instrumentalists.

The day passed by quickly and soon our time in the rehearsal space expired. The musicians agreed – they needed more time together. But the second rehearsal unfolded in the same way. This time, the ensemble met at the house of one ensemble member who prepared a multi-course meal for the guests. And again, it was met with appreciation from some and annoyance from others, who commented to me, 'This is a rehearsal, not a dinner party'. But when confronted, the host defended the action: 'I can't have people over and not offer them something to eat!'

This friction illustrates just one of the myriad intercultural tensions we faced throughout the project. Our commitment to abiding by German professional music standards had not accounted for the diverse approaches to "professionalism" that musicians brought to the project. While trying not to exploit musicians, I had not considered how different cultural practices would fit into a homogenised German mould. These experiences echoed some of the insights I observed in the ZLG which tried to impose professional standards along German cultural lines (see section 5.3 and 5.5). At its core, this experience shows how different forms of value (social, economic, artistic) combine to create a musical product. In this case, industry guidelines do not consider how different music cultures build working relationships that are necessary to creating art.

Beyond imposing a narrow model of professional expectations, this mindset limited our ability to achieve other project goals. For example, while we committed ourselves to compensating people fairly for their work, we also wanted to foster relationships between these performers that might serve them in the future. Ultimately, our way of achieving the first goal undermined our ability to reach the second one. The professional project ensemble format did not create the conditions for forming long-term working relationships, nor did it foster an interest in future collaboration. Simply put, the musicians felt that they were paid to perform their contribution and leave.

Admittedly, the barriers to fostering a collaborative ensemble spirit were higher than in most music projects. The 13 performers reside in three different countries, collectively speak more than ten languages (with no single language in common), come from differing genres, and boast different 'skills and strategies' within Kurdish music (see section 5.5). While this diversity strengthened the project in some ways, it also hindered us from coming together and 'tuning in' both musically and socially (Schütz, 1951). Without a shared linguistic or musical basis, we would have needed to invest more time and effort to create a dialogic, collaborative climate for transcultural art.

In the end, the event we put on was not able to generate significant artistic and/or career value for our interlocutors. Each artist took the stage, performed her piece (which was introduced and given a short contextualisation in German), and then joined the ensemble on stage at the end for a final piece together. We framed the evening under the title Kurdish Women Musicians in Germany in order to nuance this broad category and allow individual identities to shine through. Yet, as one interlocutor's comments at the beginning of this section already made clear, her self-ascribed musical identity was not reflected by this designation. In trying to address multiple audiences

through this title, we might have flattened and homogenised the rich individual narratives on stage. Our dream of transcultural, cross-border collaborations and discovery did not come to fruition because we failed to create the appropriate conditions for it to manifest.

6.4 "Messy" research outputs

If co-production purports to relinquish control over research, then this principle should extend to outputs as well. The final answer to the question, 'For whom are we conducting this research?' concerns the research consumers – in our case, audiences and readers. To what degree do the products of co-produced research enter into collaboration with audiences? How do those receiving this knowledge simultaneously contribute to knowledge production?

Such questions address a corollary concern of multivocal writing: if multiple representations and means of transmitting knowledge can exist side-by-side, then multiple interpretations can as well. When texts defy genre and resist linear narratives, readers share the task of interpretation with researchers. Indeed, a messy representation might not only better suit our messy realities, it might also resist positivist research methods (Askins & Pain, 2011). From this perspective, research should 'allow the non-coherences to make themselves manifest' via messy outputs (Law, 2007, p. 606). Resisting triangulation and deliberately not imposing a definitive interpretation of the data relativises the perspective of the researcher and allows other conclusions to emerge (Strathern, 2004).

However, while giving space for "messiness" may align with liberatory research approaches, it can also harm the communities profiled. After all, various interest groups may bend the data to suit

their political agendas. The ethical issues surrounding politicisation and misuse of research have been extensively explored in anthropology. Beyond the discipline's emergence as the 'handmaiden' of colonialism and perpetrator of epistemicide (Asad, 1973; Smith, 1999), harmful applications of ethnographic work continued throughout the twentieth century, including in military invasions (Price, 2011; Wakin, 1992), surveillance (Horowitz, 1967), and media representations of indigenous people (Tierney, 2000). Just because our project focused on music does not mean that it could not be used in similar ways: 'That art might be traumatic is rarely given much critical thought; just as creativity may take the form of violence, violence is itself a mode of creativity' (Ndaliko & Anderson, 2020).

The possibility for unethical applications of research presents a strong argument against leaving outputs open to interpretation. So how can co-production cope with this dual imperative to cede control over the research while still ensuring the protection of interlocutors and their communities? Sheyda and I grappled with this question in organising the concert and trying to address its many audiences. Specifically, I asked in which ways co-production could engage with audiences in creating and transmitting knowledge ethically.

This question can be explored well through a project such as ours. Firstly, music is primarily a non-representational art form in which meaning arises largely through internal reference systems. Thus the process of meaning-creation always unfolds in dialogue with listeners. Music as the object and the method of research presented an opportunity to investigate this process of interpretation across different audience groups. This is especially relevant in Kurdish music, which owing to decades of repression and migration, operates in a diffuse cultural sphere. Kurdish music does not have the



Figure 26: Performance of 'Le Gulan' at the Inanna *concert (October 2024). L-R: Astare Artner, Dîlan Top, Nure Dlovani, Hevin Afrin, Sheyda Ghavami, Kijan Ibrahim Xayat, Şehrîbana Kurdî, Mazlum Rewşen, Amirhossein Liaghat (photo by Simon Campion)*

support of a state nor a robust network of institutions to push forward its study and performance. Many cultural and political actors are involved in determining meaning, which often casts political shadows over the music. For members of the diaspora, cultural production is often framed within the logics of European migrant integration (Galip, 2024). For those in Kurdish regions, the call to empower women's voices in international development similarly conditions cultural production to Western values (Schäfers, 2022). Such political engagement is not just limited to nation-states in the Global North. The PKK in particular has used music as a means to push forward their ideology, which at times creates 'a prescriptive atmosphere' that 'circumscribes performance and production' (Kuruoğlu & Hamelink, 2022, p. 103). In this field, even non-engagement with politics is a political act (Kılınçoğlu, 2022).

With these factors in mind, we strove to create a field for these representations and interpretations to flourish in an ethical way. On the one hand, we wanted to give space for messiness – allowing

our interlocutors to represent themselves and our audiences to draw their own conclusions from the music. But on the other hand, we could not completely abdicate responsibility over the research interpretations, especially with regard to potential harm for interlocutors and their communities. Concretely, we wanted to limit the possibility of our research being used inappropriately for political gains, either by diversity-washing German institutions or Kurdish political parties.

But following this pathway proved more difficult than anticipated. Simply by engaging with these topics, we became entangled in the struggle over meaning creation within the field. This undertaking, in turn, fed back into the research findings. Instead of just presenting about the challenges that musicians faced, we experienced many of these difficulties ourselves. While such a process led to a richer ethnography and strengthened our capacity to represent these experiences, it embroiled us in these conflicts and ethical dilemmas as well.

One of the main points of friction is how artists situate themselves within the field. As I wrote about in our book text (section 6.1.1), many of our interlocutors identified a central tension between being perceived as an independent artist and as a bearer of tradition. In contrast to white Europeans, or 'people without history' (E. R. Wolf, 1982), producers in minority cultural contexts are often tasked with heritage preservation or keeping a culture alive. This burden conflicts with the Western cultural conception of artists as those who pursue their own creative and political agendas.[89] This orientation was particularly anchored in post-war German politics which emphasised the role of independent, socio-critical artists in healthy democracies (see section 2.3.2;

[89] Ethnographies of cultural production beyond Anglo-American and European contexts have similarly complicated this dualism between commercial and independent art (see El Khachab, 2021; Myers, 2002; Olszewska, 2015; Winegar, 2006).

Tinius, 2023). But musicians who are active in many traditions become caught up in identity politics, as Astare shared:

> Just making music is not enough. You really have to realise where you stand as a person in many respects and then, as a woman, say "I want to go this way now, I want to do it this way." But it's difficult...

Those who gain notoriety are subject to critique from all sides. Dîlan, who reinterprets Alevi music in new ways, often receives criticism for not upholding traditions in the "proper way".

Such imperatives to maintain imagined traditions are applied to music practitioners across cultures. But while this dynamic tension between tradition and innovation has always characterised folk music (Bohlman, 1988), musicians from the Global South must contend with additional post-colonial and political pressures. The world music industry (T. D. Taylor, 1997) and global capitalism (Erlmann, 1995), as well as institutions like UNESCO (T. D. Taylor, 2024), impose these expectations and shape how communities themselves value their own music. These patterns were reproduced in the reception of our project. Instrumentalists and singers alike faced accusations of not performing the songs "correctly", even from among our own project members.

In the case of Kurdish women musicians, such critiques take on gendered patterns as well. Astare talked about body shaming and comments on her dress and appearance. Kijan routinely receives online harassment from Iraqis (both Kurds and non-Kurds) who declare women musicians immoral. Şehrîbana even receives criticism from both ends of the political spectrum. On the one hand, conservative Muslims reject her musical career on the basis of her gender. On the other hand, left-leaning Kurds criticise her for wearing a hijab, as expressed in these comments made to me after the concert:

> Why does Şehrîbana have to wear that stupid hijab? Now the Germans think we oppress our women just like Daesh [the Islamic State].
>
> Why can't she even dress up a little bit? The others were very chic. She could have at least put on a nice dress and a headscarf. She overdid it trying to cover everything up [mimics choking gesture]. That's not how we are.

While women musicians are often subject to sexist and conflicting standards on stage (Mathias, 2021), these comments reveal an additional anxiety about how "the Germans" perceive Kurds. I heard such debates often throughout this project. Those interested in advocating for Kurdish rights and autonomy in Europe often strive to set themselves apart from other migrant groups from the SWANA region. They argue that Kurdish politics upholds Western values by viewing women and men as equals. This manifests in political structures, such as the PKK's quota system for leadership positions, as well as in cultural-religious practices.[90] However, as comments during the interviews and at the concert show, this portrayal of liberated Kurdish women does not reflect how they perceive their own gendered realities. This "freedom" is policed in both German and Kurdish contexts and shapes how artists navigate their career ambitions.

Reflecting on the audience's dialogic role in co-production shows how meaning creation is anything but apolitical or harmless. Indeed, every artistic utterance is an act of 'position-taking', or situating oneself in relation to other actors within the field (Bourdieu, 1993). I saw this position-taking elsewhere among my interlocutors in how they framed their ethnic and national identities as artists (section 3.3.3), how they positioned themselves as professionals in a crowded market (section 5.4), or the degree to which they accepted markers of diversity in pro-diversity policies (chapter four). Only when carrying out KMiD was I also forced to take a position in the field of

[90] This distinction is made most visible by the low percentage of Kurdish women who cover their hair for religious, cultural, and/or modesty reasons compared to other ethnic groups from these regions.

cultural production. Presenting nuanced, side-by-side subjectivities in the book and on stage created a diverse mosaic in theory. In practice, it caused tensions between performers that we could not solve in one evening.

Compounding these effects was how different interest groups in the audience sought to shape the narrative of the evening for their own benefit. As one musician bitterly put it, 'Everyone wants a piece of the pie'. This process began well before the concert day with our funding application process. Culture's potential for political expediency often shapes how it is funded in private and public spheres (Sassatelli, 2009; Yúdice, 2004). Our primary financial sponsor also benefited indirectly from this project. This organisation added KMiD to their profile of "diversity" funding which is presented to the government every year. Such evidence of engagement with marginalised communities is used to argue for larger budgets. I am not implying that the organisation performs this work only to satisfy such incentive structures. However, it does show that the mainstreaming of diversity programming has made such initiatives rather 'banal' fixtures of institutional management (Vertovec, 2012, see also section 4.1).

While I expected our public sponsors to use this project to strengthen their diversity profile, I was caught off guard by how Kurdish politics engaged with the concert and book. In particular, our project piqued the interest of political parties concerned with how Kurdish culture is portrayed in Germany. Unbeknownst to me, Kurdish media outlets advertised our concert across Western Europe and encouraged people to attend. This campaign seemed to produce results, as we met people who had travelled from distant regions in Germany, as well as Belgium and the Netherlands, just for the evening's programme. Only later was I informed that these platforms

advertising our project are all funded primarily by the PKK. The party's engagement was confirmed after the concert when two high-ranking members sent a congratulatory message to Sheyda: 'You have done more with this project for Kurdish women than we could have accomplished ourselves'.

I chafed at the idea of the PKK using our project to further a very different agenda from ours. While their ideology espouses a socialist, feminist, and decolonial philosophy, the party itself has been criticised for nevertheless perpetuating a militant, patriarchal culture.[91] Foregrounding their progressive social platform in public discourse draws attention away from their violent, illiberal practices in Europe, including accusations of facilitating the narcotics trade, demanding protection money from Kurdish business owners, and recruiting underage people to fight for militant groups (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010). To normalise their position in Europe, the party often seeks recognition from diverse governmental and non-governmental institutions (Sienknecht, 2021). With regard to our project, the party seemed especially to capitalise on the overlap between their gendered political messaging and that of a university research project. As one interlocutor critical of the PKK explained, 'It is important for them that something like this is done in academia to legitimise their position'.

This experience underlines the potential risks of devolving the researcher's interpretative authority over the material. Entering into co-production with audiences may lead to uncomfortable conclusions drawn from the research and potential harms inflicted on the interlocutors. We designed this project to engage with the issue of minority rights and recognition in Europe,

[91] Gender in the PKK, especially in their armed militant factions, has become a central topic of Kurdish studies (for nuanced accounts of this phenomenon, see Käser, 2021; Szekely, 2023; Topal, 2024).

especially through an intersectional lens. In this way, we strove to curate a project that was *politically engaged* without necessarily becoming *political* ourselves.

But as we learned, Kurdish cultural production is never apolitical. Our attempts to not engage politically led to negative outcomes for one interlocutor in particular. Rojîn* had cut ties with all Kurdish parties more than a decade earlier after becoming disillusioned with their politics. Rojîn told us many times that she valued our project for its non-engagement with politics and exclusive focus on the musicians and their art. But during the concert she was unsettled to see PKK members in the audience and accused us of tricking her into performing for a party project. We assured Rojîn that we had nothing to do with the organisation, but our position did not stop the party from trying to reengage her. A few days later, she received a call from party officials asking her to perform at a Kurdish women's conference later in the year. Others contacted her after seeing videos from the concert on their media channels, asking, 'Are you back in politics now?' Rojîn called me to express her disappointment: 'After years of distancing myself from party politics, they thought they could mobilise me again'. It was clear that this project had put her in an uncomfortable position:

> I thought the project was just to document us, to produce something academic. Then I was surprised when you were talking about a book and a concert. I didn't see myself in the project, I am not a Kurdish musician. If I am pinned down like that, I can't breathe. The whole world is my home, not just Kurdistan or Europe. I want to get away from the drama, away from the heavy stuff.

While our book and concert evening strove to create a nuanced, differentiated view of what it means to be a Kurdish woman, we ended up inadvertently reproducing similar conditions to those

identified in the interviews. Paradoxically, using co-production to reduce the harms inflicted by research and gatekeeper knowledge-production led to still other harmful consequences.

6.5 Co-producing value for whom?

In light of the above reflections, I return one final time to the guiding question, 'For whom did we conduct this research?' Within the overarching theme of this dissertation, this question could be reframed in terms of value: what value does ethnography produce and for whose benefit? Throughout these reflections on KMiD, I consider how this performance of value manifested imagined totalities which normally remain invisible.

Section 6.2 explored how co-production can generate value for researchers. The relationship between Sheyda and myself made visible the hierarchies of knowledge creation and the symbolic violence they exert within academia. Such structures determine whose life experiences are made legible in a neocolonial academic system and can be converted into further resources. We attempted to address these inequalities through continually evaluating our multiple roles and identifications as the project unfolded.

In section 6.3, I explored to what degree we created value for our interlocutors. Indeed, we found that co-production does not necessarily solve issues of representation and reciprocity in work with additional interlocutors. We addressed these points by giving our interlocutors a platform to represent themselves in the book and through a large public stage. Yet this approach created additional challenges that decreased the potential value of the experience for some. For example, my efforts to create fair working conditions for performers was guided by a model of professional

efficiency to maximise economic value. However, this approach neglected the importance of social value and position-taking in creating meaningful performances. In the end, by channelling our reciprocity primarily through economic benefits, I neglected to account for how music's value is located not only in its labour, but also in 'the social relationships that are built through acts of musical production and exchange, the very relationships that define aesthetic value' (Garland, 2022, p. 3).

Finally, in section 6.4, I questioned whether the principles of co-production extend to audiences as well. Namely, what role do they have in interpretation and determining the value of research findings? On the one hand, creating "messy" outputs cedes some of the power over interpretation from researchers to audiences, in line with principles of co-production. But on the other hand, the work may be co-opted for ulterior motives, some of which may harm research interlocutors.[92] We confronted this issue when external organisations tried to capitalise on this project's value for their own benefit. On some level, our work became commodified as a token of value. In this state, outside groups could use our work to reflect back the value of their own actions – whether we agreed with these actions or not. This transpired primarily with the PKK, which sought to align our work with theirs in the fight for Kurdish recognition. Such struggles over value are important, however, because 'this is what politics is always ultimately about: not just to accumulate value, but to define what value is, and how different values (forms of "honor," "capital," etc.) dominate, encompass, or otherwise relate to one another' (Graeber, 2001, p. 259).

I include these reflections to present the inner workings of how these methods unfold in practice. In a way, this exercise analyses value in a Graeberian sense through unpacking power relations.

[92] (For more on how decolonisation rhetoric can be hijacked by authoritarian forces, see Shah, 2024).

Power, according to Graeber, can be understood as one's potential for action, or one's "creative energies". These energies are embedded within social relations, which Graeber couches in terms of performance: '"Society" simply consists of that potential audience, of everyone whose opinion of you matters in some way' (Graeber, 2001, p. 76). Framing social structures through action or "creative energies" foregrounds society's emergent quality. Importantly, he remarks, it reveals that 'this social order is not some abstract set of categories that exists prior to action. Actions are what it is, what it primarily consists of. It is a process of constant creation' (p. 77).

Thus the process of co-produced research not only helps to reveal the structures of these actions, but might contribute in a small way to reshaping them. The KMiD's performance of value manifested a number of potential audiences, or imagined totalities: a dispersed and politically engaged Kurdish diaspora, academic researchers, diversity-oriented German institutions, and Kurdish women musicians in Germany (although not everyone saw themselves under this term). Not all of these audiences shared the same values, as seen in Sheyda's contract negotiations, the co-option of value by various political entities, and even disputes amongst our own interlocutors. Such an analysis allows us to look more closely at these processes of value creation through action and question their logics.

This chapter offered a reflection on the process of co-production in practice, not just in theory. It focused on how the creative energies expended by co-researchers, interlocutors, and audiences generated value through an ethnographic research project. This analysis brings to the fore the ways in which different stakeholders in research participate in struggles over value definition – sometimes in harmony, other times with more dissonance. The KMiD project illustrates how co-

production, though far from a perfect solution to ethnography's methodological and colonial shortcomings, can lead to a more reflexive process of knowledge and value creation for a broader coalition of beneficiaries.



Figure 27: Before a concert at the Katakomben Theater in Essen (November 2022)

Chapter 7: The false sounds of our own dreams

It is a dark winter day in December 2023, and Sheyda is visiting me in my office at the University of Cologne. Our task today is to figure out what type of work contract we can provide for the KMiD project. The contract is less about delineating her roles and duties within our project, and more about projecting to outside agents – namely the state bureaucracy – that she will be gainfully employed over the course of several months. She hoped that by cobbling together a paper trail for her various jobs, she can demonstrate her economic independence to the state authorities. As explored at various points throughout this dissertation, Sheyda's efforts to acquire German citizenship touch on a number of hot-button policy areas. By not possessing an accredited, recognised qualification in Germany, she is excluded from many employment opportunities that would provide not only economic stability, but also strengthen her claims to becoming a citizen. These conditions pushed her into the freelance music scene, where she is simultaneously lauded as an entrepreneur but also ineligible for many labour protections instituted in the precarious music industry.

To date, she has completed all the other naturalisation requirements except one: showing evidence for a stable monthly income. Once she achieves this, she is confident that her application will be approved. "Becoming German" for Sheyda is less about a feeling of belonging and affinity for the country, but rather the protections that it brings. 'I can't go back to Iran', she intoned multiple times over the course of these discussions.

For Sheyda and many other racialised migrants, "becoming German" represents the final step in establishing their lives in the country. For those fleeing persecution, it represents safety, refuge

from potential harm. Others see value in future opportunities for themselves and their families – not only economic but also the promise of artistic freedom. Still others see it in more symbolic terms: the process of naturalisation recognises one's value to the imagined community by welcoming them into the ranks of those who belong.

Yet, as profiled at many points throughout this dissertation, naturalisation is not an option open to many musicians. As in Sheyda's case, this is often due to structural limitations on income thresholds which do not account for the precarious conditions under which freelance musicians work (as explored in chapter three). Such gaps illustrate how the market increasingly determines the boundaries of citizenship. This diverges from classic liberal conceptions of citizenship based in social and civic rights and supported by a robust welfare state that regulates markets (Marshall, 1950/1983). Instead, citizenship is determined by labour market participation and the ability to survive in neoliberal economies. The logic of state support has transformed into narratives of entrepreneurship, freedom, and self-empowerment within increasingly precaritised employment practices. In some circumstances, this turn has created 'flexible citizens' and 'entrepreneurial subjects' who are able to strategically use their mobility for profit within these state systems (Ong, 1999, 2006). But on the other hand, it has also created 'virtuosos of freedom' (Lorey, 2015), or those who become 'reluctant entrepreneurs' through the lack of state protection – either in terms of migration status or market regulation (Haynes & Marshall, 2018).

Even those who do eventually become naturalised are still subject to "exclusionary incorporation" along racial lines (Partridge, 2008). Papa Jo brought this to my attention with his pointed message on my consent form: 'I am not a migrant'. This can be seen in the racialised rhetoric of belonging

in categories of "foreigner" and "people with migration background" (chapter two). It also manifests in mechanisms of stratified citizenship, such as qualification recognition processes that determine whose human capital is deemed valuable in the labour market (chapter five). The rights and social protections made available to different classes of residents do not always fall along lines of citizen/non-citizen. Indeed, they can create gaps and unintended consequences.[93] For example, many racialised second-generation and long-term residents among my interlocutors expressed resentment towards the so-called "newcomers" for all the opportunities and resources offered by the state in recent years.

Still, efforts to reduce these different forms of exclusion may end up reinforcing the boundaries of belonging. This can be seen in the diversity initiatives profiled in chapter four. By addressing these markers of difference through language such as "intercultural", "cultural diversity", or "for migrants", such programmes might be further siloing these populations without addressing the underlying causes of their marginalisation. Furthermore, the degree to which programmes purport to value various ethnic and migrant groups falls more along the lines of political expediency (Yúdice, 2004) and less along the documented needs of these people. This can be seen in the successive waves of state support (or lack thereof) for different racialised groups since the start of my DPhil, including Afghans, Ukrainians, Iranian women, Palestinians, and Jewish people/Israelis. The consequences of such integrative programmes are borne out in chapter five's analysis of the ZLG. The ways in which professional opportunities for racialised musicians are created might be pushing them further into dead-end, ethnicised niches. While all of these narratives foreground the

[93] Miriam Ticktin (2011) illustrates this phenomenon in the French humanitarian migration system.

social value of a diverse society, the question remains as to who benefits from these policies (Vertovec, 2012).

Sheyda and I asked this question openly during our co-produced research endeavours. While we approached the project as equals, we also recognised how each of us stood to benefit from this work differently. Sheyda sought to leverage the economic and symbolic capital of affiliation with the university to further her claim to citizenship and university ambitions. I similarly capitalised on the project to advance my own career by presenting at various conferences and making a name for myself with a topical and opportune methodology. We were both aware of the value we offered to one another at the beginning of the project, yet the benefits have not manifested so equally. One of the benefits for my career came when we won the British Forum for Ethnomusicology's 2024 prize for best student paper. Sheyda initially shared my excitement, asking what this meant for us. When I answered that it was not a cash prize, but rather a symbolic one, she responded, '*na gut...*' ['all right then']. We designed the final concert to balance out these benefits by increasing Sheyda's profile and hopefully bringing about further event invitations. However, as the story about the technical issues in chapter six shows, the material benefits she could reap from the concert were limited. Once the concert was over, she had little to show from it in terms of scaling up her production capacity. One year on, the situation has not changed. When I met with Sheyda to review the final version of my dissertation with her before I submitted, she told me that her citizenship application had been rejected. Ultimately, a year after the completion of the project, Sheyda will still be stateless and I will have my doctorate.

The ethnographic insights presented in this dissertation illustrate how citizenship and integration is often couched in racialised terms of economic value and social deservingness. Within such structures, however, these individuals navigate alternative structures of belonging that allow them to create their own constellations of value. Such experiences have been explored previously through cultural citizenship, which Rosaldo (1994) conceptualised as the ways marginalised groups assert belonging through cultural practices, thereby expanding the terms of membership beyond legal status or economic contribution. Similarly, work on urban citizenship has highlighted how migrant and racialised communities claim space, recognition, and rights through practices of inhabiting and reshaping the city, rather than through formal political channels (Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2003; Holston, 2021). These perspectives align with scholarship on political collectives (such as neighbourhood associations and trade unions) which mediate an individual's relationship to the nation-state, thereby shaping conceptions of citizenry (Lazar, 2020).

Relevant here is the idea of artistic citizenship, which foregrounds creative practice as a form of civic engagement, ethical responsibility, and social belonging (Elliott et al., 2016). By emphasising the social and moral obligations entailed in artistic work, these approaches situate musicians not simply as cultural producers, but as citizens who participate in shaping collective life. Indeed, examining the relationship between music and citizenship might open up new ways of conceiving civic belonging beyond that of the nation-state – one that is based instead on performative or affective political practices (Stokes, 2023).

Taken together, these alternative conceptions foreground citizenship as an emergent and negotiated practice rather than a fixed status imposed from above. This dovetails with Graeber's

conception of value as a performative act, not just as a quantifiable exchange mechanism (2001). This paradigm highlights how acts of cultural and artistic creation themselves generate and enact new imagined totalities. Viewing citizenship through the paradigm of music and the arts allows us to look at belonging beyond just rights and protections (although these are still important for the survival of racialised others in a society).

Such a perspective allows us to explore how culture mediates the experience and contestation of value in diverse spheres. As I showed in chapter three, the freelance music scene seemingly offers a route for migrant entrepreneurs to find autonomy and produce economic value in line with the naturalisation process. Yet, the freedoms both imposed upon and embraced by these 'reluctant entrepreneurs' in this sector show how such precarious pathways may heighten their exclusion from the German imaginary, not alleviate it. This process is visible not only in the professional protections that create an underclass of workers who fall outside of these policies, but also the conditions which push many forced migrants into this field of work in the first place. For example, Sheyda's decision to become a full-time musician was cast into a different light by the revelation that she was rejected from an apprenticeship at a supermarket.

Chapter four presented a similarly ambivalent marker of belonging: those subject to diversity policies. In the two case studies from the LMR and KS, musicians negotiate their identities in relationship to a German norm dictated by logics of the state and market. In doing so, they challenge understandings of migrant integration, cultural inclusivity, intercultural dialogue, gendered labour practices, and what I call the "white ear" of exoticised listening. All told, some pro-diversity initiatives may reinforce exclusionary borders as they try to dismantle them.

In chapter five, I explored the possibility of professional belonging in world music framed through qualification recognition. The value of the ZLG is shaped and contested by not only participants, staff, and the LMA, but also external actors in the world music scene. Here too, the ZLG's value pivots on questions of belonging: what does it mean to be a professional in a precarious neoliberal economy?

Chapter six applies this paradigm to ethnographic research. I asked who derived value from this work and on what terms. It turned out that the process of co-production did not solve many longstanding issues in anthropology. However, it gave us the space to question how our creative energies were manifesting and shaping our own imagined totalities.

What I have endeavoured to show in the preceding chapters is that belonging – whether national, professional, affective, social, or cultural – can be explored through the experiences of people on the periphery, in this case racialised performers in NRW's world music scene. Broader political topics in contemporary Germany threaten to superimpose new values and meaning onto artistic products by racialised and forced migrant musicians. Through this process, commodified labour becomes the false coin of our own dreams (Graeber, 2001). In order to claim back these false coins – or in this context, the *false sounds* of our own dreams – we must ground conceptions of value back in the social actions that produce our imagined totalities.

I argue that the musicians profiled in this dissertation do just that. The strategies they use to pursue their careers reveal the different ways marginalised people can negotiate the value of their art, labour, and indeed their very existence in Germany today. These musicians' efforts counter an integration regime that produces racialised non-citizens. They do so by engaging in a different form

of self-making beyond the boundaries of state citizenship. Within the state-structured subjectivities of “migrant”, “person with a migration background”, “world music”, “professional” or indeed “musician”, the protagonists profiled here perform the value of their own dreams to audiences of their own making.

Appendix 1: Diversity-oriented music programmes with state funding in NRW

The texts below provide background for the analysis in Table 1 (p. 168).

Landesmusikrat NRW (LMR)

This section profiles two other programmes not detailed in section 4.2.1. The funding stream *Interkultur* [Interculture] apportions funding to intercultural projects from the general amateur music funding pool. In my experience on this jury, the projects on paper looked quite similar to those in Culturally and Inclusively Diverse Music Projects with Forced Migrant Musicians, only with less focus on engaging forced migrant participants.

The final diversity-oriented project at the LMR is *Creole*, a competition for global music in NRW. Creole began as a country-wide event with regional pre-competitions in 2006. The goal was to increase the popularity and visibility of world music performers. The competitions took place in prominent venues and were designed to attract event organisers, producers, labels, and media. It functioned as a hub for the scene for many years, both to bring musicians together to meet one another and establish connections, but also to confer some legitimacy on exceptionally skilled musicians. Funding for the regional and national competitions faced difficulties in the 2010s as the organising music councils were subject to funding decisions by their respective state and city governments. By 2020, the last remaining Creole competition in Germany was that in NRW, which was cancelled due to the Covid-19 lockdowns. In subsequent years, the LMR applied for state funding to restart the competition, but was left in a state of limbo. Until 2024, the applications were neither approved, nor denied – the state simply did not deliver a decision.

Finally, the approval came in summer 2024 and the competition was able to take place again in September in the Domicil in Dortmund. If and when it will be funded again is unclear at the time of writing.

Landesmusikakademie NRW (LMA)

The LMA professes a similar goal to the LMR of promoting the amateur musical landscape in NRW. Yet, they focus more on affording teaching and learning opportunities in music education. Rather than funding external projects, the LMA puts on its own programme of workshops, continuing education certificates , and networking events. Their three diversity-oriented programmes reflect these different approaches in comparison with the LMR.

In.Di.E Musik is a project funded by the state cultural ministry (MKW) and housed within the LMA. In.Di.E Musik – shortened from "interculture, diversity, and empowerment" – offers workshops and networking events to support music educators with "diverse backgrounds" in NRW. This project also arose out of a response to the long summer of migration, and like projects arising at the LMR at the same time, moved from a lexicon of "integration" to "inclusion, diversity and empowerment". Seminars offered by In.Di.E music in 2025 covered topics including developing strong music-pedagogical projects, acquiring public funding, community music methods, and marketing.

Brückenklang is another programme funded by the MKW based at the LMA. It was originally developed in conjunction with the LMR, where it was also affiliated until 2020. The project's aim is 'to promote encounters and exchanges between cultures that are musically active in NRW, both at an amateur and professional level'. This philosophy manifests primarily in a rich programme of

workshops offered across NRW. These day- or even week-long courses offer amateur musicians the opportunity to learn from music professionals of "diverse" cultures based in NRW. Titles include "World Percussion Academy", "Oriental Playing Techniques", "Traces of Al-Andalus", "Songs of the World", "Introduction to Konnakol" and "Music of the Black Sea Region". Brückenklang was awarded the WDR Jazz Prize's 2019 "*Ehrenpreis*" [special honours] for its work promoting intercultural music-making.

Finally, the *Zertifikatslehrgang Musikpädagogik Musiker*innen verschiedener Kulturen* (ZLG) was inaugurated in 2018 to provide a qualification for practitioners of diverse music genres. While this programme professes an orientation towards programmatic diversity, the structure and practical orientation of the curriculum are aimed towards diversifying personnel. An extensive analysis of this programme forms the basis of chapter five.

Landesverband der Musikschulen in NRW (LVdMS)

The LVdMS is an umbrella organisation for public music schools in NRW. They represent the interests of 161 institutions in NRW in state politics as well as in the national association of music schools. They couple inclusion and diversity together to address the various spectra of marginalisation that impact music education.

The flagship project within this stream is *Heimat: Musik.* Since 2016 this programme has offered funding for projects at music schools that engage with students of 'different backgrounds', generally those that target forced migrants. The overarching goal is to increase the diversity of students and offerings at public music schools. The majority of the funding goes towards projects that provide music lessons for young people. In recent years the funding has targeted more

sustainable investments in skill-building and awareness training for music school teachers and administrators.

Two further initiatives target more advanced performers within world music genres. *Global Music NRW* is a biennial festival that showcases the 'stylistic diversity' of music school ensembles in the state. The festival began as a "folk and world music" competition in 1980 and was renamed Global Music NRW in 2015. The competition took place every two to three years and prizes were awarded in four age categories up to 27 years old. Qualifying genres include 'folk, ethno, world music, rock or pop music with multicultural roots and innovative approaches'.[94] The final competition took place in 2019. The LVdMS reinstated Global Music NRW in 2023 in a solely festival format. The festival ran under the title "Vibes and Stories" to emphasise the 'spirit of tradition and a new, emancipated and open concept'.[95] Now musicians of all ages may apply, including those not affiliated with a music school. This openness extends to the call for genres, which has similarly been rewritten to be as inclusive as possible: 'Global Music NRW brings the stylistic diversity of North Rhine-Westphalia's music scene to the stage. From acoustic to electronic, from traditional playing styles to club-oriented sounds'.[96] This shift in direction for Global Music NRW reflects not only current diversity discourses in the world music landscape, but also the call for more inclusive event formats that move away from the pressures of competitions.

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[94] 'Für Bands und Ensembles aus NRW, die Folk, Ethno, Weltmusik, Rock oder Popmusik mit multikulturellen Wurzeln und neuartigen Ansätzen präsentieren' (www.miz.org/de/institutionen/landeswettbewerb-global-music-nrw-i8733).

[95] 'Einst als „Folk and World Music NRW" gestartet, hat das Festival Global Music NRW nun die „Vibes and Stories" mit Menschen aus NRW verwoben und damit einen Spirit aus Tradition und einem neuen, emanzipierten und offenen Konzept hervorgebracht' (www.lvdm-nrw.de/arbeitsbereiche/global-music-nrw).

[96] 'Global Music NRW bringt die stilistische Vielfalt der Musik NRWs auf die Bühne. Von akustisch bis elektronisch, von traditionellen Spielweisen bis zu cluborientierten Sounds' (www.lvdm-nrw.de/arbeitsbereiche/global-music-nrw).

Another recent programming addition from the LVdMS in the area of diversity promotion is the founding of their own youth ensemble *Mondomuziko*. The state-wide ensemble was inaugurated in April 2021 to give talented young musicians the opportunity to engage with NRW's 'diverse music and society'. It is led by the multi-instrumentalist Koray Berat Sarı, who is also on the staff of the ZLG. This ensemble functions similarly to state-wide classical music and jazz ensembles. They first recruited young people from music schools and Koray's own teaching networks. The ensemble convenes up to three times per year for intensive rehearsal weekends leading up to performances. Koray curates the repertoire to span a number of musical traditions, generally with an emphasis on the SWANA region. When I joined as a chaperone for a rehearsal weekend in November 2022, the ensemble boasted an eclectic mix of instruments: three people playing bağlama and one person each playing guitar, saxophone, flute/ney, duduk, violin, and percussion. Because the ensemble only meets for a few weekends a year and has a high fluctuation of participating members, each phase tends to centre on learning a specific repertoire and not on generalised ensemble skills for transcultural practice. Most of the participants were near the end of their schooling or were recent school-leavers.

Ministerium für Kultur und Wissenschaft des Landes NRW (MKW)

As introduced in section 4.1, the ministry of culture in NRW has also launched its own diversity programming in addition to funding all of the above projects. The 2021 *Gesamtkonzept* for diversity outlined provisions for the "diversity fund" [*Diversitätsfonds*] which supports 'new artistic perspectives' previously underrepresented in the state's arts and culture scene. Specifically,

this includes PoC, elderly, and queer artists, as well as those with disabilities.[97] A similarly diverse jury that spans all of these identity markers as well as artistic forms and regions within NRW evaluates the applications and curates a representative funding portfolio.

Two points of interest are from this list of qualifying 'underrepresented perspectives'. I have translated the terms into common British English usage, but the original German language also carries with it different delineation of the categories. For example, they use the phrase "people with migration histories" – a variation on "migration background" – as well as "Black people (PoC)". Here the experiences of Black people are distinguished from those with a migration history using a mixture of German and English terms. Second, it should also be noted that cisgender women are not explicitly included in the above formulation.

NRW Kultursekretariat (KS)

Beyond the Dialogue Project profiled in section 4.4, the KS has two other diversity-oriented programmes

The annual *Musikkulturen Katalog*, as profiled previously in section 3.4.2, focuses on reducing the financial risks involved in programming world music ensembles. The KS not only compiles a list of quality performers that might appeal to bookers, they also subsidise 50% of the concert costs with public money. Approximately 80 acts apply each year to be included in the catalogue. A pre-jury of two or three people and the administrator narrow the list down to 15 applicants. These are then evaluated by the advisory board [*Beirat*], consisting of 20 experts in the field of musical diversity –

[97] 'Perspektiven von Menschen mit Zuwanderungsgeschichte, schwarzen Menschen (PoC), älteren Menschen, Menschen mit Behinderung oder Lesben, Schwule, Bisexuelle, Trans*, Inter* und queere Menschen (kurz: LSBTIQ*)' (www.mkw.nrw/themen/kultur/kunst-und-kulturfoerderung/diversitaetsfonds-nordrhein-westfalen).

musicians, agents, administrators in cultural ministries, and academics (including myself). The board selects seven to ten groups based on their ability to appeal to event organisers in the state. Musical quality is often discussed as the primary criteria, but they also take into account financial viability and diversity of genres and registers.

This often results in a collection of ensembles that would otherwise never cross paths. In 2025 venues in NRW partner cities could book the duo Mariama & Vieux to hear Senegalese Djeli (also known as Griot) music, the eight-man band Royal Street Orchestra and their Balkan dance music, or the Asambura Ensemble for new transcultural compositions drawing on member's international backgrounds. While not every ensemble will appeal to bookers, every booker will be able to find at least one ensemble to fit in their annual programming from this catalogue – or so the logic goes. Such policies target a diversification of musical programming. In my experience, the jury selection processes rarely discuss diversifying the musicians themselves, and if so, only with regard to gender quotas.

One further programme at the KS beyond that of *Musikkulturen* [Musical Cultures] is their *Kultur, Diversität und Diskurs* [culture, diversity and discourse] project funding. With this programme the KS wishes to 'thematise the connection between art and discourse in the field of diversity'.[98] The call for applications explicitly expresses interests in projects that engage with questions of cultural belonging and perspectives, as well as inclusion of people with disabilities and gender diversity.

[98] 'Thematisch geht es um die Verbindung von Kunst und Diskurs im Themenfeld Diversität' (www.nrw-kultur.de/programme/kultur-diversitaet-und-diskurs).

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