Afghan son(g)s: The role of music in the migration process

BITTEL, Sarah

Abstract

Many Afghan musicians have been forced to leave Afghanistan and pursue activities abroad. Based on fieldwork conducted in the greater Geneva area, this research explores the role of Afghan music in maintaining and (re)constructing a sense of self and belonging for Afghan migrants. By following a young Afghan musician from the city of Mazar-I-Sharif and his group, I examine how music can be used to maintain ties to peers and bridge national boundaries. The research mainly focuses on musical events and explores music’s potential to contribute to a sense of Afghan identity. It also considers the role of the internet and social media in bridging national boundaries, allowing people to follow fellow musicians’ practice and the musicians to broaden their audience. The collection and analysis of empirical data is based on film as a research method. Therefore, participant observation with video and semistructured interviews are central to this study.

Reference

BITTEL, Sarah. *Afghan son(g)s: The role of music in the migration process*. Master : Univ. Genève, 2018

Available at:
http://archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige:123012

Disclaimer: layout of this document may differ from the published version.
Master’s Thesis in Political and Cultural Geography

The Role of Music in the Migration Process:
What role does Afghan music play in maintaining and (re)constructing a sense of self and belonging?

Film title: Afghan Son(g)s

Sarah Bittel

Defence of the Master’s Thesis: 10 September 2018

Supervisor
Juliet Jane Fall
Université de Genève

Jury Member
Alessandro Monsutti
Graduate Institute Geneva

Jury Member
Nicolas Senn
MédiasUnis
**With special thanks to:**

Mansoor Ghafoor and Hassan Shahzada, who both actively engaged in this research, suggested events and people to interview, established links with other research participants and translated.

Farhad Djaafari, Nesaar Mastor, Sébastien Lacroix, Qais Halimi, Samir Tufan, Hasan Soleimani, Ali Darvishi, Bakhtiyar Rezaei and all the other participants in the Nauruz Party who kindly allowed me to film and / or interview them.

Greig Stevens for his help and suggestions during the recording of Ham Awa’s rehearsals.

Juliet Jane Fall, Nicolas Senn and Alessandro Monsutti for their advice and technical support.

---

**List of Figures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of Figures</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>List of Figures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**I Presentation**

| 1.1 Introduction     | 07 |
| 1.2 Abstract         | 09 |
| 1.3 Subject Choice and Intentions | 09 |
| 1.4 Research Questions | 12 |

**II Literature Review**

| 2.1 Music in Cultural Geography and Ethnomusicology | 15 |
| 2.2 Music and Migration                             | 17 |
| 2.3 Music and Identity                              | 18 |
| 2.4 Music, Dancing and Performance                  | 19 |
| 2.5 Music and Memory                                | 20 |
| 2.6 Music, Transnationalism and Social Media        | 21 |
| 2.7 Afghan Music                                    | 22 |

**III Methodology**

| 3.1 Theoretical Framework                           | 25 |
| 3.2 Research Design                                 | 27 |
| 3.2.1 My Presence at Events                        | 28 |
| 3.2.2 Supplementary use of Photography              | 30 |
| 3.2.3 The Nauruz Party                              | 31 |
| 3.2.4 Research Participants                        | 34 |
| 3.2.5 Language and Interview Locations             | 37 |
| 3.2.6 Technical aspects                             | 38 |
| 3.2.7 Videos from Social Media and Video Hosting Sites | 39 |
| 3.2.9 Editing Process and Film                     | 40 |

**IV Discussion of Results**

| 4.1 Nostalgia/Memories                              | 42 |
| 4.2 Maintenance and Concerns of Afghan Music        | 43 |
| 4.3 The Musical Event: Place of Encounter, Identification and Maintenance | 45 |
| 4.4 Music in the Migration Situation: Loss of Status and Difficulties of transmission | 48 |
| 4.5 Questions of Authenticity                       | 49 |
| 4.6 Social Media and Video Hosting Sites            | 50 |

**V Conclusion**

| V Conclusion                                     | 52 |

**Bibliography**

| Bibliography                                    | 54 |
List of Figures

Unless indicated to the contrary, all photographs were taken by myself, Sarah Bittel.

Figure 1: Screenshot from Nesar’s Facebook page, me with Ham Awa’s group members 29
Figure 2: Screenshot from my own Facebook page, announcing Ham Awa’s concert 29
Figure 3: Poster announcing the Eid al-Fitr concert 29
Figure 4-7: Screenshot from Farhad’s Facebook page, displaying pictures I shared with him 30
Figure 8-9: Screenshot from Mansoor’s Facebook page, displaying pictures I shared with him 31
Figure 10-45: Impressions from the Nauruz party 32/33
Figure 46-53: Research Participants 35
Figure 54-57: Illustrations of the work progress on the film; 56-57 ©Nicolas Senn 41
Figure 58-67: Impressions of the group Ham Awa 48
This research was conducted as part of my thesis to complete a Master’s in Political and Cultural Geography at the University of Geneva. Whilst studying this MA program I developed a critical approach to the interconnectedness of imagined geographies and systems of domination. The program also introduced me to innovative approaches to learning and research, particularly documentary filmmaking in the study of social and spatial issues. In the present study, visual research methods have been of particular significance whilst gathering, analysing and diffusing empirical data. The result is a 32-minutes research film entitled “Afghan Son(g)s”. The film Afghan Son(g)s forms the central part of the research and stands on its own, but is complemented by the present written part, which introduces the study and develops the research questions, literature review and methodology. Therefore, whilst the written part expands the discussion of the research questions, it is ultimately only through watching the film that one can understand the broader picture, the atmosphere, soundscape and interactions that occurred during the events.

The present research was inspired by Mansoor Ghafory’s passion for music. My initial idea was to do a film study of Afghan migrants adapting to their new socio-spatial environment with field study in the city of Geneva, Switzerland. However, Mansoor’s passion for his music and his initiative in gathering friends around musical events deviated my research focus towards music’s role in the creation of self and belonging for young Afghan migrants. The starting point for this research was the Nauruz party (the Persian New Year) organised by Mansoor. It was held on 23 March 2018 in Geneva and music was central to the event. Starting from this event, I explore Afghan music’s capacity to reveal social phenomena and illustrate the relationship with home country. Through investigating Afghan migrant’s musical practice, I began to better understand concepts of self and belonging and, more broadly, life in exile. By following Mansoor and fellow musicians during rehearsals and other events and during discussions with the audience, I quickly realised that the Nauruz party would be central to this study. Of all the events I was invited to assist with, the Nauruz party gathered the most young, recently arrived Afghan men. The observations I made during this event helped me to formulate my research questions, further develop interviews and establish connections with research participants. Suggestions by research participants, including interview locations and other events to document, have been key to the project. The film mixes a more standard approach of frontal interviews with a more participatory approach, including sequences that have been filmed by the participants themselves on their mobile phones.

In this study, I will purposefully not provide a clear definition of Afghan music, leaving it open to the interpretation of the research participants. According to Bailey, “[a]ny musical
ethnography must go into the question of how the people classify the different kinds of music that they use.” (Baily, 1981a: 107). The musical styles practiced by the musicians are what they themselves call traditional, patriotic, classical and folkloristic styles.

The method of film is appropriate to this research as it is able to document visual and acoustic aspects, which are central to the research. Film is an effective way to capture the ambiance, the sound of the music and the interactions of the participants, allowing the viewer to accompany me in my exploration of this musical environment. All of the events and interviews in the film took place between March and August 2018.

1.2 Abstract

Many Afghan musicians have been forced to leave Afghanistan and pursue activities abroad. This is due to the Taliban’s extreme censorship of music, banning musical instruments and music itself from public space. This made the continuation of musical practice in exile particularly important and essential for Afghan music’s survival (Baily 2006, 2010, 2015, Saljuqi 2013). Based on fieldwork conducted in the greater Geneva area, this research explores the role of Afghan music in maintaining and (re)constructing a sense of self and belonging for Afghan migrants. By following a young Afghan musician from the city of Mazar-i-Sharif and his group, I examine how music can be used to maintain ties to peers and bridge national boundaries. The research mainly focuses on musical events and explores music’s potential to contribute to a sense of Afghan identity. It also considers the role of the internet and social media in bridging national boundaries, allowing people to follow fellow musicians’ practice and the musicians to broaden their audience. The collection and analysis of empirical data is based on film as a research method. Therefore, participant observation with video and semi-structured interviews are central to this study.

1.3 Subject Choice and Intentions

“Music travels with emigrants and migrants often perform their identity through the performance of music.” (Kearney, 2010: 50)

Studies on music and migration have received frequent attention within different fields of study, such as cultural geography, migration studies and ethnomusicology (Canova 2013, Karney 1978, Nash and Carney 1996, Kearney 2010, Stokes 1994, Toynbee and Dueck 2011). As stated by Lidskog (2017: 24), most studies focusing on music’s social functions and it’s aspect of identity formation concentrate on Western culture with a particular focus on “individual cognition and perception”. However, there has been little focus on the relevance of Afghan music for Afghans living in exile, with only John Baily having done extensive research in this field. Therefore, this study will focus on the role of Afghan music for Afghans living in exile and music’s relevance in (re)creating a sense of being Afghan.
These decades of conflict disrupted the flow of musical dissemination. It was only after the Taliban were overthrown in 2001 that popular platforms such as commercial radio and television were able to revive popular music forms. For example, the television show "Afghan Star" for emerging music talents, inspired by "American Idol", had an estimated 11 million viewers. It was broadcast on TOLO TV, one of Afghanistan's new popular commercial television stations (Olson 2017). However, following more than four decades of turmoil and war, Afghan music mostly flourished outside the country with some musicians returning after the overthrow of the Taliban to give concerts in their home country (Baily 1985, 2005, Saljiq 2013, Broughton 2002, Doubleday 2007). "The return of Afghan professional and amateur musicians from abroad is obviously important for the rebuilding of Afghan musical culture." (Doubleday, 2007: 299). Consequently, the maintenance and development of Afghan musical tradition in exile has been key to its survival as it feeds back into the home country (Baily 2006, Saljiq 2013). "With the restrictions placed on music in Afghanistan during the Coalition and Taliban eras (Baily 2009), the main centres of creativity in Afghan music became the USA and Germany" (Baily, 2011: 186).
platform for aspects of identity to thrive and for social interactions (physical or digital) to take place. As Lidskog states, making music means “to take part” (Lidskog 2017: 24) by performing, listening or dancing. Therefore, this study is interested in the event created around the practice of Afghan music in Geneva and its potential for creating and maintaining a sense of belonging and Afghan identity for the participants. Here, music is not seen as a unidirectional activity but, as described by Lidskog, “as a dynamic process involving context and culture” (Lidskog 2017: 25). I am particularly interested in the relevance of musical practice for recently arrived young male Afghans who mostly migrated without their families, and either grew up in Afghanistan or grew up in a neighbouring country and never saw their homeland. The term “musicking” is used by Small to capture the conceptual connotation of all meaning-making music, seeing it for its whole process involving “context and culture, thereby creating, maintaining, and changing meanings.” (Lidskog 2017: 25). Also, as suggested by Stokes in Ethnicity, Identity and Music, “The musical event [...] evokes and organizes collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity” (1994:3). Smith reinforces music’s potential to help us understand society, stating: “music can express and reinforce the status order, challenge some of the more stifling aspects of the economic hierarchy and help make sense of the political geography of identity” (Smith quoted in Kearney, 2010: 53).

These musical events can also be seen as opportunities to maintain ties with peers living in other countries or in the home country, sharing their experience of a certain Afghan transnationality. It may be through media, as described by Lovering and Thompson, where “(...) people can also make assumptions connecting particular musics and places ” (Lovering and Thompson quoted in Kearney 2010: 52) or it may be digitally via diverse social media platforms. As social networks have ‘democratised’ access to transnational communication, it is important to consider the role of technology and social media in (Afghan) migrants’ communication. Indeed, “millions of Afghans throughout Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and in the rest of the world have now access to the Internet and use their smart phones for communication and exchange of information” (Abbasi and Monsutti 2017: 13). By presenting their lives online and circulating images and videos taken during music events, they maintain their knowledge of Afghan music and spread (musical) evolutions quickly and widely.

1.4 Research Questions

“Quand il chante des chansons [Mansoor] ça me rappelle mon pays. Surtout, il y a une chanson qu’il chante pour Mazar-i-Sharif, c’est la ville d’où je viens, quand il joue cette chanson j’ai toujours les larmes dans les yeux et puis j’ai des souvenirs qui viennent dans ma tête. Je revis des instants quand j’étais en Afghanistan.” (Hassan in Afghan Son(g)s)

“Mes amis qui sont ici en Suisse sont très content de nous [musiciens] avoir. Ils me connaissent en tant que musicien et ils me contacteront souvent pour

organiser des soirées. Ça me fait très plaisir que les amis sont en contact avec moi, et qu’ils veulent toujours avoir des soirées musicales pour oublier leurs problèmes et souffrances.” (Mansoor in Afghan Son(g)s, translated from Dari)

Living myself with a partner from Afghanistan, I witnessed firsthand the importance of music from the home country and its capacity to foster Afghan identity. Statements like those quoted above alerted me to the way music feeds into nostalgia and its capacity to carry powerful emotional connotations. This inspired me to focus my research on music’s role in a process of identity renegotiation in a migration context. What potential does music have to inform Afghans’ “experience of mobility” or life as an “âwâra”, “a wanderer” (Abbasi and Monsutti 2017: 6)? What types of memories and fantasies of the home country are triggered by playing and listening to Afghan music abroad?

In his research, Baily predominantly focused on the musicians themselves. Alternatively, my research enlarges the notion of music by studying not only the musicians, but also the audience and the capacity for musical events to form social and communicative spaces, both physical and digital. My research envisages the musician as an active creator of group identity and therefore considers what meaning musicians give to the imaginary and symbolic space of music. By focusing on the musical event as a whole, I am able to observe music’s own transformation in the migration context, acknowledging that musical practice is a “dynamic process involving context and culture” (Lidskog 2017: 25).

Examining musicians’ practice and the events organised around this practice should allow the researcher to develop insights into the role of migrants in actively creating ‘their’ home culture abroad. I have a particular interest in the notion of Afghan ‘cultural identity’ for those who have never lived in their home country, but were raised as second generation refugees in a neighbouring country before they came to Europe. As stated by Mansoor “I organise these kinds of musical events [referring to the Nauruz party] to familiarise young Afghans with their own [musical] culture. Most who didn’t grew up in Afghanistan don’t really know about their own music.” How does this second generation of Afghan exiles experience ‘their’ music and what do they identify as being Afghan music?

Whilst I was assisting with the Nauruz party for Persian New Year, I realised that many were using their mobile phones to either take pictures or videos during the event. As previously mentioned, the musical event as context for social interactions is key to this research. In light of this observation, I was prompted to ask about the digital interactions that were triggered by the event. What is the intention behind the audience and musicians filming these moments? With whom and through which channels do they share these digital recordings?

Considering these questions, my research follows the hypothesis that musical events have the potential to reinforce abstract feelings of ‘Afghanness’ in the context of exile. Music is here seen as identity marker, eventually stimulating feelings of nationalism and becoming a symbol of a constructed national identity. Even though my research applies a functionalist approach to music, thereby relying
on its unifying quality, it should nevertheless be acknowledged that music can also create divisions between language, age, gender and regions. This was identified by Monsutti in relation to Afghani dishes for Afghan migrants in Iran, where “An abstract sense of Afghanness, developed in exile and symbolically embedded in emblematic dishes, coexists with an everyday life which tends to be fragmented by group of origin.” (Monsutti 2010: 217). Whilst acknowledging music’s complexity and both its divisive and unifying capabilities, the observations I made in my research context led me to focus predominantly on music’s unifying quality.

II Literature review

2.1 Music in Cultural Geography and Ethnomusicology

“Music is by nature geographical. Musical phrases have movement and direction, as though there are places in the music: quiet places and noisy places, places that offer familiarity, nostalgia or a sense of difference, while the dynamism of music reflects changing lives. Sound is a crucial element in the world we construct for ourselves, and the world that others construct and impose on us.” (Connell and Gibson in Hogan, 2007:1).

Research on music in the field of cultural geography emerged in the 1960’s in the US, with Nash as one of its most important representatives. Nash was one of the first authors on the topic and almost completely focused on American folk and popular music (Carney 1998, Kearney 2010). In the subsequent four decades, a significant number of research papers on music geography were published. Nevertheless, music only received full academic legitimacy as a subfield of cultural geography in the 1990’s, following events such as the conference on ‘The Place of Music’. The conference was organised in 1993 by the Institute of British Geographers, including special sessions on music geography in its 1993, 1994 and 1995 edition. Music gained further credibility as an emerging subfield of cultural geography through the Association of American Geographer’s annual meetings (Carney 1998, Canova 2013, Connell and Gibson, 2003). Despite music geography’s rise in academic acceptance within cultural geography, “explicit scholarship on geographies of popular music remains scant.” (Hogan 2007: 1). According to Nash and Carney, music geography can be divided into the following seven subfields: 1. origins (non-‘geographical’); 2. world distribution and types; 3. location analysis; 4. source areas of musical activities; 5. trends based on electricity; 6. impact of music on landscapes; and 7. global music. Music in geography originally emerged from the studies of ethnomusicology and studies on folklore (Nash an Carrey 1996). Its predecessors included the ethnomusicologist Nettl and the folklorist Lomax, who both focused on spatial diffusion and limitations in each respective field. In the 1960’s and 70’s, the question of “What is ‘mappable’ concerning music?” (Nash an Carrey 1996: 70) arose. “Nash’s ‘Music Regions and Regional Music’, presented at the International Geographical Union meetings in New Delhi, India (Nash 1968), provides samples of preoccupations at this level.” (Nash and Carrey 1996: 71).

The study of music geography is considerably less developed in the Francophone literature than the Anglophone literature. This is illustrated by the terminology used in the subfield: “The numerous labels for this subcurrent reveal distinctions: Géographie musicale (de Gironcourt 1932), Geography of music (Carney [1978] 2003), Geomusicology (Nash 1993), Music geography (Nash and Carney 1996), Geography by music (Romagnan 2000), Musical geography (Clark 2004; Gibson 2006), Géomusique (Raibaud 2009).” (Canova, 2013: 864). This was put more succinctly by Guiu: “There are as many geographies of music as there are geographies.” (Guiu quoted in Canova 2013: 864). Alternatively, music might be of particular relevance to geographers as it reflects upon important
notions of place and its fixity and fluidity. It therefore “appears as a powerful catalyst for reuniting the different dimensions of geographical observation” (Canova 2013: 864) and is relevant for examining links between local and global. This is particularly so in a context where “digital flows (Internet, TV, radio) are taking over from the physical flow of musicians” (Ibid.). Here of interest is what Canova calls “music as a factor in the dematerialization of territories.” (Ibid., 865) According to Deleuze and Guattari, music becomes an inherent piece in a process of territorialisation in social as well as scientific terms (Deleuze and Guattari quoted in Canova 2013: 865). “Thus, the territorial perspective sometimes seems to refer to the notion of place” (Bonnemaison 2005). (...) Because music is both a space marker and a place maker, there are strong and constructive links between it and geography: let them ring out!” (Ibid.) In this respect, the work of French ethnomusicologists such as Jean During and Sabine Trebinjac are of interest. While exploring different contexts, During focused on Iran and Trebinjac on China, both authors question the notion of musical “tradition”. In light of the recent social, economic, political and cultural changes in Iran, During (2010) advocates a pluralist approach to the study of Iranian musical tradition: “We really have to talk in the plural form about the music of Iran, for [even] in the so called high [music] category, the trends and modes diverge in their execution as well as by their function and desired effect” (Ibid., 9). According to Trebinjac (2007), in China musical “tradition” is voluntarily created and appropriated by the central power. As such, it would be more appropriate “to replace the term [tradition] with “state traditionalism”” (Trebinjac 2007: 221). Trebinjac suggests that appropriation of the multiple traditions of the different ethnic groups thus justifies state unity and pluriethnic cohesion. Tradition in China is therefore not static, rather “traditions are being perpetually reinvented” (Ibid., 222).

The current research is mainly situated in what is called “source areas of musical activities”. This category was characterised by Nash and Carney in their aforementioned paper on the seven categories of music geography. This category includes the source area of a certain type of music and its diffusion and phenomena of migrations. In addition to Nash and Carney, other researchers have tried to find coherent categorisations for different tendencies within music geography. One of the most relevant categories asks about music’s capacity to inspire feelings of nationalism. This was developed in the research of Bartok, Kodaly, and Liszt on the catalytic role of music to patriotic feelings expressed in their research through folk themes. (In Nash and Carney 1996: 71) Nash and Carney’s seventh category, “global music”, is also of interest to this study. As World Music became more popular in the 1990’s, The Rough Guide published its first ‘The Rough Guide to World Music’ in 1994. In 2010 an edition entitled ‘The Rough Guide To The Music Of Afghanistan’ was added to the collection and included popular, classical and folk traditions of Afghanistan. Veronica Doubleday was a researcher for the publication and Simon Broughton, director of the BBC4 documentary film ‘Breaking the Silence - Music in Afghanistan’, was the editor. During this period, the BBC broadcast two programs dedicated to Afghan music, including the BBC World Service’s Studio 7 and Zamzama. In addition to Nash and Carney’s seven categories, Carney develops five other categories. I focus on what he refers to as, “spatial interaction (migration, connectivity, transportation routes, and communication networks)” (Carney 1990).

2.2 Music and Migration

“Migrant music creates something new: “That musical repetition is acknowledged as “creating something new” is not a contradiction.” (Shelemay, 2006, 31)

In the study of music and migration, Baily attributes much of its development to Adeleida Reyes, whose research reveals that, “many things can happen to, with and through music in the migration situation” (Baily 2005: 216). As stated by Toynbee and Dueck (2011), migrant music brings together theories from diaspora and music studies to better understand complex musical translations in a cosmopolitan perspective. They note that existing literature on ‘World Music’ is lacking in discussion about migration and mobility. Alternatively, diaspora studies broadly debate the former, but pay little attention to the relevance of music. Further, according to Cohen, scholars progressively turn away from “fixed and bounded notions of culture” and have taken up “a language of mobility” – of travel and flow or “scapes” – to describe culture in a context of contemporary globalization.” (Cohen quoted in Toynbee and Dueck 2011: 247). Migrant music here is produced by migrants in ‘in-between spaces’, within transnational flows intersecting between what could be called the local and the global, gauging between agency and identity (Toynbee and Dueck 2011, Kiwan and Meinhof 2011). According to Toynbee and Dueck, migrating music(s) might be the most outstanding mode of performance of “otherness to mutual others” (Toynbee and Dueck 2011), revealing social imaginaries amongst “(...) people, largely unknown to one another, come to share a sense of affiliation” (Warner quoted in Toynbee and Dueck 2011: 22). Nationality transcending national borders is particularly relevant for migrants, where “(...) through acts of attention, performance and publication play a role in extending homelands across borders.” (Toynbee and Dueck 2011: 22). These social imageries therefore create cultural groups of a wider or narrower public, creating unity within a group through distinction from the outside group.

Migrant music defies fixed notions of culture by maintaining musical ties with the home country and simultaneously adapting their musical practices to their new environment (mimesis). In consequence, Baily labels music as “(...) a sensitive indicator of wider socio-cultural processes”. It is reflective, indicative and even proactive in “(...) supporting and even instigating political action.” (Baily 2015: 2) Further, the influence of neoliberalism on music is evident in the rise of displacement as well as the development of new communication technologies, resulting in structural inequalities to the advantage of Western music. According to Vanspauwen, contexts of rising populist racism have “essentialized understandings of culture, music and identity” (Vanspauwen 2014: 2).

In a fully mediated area, migrants can easily maintain contact with their musical commune. This facilitates connection to those at home as well as peers scattered all over the world. Musical hybridisation also arises in this context. Big cities are ideal for this, as in this setting local music encounters migrant music. This is described as mimesis for musical appropriation by Dueck. As articulated by Laura Steil, being torn between musical evolution and cultural authenticity is a significant issue in the young, black, French-born transnational community (Ibid., 3). Sometimes adaptations are initially provoked by anxiety of alterity, which then transforms and evolves towards something
more indigenised, “elaborated in response to the most pressing concerns of the people who have appropriated it.” (Toynbee and Dueck 2011: 10) This process of mimesis also involves translation of ‘other’ music into one’s own. This involves readaptation of the ‘other’ music into “your own system of conceptual and aesthetic categories, in which it makes sense and has value.” (Ibid., 8) Such transformations are expressions of creativity that allow translation of musical practices into contexts that might operate in quite distinctive ways from their initial context. “This may help to explain how it is that certain practices, instruments, and sounds – some appropriated in the heightened mimetic context of colonial or imperial encounter – become thoroughly indigenized in their new contexts (thus the harmonium is as indigenous in India as curry in the United Kingdom).” (Ibid.) Further, degrees of alteration in music culture and its performance in the migration situation depends, according to Baily, on the following; geographical distance between countries of origin and settlement; cultural similarity in terms of language, religion and other attributes; prospects for the future in terms of language, religion and other attributes; and prospects for the future in terms of security, employment and eventual integration in the host society. (Baily 2005: 213)

2.3 Music, and Identity

“Music not only functions to express and maintain pre-existing identities, it also provides resources for contesting and negotiating identities and constructing new ones” (Lidskog, 2017: 25)

The study of music and identity is generating growing interest within the subfield of ethnomusicology (Rice 2007, Lidskog 2017) as music is a fundamental part of culture and therefore “is important for individual and social identity formation. It can serve as a space and practice that binds group members together, so that they understand themselves as belonging to each other and maybe even having a specific task or mission to accomplish.” (Lidskog 2017: 25) “Music has the capacity to evoke emotion, provoke social and cognitive ties, thereby indirectly enacting and constructing “social identity and a social memory where the individual and social are linked.” (Shelemay 2006)

Despite a growing interest in identity by ethnomusicologists’ literature, few authors have written about its general significance for the subfield. Most studies focus on specific groups and extensive work implementing literature on identity is missing (Rice 2007, Lidskog 2017). This academic gap and the lack of cross referencing between authors limits “the potential of our field to grow in intellectual and explanatory power.” (Rice 2007: 20). According to Rice, the link between music and identity in the field of ethnomusicology had already been identified at the beginning of the 1980’s.

In accordance with Rice’s observations, the literature on identity is relatively wide and confusing. Therefore, an extended discussion of the term goes beyond the reach of this study. Nevertheless, I will provide some brief comments on the understanding of identity relevant to this research. Firstly, Stuart Hall’s introduction to “Who needs identity?” describes it as a concern of belonging to, or identifying with, social groups. Further, similar to Gordon Thompson’s study on an Indian caste ‘Carans’, my research is predominantly, but not exclusively, focused on the construction of a group identity. Identity is concerned with collective self-understanding, which may be reflected in a variety of ways, including through music. From a constructivist perspective, identity is something that is changeable and influenced by the different cultural and other influences surrounding the individual at different moments in his or her life. It is therefore alterable according to changing life situations and environments (Rice 2007: 24). An interesting example is Thomas Turion’s study in the Peruvian highlands. He asks about music’s role in the production of social identity forms, where both sense of belonging and self-understanding shift according to different contexts, and our self-representation is adapted accordingly. On the other hand, Foucault’s understanding is that a self “that could or would create an identity is a product of various “regimes” and “discourses” and thus is not a free agent in the creation of identities” (Ibid., 28). This means that the creation of identity here is not a result of agency, but has been shaped by obligations and has been socially constructed and based on factors like gender, nationality and social status (Nikolas Rose in Hall 1996). It is important to note here that “Music can be understood in both ways: as a regime of self-creation (subjectification) and as a tool of resistance to those regimes.” (Rice 2010: 28), making music a particularly powerful tool in the (conscious or unconscious) formation of identity.

To further clarify my understanding of the term “identity”, I would like to mention two definitions which are particularly relevant for me. Katzenstein suggests: “The term [identity] (by convention) references mutually constructed and evolving images of self and other” (Katzenstein quoted in Fearon 1999: 5) More significantly, Stuart Hall proposes that identity is not one but a multiple, and that identity is something built through a relationship: “Identity is a process, identity is split. Identity is not a fixed point but an ambivalent point. Identity is also the relationship of the Other to oneself” (Hall 1991: 16).

2.4 Music, dancing and performance

Musical performance and dancing are of particular interest in the migration setting, as they allow for enactments of both former and new cultural identities. They facilitate retrospective but also contribute to the creation of new forms of identity “indicative of the issues facing the immigrant, and which help in dealing with a new life in the place of settlement and in the articulation of new identities.” (Baily 2005: 217). Therefore, the musical event might be seen as a representation of ‘otherness’ (Rammarine 2007). Lewis phrases this in more inclusive terms, such that parties “create ‘community moments’ through a sense of unity around central, familiar cultural symbols.” (Lewis 2010: 571). It is important to mention here that these types of events can “not be strictly categorized as relating to ‘there’ or ‘here’ for music events containing both of homely familiarity and strange novelty.” (Ibid.) Very often, these types of events are not exclusively welcoming for diaspora members but, on the contrary, are largely open to participants from any nationality. By combining music, clothing, food and dancing, these kinds of ‘community events’ and parties create a homely and familiar atmosphere. According to Lewis, this kind of event also allows to move “(…)beyond an acknowledgment that there may
be divisions and differences within ‘communities’” (Ibid., 572). At these events, social status, age, gender, religion and ethnic differences are leveled. A central argument in Lewis’ analysis is “that such ‘community moments’ are a significant space for negotiating relationships between and affiliations to ‘here’ and ‘there’.” (Ibid.). Further, these types of events are also occasions to bring co-nationals who are scattered over different places together. In their 2006 paper, Baily and Collyer confirmed music and dancing’s inherent potential for creating migrants’ sense of identity and belonging. In his research on the Dabkeh dance by Palestinian refugees in the Jordanian Jordan Valley, Van Aken explores the way this displaced community manages to create a space for home by performing music and dance ‘out of place’ (Van Aken, 2006). Van Aken argues that music and dance “refer to other places, imagined or lived, linked to ideas of authenticity and identity.” (Ibid., 205) In this context, dance is performed to affirm ‘otherness’ towards the local population whilst celebrating their Palestinian roots. In this way, music is used for its attribute of being an identity marker.

2.5 Music and Memory

In 1959, Alan Lomax underlined music’s potential for prompting memories of the past and its capacity to encourage memories to emerge:

“(...) the primary effect of music is to give the listener a feeling of security, for it symbolizes the place where he was born, his earliest childhood satisfactions, his religious experience, his pleasure in community doings, his courtship and his work / any or all of these personality shaping experiences.”

(Lomax quoted in Baily, 2005,:216)

In Shelemay’s study on the Prizom, a hymn recited by Syrian Jewish diaspora in the US, discussions with his research participants on music and memory show the way in which musical experience is supported in memory as both “a sound world and an affect laden recollection of the past.” (Shelemay 2006: 20). A specific song or a certain type of musical event will unconsciously blend with features of the initial event, including place or company, as well as first encounters within a context. Conscious evocation of such memories can be done through textual or acoustic mnemonic devices (Ibid., 27). However, in the context of musical innovation, music’s attachment to memories becomes questionable. Tensions between maintenance of tradition and the creation of new forms of music can be indicative of the issues immigrants are facing. “They never come up with anything new because they are trying to keep the memory of home alive so they use the same songs” (Baily 2005: 143). There is a danger that if this continues, repetition will lead to cultural stagnation.

Relevant to the discussion on innovation versus maintenance is the accessibility of musical performances. Baily distinguished between two possible cases that he calls inward and outward directed performances. (Baily 2005) Inward directed performances are addressed to fellow nationals and try to remain as discrete as possible towards the host society. Outward directed performances are used to flag musicians’ cultural identity to others and generate understanding from the larger society. At the same time, these outward directed performances reveal the assumptions of the local population of what they expect immigrant’s music to sound like (Ibid., 217).

Music not only evokes memories, but it also reflects emotional connotations and can therefore “(...) be used to assert and negotiate identity in a particularly powerful manner” (Baily 1994: 48). Through its relationship with emotion, music has the power to evoke feelings, therefore to make someone feel (Shelemay 2006: 28). Evocation of feelings of nostalgia links past and present and eventually hopes for the future (Ibid.). To reconsider the question of repetition and cultural stagnation, it is interesting to add a further observation Shelemy perceived through his study. The repetition of songs, here the Prizom, evokes associations to former performances, but also adds new layers from the current context. This mergence of an original with an actual context creates memories of the new experience on a conscious and unconscious level. This has been discussed and proven by neuroscientists (LeDoux quoted in Shelemay, 2006: 29-30). In that sense, past memories and linked emotions remain through their mergence with actual ones for the long term, and will be remembered in the future for all their different layers of emotional memories.

2.6 Music, Transnationalism and Social Media

“(…)mediating technologies have permitted migrants to keep in touch in a nearly instantaneous manner with musical happenings vast distances away. Email, digitized music files and video hosting sites permit migrants to track the latest trends and dance moves from back home, and just as importantly to celebrate and create a shared musical history with distant intimates.”

(Toynbee and Dueck, 2015:2)

Due to video hosting platforms and social media, music is circulated quickly and widely from its original place of recording. This allows a person to listen to their music of choice at any moment and follow musical evolution from home country anywhere in the world. It also allows musicians in the home country to follow musical activity worldwide. As such, migrants have become significant in constructing musical networks (Appadauri 1996, Warner 2002), giving music the potential “to migrate more quickly, and to arrive in more places simultaneously, in very similar forms, compared to previous centuries.” (Toynbee and Dueck, 2011, chapter 4). This shift towards the broad accessibility of music from any place in the world, “(...) from the ‘private collection’ of recordings (Stokes 1994) to the ‘public library’ of songs available through video hosting sites – have implications for sociability, self-making and the sense of well-being of highly mobile populations” (Toynbee and Dueck 2015: 22).

Specific to the Afghan context, this means that “Afghanistan” was no longer the population of a specific geographical location, but an amorphous virtual globalised disbursement that after many years of conflict was beginning to gain a sense of itself as a transnational community, made possible
in part by the advent of new communications technology.” (Baily 2015: 168). In a similar vein, Helland (2007), in the context of diasporic and transnational religious traditions, analysed how the internet and online activity are a means to not only create connections amongst diaspora people but also to create connections between these people and the homeland itself. Ultimately, online networks and social media create “a sense of immediacy, which shrinks distances and allows for a level of interactivity and accessibility that has not been available in the past.” (Helland 2007: 974).

2.7 Afghan Music

“Music is an important element of a shared culture that allows diasporic Afghans to retain and experience their ‘Afghan identity.’” (Baily, 2011:180)

Historically, national radio and television were prominent platforms for Afghan musicians to promote their talent. However, his mode of transmission was interrupted when the Taliban took power in 1996 and shut down the TV stations and prohibited radio stations from playing any instrumental music. Under Talibain rule, only religious chants were allowed. Prior to the Taliban regime, Afghan music suffered censorship and unrest under the mujahedeen and the Soviet era and many musicians had already started to leave the country from 1978 (Baily 2009, Broughton 2002).

Music remains an important aspect of Afghan weddings, where dances such as the ‘atan’, a circular traditional dance, is performed by both men and women. There are many Afghan instruments, including the rubab, which is a string instrument often referred to as the Afghan national instrument. The original meaning of the word rubab is contested, but currently it is said to be “a combination of two words: rau meaning ‘soul’ and báb meaning ‘doorway’, so the rubáb becomes ‘the doorway to the soul’.” (Baily 2015: 20) Nowadays, most famous rubab players live in exile. The dotar is a string instrument with a long neck made out of mulberry wood. The danbura is a fretless two-string instrument carved out of mulberry wood. The zirbaghali is a drum made out of clay or wood, covered with goatskin. The tabla is a double-sided drum originally from India and brought to Afghanistan at the beginning of the 20th century. The harmonia is similar to the accordion and mostly accompanies the singer.

As noted by Baily, it is of great importance for the ethnomusicographer to question how musicians define themselves and the different kinds of music they play or listen to. Consequently, researchers should follow musical style differentiations used by native musicians and audiences. To clarify some musical style terms used in the film Afghan Son(g)s by the research participants, I will provide some brief notions of the most relevant styles described by Baily (Baily 1981b). ‘Musiqi-ye klasik’ or Classical music refers to Hindustani music, “often referred to as ‘Indian classical music’.” (Ibid., 107). Ghazal is another music form, referring to “the singing of serious Persian poetry.” (Ibid.). Reciting poems from the great Persian poets like Hafez and Rumi. Mahali is what could be called local or ‘folk music’, referring to music that has been “handed down through oral tradition over the generations and being performed by non-specialists.” (Ibid.). These types of local music differ according to regional language and ethnic groups, and accordingly reflect diverse influences in style and employ instruments from neighbouring countries. This is a testament to Afghanistan’s geographical and historical situation at crossroads between empires. Thus, music is often identified by its regions. Kilwali is referred to by Baily as ‘popular music’ and has largely been broadcast on Afghan radio. Finally, qawwali can be seen as a musical expression of Sufi poetry, with sound as spiritual power (Lorraine Sakata 1996: 1) bringing one’s soul closer to God. “Qawwali is a recognized musical genre in the Indian subcontinent. It shares general traits with the light classical music of North India and Pakistan, but has unique characteristics related to its religious function.” (Khan et all. 2015: 1701).

As previously mentioned, one of the more prominent researchers on Afghan music is the ethnomusicologist John Baily, who undertook extensive research into the musical practice of Afghan musicians in exile. Through what he describes as ‘fieldwork movie’, he follows several musicians between their exile in Pakistan, California, Germany and the UK. One of his most important films was undoubtedly, “Amir: An Afghan refugee musician’s life in Peshawar” (Baily 1985). The film follows a rubab player Baily met during one of his former fieldworks in the 1970’s in Herat and who now lives in exile in Peshawar with fellow Afghan musicians. In his research, Baily observes two kinds of ‘functions’ for Afghan musical performance outside the home country: one that maintains links with the past, mostly observed in the Afghan refugee musician community in Peshawar, and the one that looks for a new mixed identity. The latter function appears in his study in Fremont, California, where mostly Afghan amateur musicians mix their musical practice between Afghan music and electronic Western-style music. New music styles created in exile become models that shape practices at home and influences from Western music are undeniable, as described in Baily 2005. A young generation of mostly nonprofessional Afghan musicians try to adapt their own music with that of their host society, introducing, for example, the keyboard into Afghan music: “Musical dissemination and pedagogy is also in flux, for example, keyboard players record close ups of their hands whilst playing popular tunes and subsequently upload the material onto video hosting sites as a teaching tool for their family and friends who may be living in Herat, Hamburg, Kabul or California.” (Saljuqi 2013: 5). Even the new national anthem, adopted in 2004, was created by two Afghans living in Washington DC and Germany respectively (Ibid., 23). Baily also identifies the importance of the United States and Germany as new centres for Afghan music’s creativity, following the restrictions placed on music in the home country. The emergence of a new kind of dance music, developed earlier by the famous Afghan singer Ahmad Zahir, took considerable advantage of the electronic keyboard with its built-in rhythmic programs and instrumental imitation facilities, enabling many musicians to function, “(...) as one-man bands” (Baily 2005: 227). This tendency also fed back “(...) to Afghanistan itself, tending to replace older styles of popular music associated with Radio Afghanistan.” (Baily 2011: 186).

The move into exile of most of Afghanistan’s music masters (called ‘ustads’), spreading mostly to the US, Germany and the UK, (Baily 2005, 2010b, 2011, Doubleday 2007, Broughton 2002, Saljuqi 2013) brought musical knowledge into the Afghan diaspora. This facilitated the maintenance of Afghan music in different parts of the world, but also widely scattered the country’s musical talent. An illustrative example might be Homayoon Sakhi, a rubab player born into one of Afghanistan’s leading musical families. Like many musicians, Sakhi relocated to Peshawar in 1992 where he maintained his
practice. Unlike many Afghans in Peshawar who returned to Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban, Sakhi made his way to Fremont in California where he founded the Sakhi Ensemble and became in leader of the local music community. (Sajuqi 2013: 66-67). Another similar example in the promotion of Afghan music abroad is Ustad Hosein Arman, who formerly practiced as music teacher and radio musician in Kabul, and his son Khaled Arman, who completed his musical studies assisted by a scholarship at the Conservatory in Prague. Khaled Arman was fully trained in ‘Western art music’ and later became attracted to Afghan traditional music through playing the rubab, “to which he has made significant structural changes” (Baily 2010c: 83). Both established themselves in Geneva, where they founded the Ensemble Kabul, and took “a leading role in what was now becoming established as the ‘world music market’.” (Ibid.) The Ensemble’s first CD was produced under the artistic direction of Laurent Aubert, former director of the Ateliers d’Ethnomusicologie in Geneva. The Ensemble toured “extensively in Europe, adding occasional performances of Indian and Iranian art music to their programme”. And after their (now former) member Ustad Farida Mahwash, the only female Afghan singer having gained the title of ‘master’, won the BBC-Songlines Top of the World Music Award in 2003, the group received recognition within World Music circles. Unfortunately, this interest in Afghan music quickly faded. The “most obvious indicators of this declining interest is the absence of recordings of Afghan music from the review section of Songlines over the past few years.” (Baily 2010c: 84).

World Music’s awareness of Afghan music is also reflected in the 2010 publication of the ‘The Rough Guide To The Music Of Afghanistan’ and BBC World Service attention, broadcasting two programs dedicated to Afghan music, one called Studio 7 and presented by Haroon Yousoufi, the other called Zamzama, presented by Haroon’s wife Amina. Both shows have been discontinued. “The BBC World Service’s Studio 7 and Zamzama programmes have an important place in the narrative of the global circulation of the music culture of Afghanistan in the first decade of the twenty-first century,” (Baily 2011: 193). Both programs focused on a predominantly Afghan public.

III Methodology

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The main medium of this research is film. Therefore, its method is embedded in visual methodologies, which have received growing interest in fields of social sciences during the last two decades. Nevertheless, visual methods appear to be more popular in Anglo-Saxon research, and were first used in ethnology (Pink, Banks), as well as in geography (Rose). The increasing interest in visual methods is reflected in the ever-growing literature which introduces and analyses different works using visual methodologies, with authors such as Gillian Rose, Stuart Hall, Nicholas Mirzoeff, Markus Banks, Sarah Pink, to name only a few. The present work situates itself in the strand of works that use visual methods “to explore social phenomena in their fieldwork. This strand has its roots in visual anthropology and visual sociology. The journal Visual Studies is the main outlet for work in this tradition.” (Ball and Gilligen 2010: 17). I therefore use film more in the sense that it is used by sociologists and anthropologists, and not like most geographers’ films, which mainly focus on place rather than social interactions.

The present research is qualitative and uses collaboration-based filmed participant observation (Maggi et al. 2008: 11) and filmed semi-directed interviews as its main methods. The camera is used to record and reproduce ambiances, verbal and non-verbal interactions and (musical) performances. The camera becomes the catalyst for situations, discussions and emotions that might not have arisen in its absence. In this process of filmed participant observation, the researcher “l‘oin de demeurer extérieur au procès observé et enregistré avec la caméra, en simple observateur distant ou contemplateur, devient lui-même partie de ce processus de recherche filémique.” (op.cit.). In consequence, the two elements that define the research approach adopted are, on the one hand, the idea that “neutrality of the researcher” is a myth to be demystified and, on the other hand, the idea that research must be collaborative, that is, it must not be about people but rather with people (Pink, 2001, Banks 2001). My aim is to avoid the pitfall of creating a false hierarchy between the researcher and the researched. As argued by Young (in Baily, 2009a: 57), the researcher or filmmaker must not attempt to “act as an aloof, detached observer” but rather “as someone watching as much as possible from the inside”. It is in this spirit that I follow Grasseni’s idea that the researcher must appreciate and, to a certain extent, appropriate, the way of seeing of the observed (cited in Pink 2008:244). The reality produced during a research project is therefore always negotiated between the researcher and the participants (Pink 2001). By engaging in collaborative research I ensure that it is “the participants’ perspectives and concerns which structure the film” as opposed to my own analysis of their culture (Hancock quoted in Baily 2009a: 57).

As pointed on by Magritte in his famous painting ‘The Treachery of Images’ or better known as ‘This is Not a Pipe’, paintings, pictures and film will always remain a representation of something and can therefore never show the full ‘reality’. They remain a reproduction of a certain setting or an event that happened at a certain moment in time which has been centred by its producer. Through using video,
my aim is not that of equating visuality with reality, but rather that of showing certain elements of experience which are visible (Pink 2001). By adopting a collaborative approach, I had the opportunity to reflect upon these visible elements and the multiple meanings they might have for different people, as well as on the aspects of experience that are not visible (Pink 2001). Through recognising reality as always being negotiated, it seems important to acknowledge the context of the visual’s production as well its procedure and what impact the presence of a camera might have on the situation it represents (Baily 2001, Pink 2013, Rose 2016).

This objectivity versus subjectivity debate, which has marked a turn in the history of visual anthropology, has since the 21st century “departed from pure observation to emphasise the intersubjectivity and collaborative aspects of the production of photography and video.” (Pink 2006: 36). A reflexive approach on the mode of discourse production is echoed within the film, the relation between researcher and research participant as well as the presence of the camera is here fully assumed and, unlike cinema film, its production and ‘research aspect’ remain visible.

Film in research on music and sound

“Research into the geographies of sound and music has developed over the last 20 years, yet such work largely remains reliant on conventional verbal-textual methods of data collection and dissemination.” (Gallagher and Prior, 2014:267)

For the current research, the method of film is of particular interest for its capacity to record and reproduce sound as well as the event’s atmosphere, dance movements and peoples’ interactions. Pink (2009: 101) highlights that video recording an event or an encounter creates a sense of “place” through the “coming together of social, material and sensorial encounters that constitute an event”. On a second level, place is also “remade as a representation of that phenomenological reality”. The use of film therefore enables the researcher to convey and represent the sensorial and phenomenological aspects of experience. Video further gives research participants a platform to share their musical practice, favouring research participants’ active intervention in the research process. In consequence, proximity to the participants is central. Further, I found John Baily’s ‘fieldwork movies’ very helpful in developing the best way to film the musicians and their audience. “John Baily’s films encourage ethnomusicologists to take filmmaking more seriously as a research tool and as a way of communicating ethnographic knowledge. The films, together with some of Baily’s other publications (2005, 2007), are important documentation of the neglected Afghan diaspora and its contemporary music culture.” (Baily 2009b: 167). According to Baily (2015) an “observational” approach to filmmaking is a way of “performing ethnography” (2015: 3). In a broader sense, Gilber Rouget estimates “qu’il faut donner à voir autant que donner à entendre” (Rouget quoted in Lochmann, 1988: 205) and Hugo Zemp emphasises another aspect which may be transmitted by film, “l’émotion musicale si difficilement saisissable par l’écrit”. (Zemp quoted in Lochmann 1988: 208). This was further developed by Lochman, who states that film allows the researcher to record scenes that only a musician’s audience sitting very closely could witness, namely ‘close-ups’ on the musician’s fingers, high-angle views on the instruments and detailed visuals of how the musician embraces his instrument (Lochmann 1988: 207).

3.2 Research Design

As previously mentioned, using film for the collection and dissemination of research data is a more direct way of transmitting the information than conventional verbal-textual research forms. In addition, generally it is not the interviews themselves that are the most revealing, but moments that happen around the production of the film, such as informal discussions about the project and suggestions made by research participants on what they think I should or could show. These moments provide information on how participants would like to appear in front of the camera and under what ‘role’ (Pink 2004). The camera’s presence therefore provokes (inter)actions and enables a more direct implication of the research participants. As noted by Pink (2004: 62), video interview is not to be merely considered as a recorded interview, rather it reveals “a situation where the video camera and the informant’s understanding of video’s potential for representation is an integral part of the interview itself and of the way it is analysed”. The camera itself is to be understood as a (non-human) agent in the research process and it becomes an integral part of the relationship between researcher and participant (Pink 2004). Additionally, using video provides the opportunity to share recordings with research participants and receive their feedback. Watching footage together were key moments for participant implication, mostly for giving feedback on the footage. Participants suggested other events or locations or persons to film or interview, or sometimes watching the footage remind them of something they forgot to say and want to share in front of the camera. Video can also act as a motivator to participate. Several participants asked me beforehand to see footage of events I had already recorded, and after seeing their friends appearing in the video they wanted to participate as well. Another great advantage of doing research with video is the opportunity to give back. All the footage I produced during rehearsals and concerts will be of concrete use to the musicians. I plan to undertake a second editing of filmed material they can later use as promotional film.

Further, video filming is practiced by the research participants themselves. Some of the participants of the Nauruz (the Persian New Year) party also filmed the event with their own cameras, and most, maybe even all, used their mobile phone at certain moments to record specific moments or songs. Also, as I had already observed on social media platforms before filming for the current research, most of the musicians and their friends film informal music sessions or concerts and instantly put these videos and photos on social media. In consequence, nobody appeared to be concerned by my camera’s presence. On the contrary, the camera was generally welcomed and several people approached me and asked to be photographed.

Video was also particularly useful when it came to evaluating my way of interviewing participants. After rehearsing the first interviews, I was able to reflect on how I ask and formulate questions. Through
observing the body language of the interviewees I was able to reflect on how I position myself physically during the interview. This direct feedback allowed me to adapt my approach for further interviews. Consequently, throughout the process I readapted interview questions and settings. Besides video as the main research tool, I also kept a research journal, allowing me to note down thoughts, observations and discussions that happened off camera.

3.2.1 My Presence at Events and Informal Discussions

The legitimacy of my presence never seemed to be questioned as I was immediately associated with being a friend of Mansoor, who seems to be a central figure to musical events organised in Geneva. As Ali states during an interview, “Je ne connais pas d’autre musiciens. Je ne connais pas d’autres avant Mansoor il y avait pas des fêtes comme ça. C’est grâce à lui qu’a commencé ces événements, c’est après lui qu’il y a des fêtes, des festivals Afghans [ici à Genève].” (Ali) Even though I was often the only woman present at these events, this never seemed to be an issue. This was mostly because none of the events were exclusively for men. Rather, this was a result of the recent Afghan arrivals in Geneva, where men form a majority and they know very few Afghan women around the same age. For example, Mansoor invited the young Afghan women he knows in Geneva to the Nauruz party but they did not attend.

The approach was certainly made easier by the fact that I had already known Mansoor for two years and my partner is one of Mansoor’s friends and a regular participant in Afghan events. They both helped me to establish contact with other research participants. The fact that I was always present with my camera also facilitated contact with event participants, as several approached me asking me to take pictures of them. At the beginning I feared that my presence with the camera would be too intrusive and that the noise of the setup might disturb the musicians’ rehearsal or that I would break their concentration if I came too close with my camera. However, I slowly realised that I was the only person concerned about these things.

During rehearsals I tried to capture the relationships and interactions between the musicians in between the pieces. The discussions we had together during the breaks also enriched the research and allowed me to ask questions and for them to explain their interest in music and stories about Afghanistan in general. As mentioned by Pink, filming became a much wider event, talking about “(...) cultural knowledge and personal experience” (Pink 2004: 67) and also allowed participants to question me on my own practice. In order to keep track of what had been said off-camera during these informal discussions, I kept field notes where I wrote down all the little episodes they told me I should ask about in my interview questions.
3.2.2 Supplementary use of Photography

During the five months that I followed the musicians I covered several events and rehearsals and I regularly sent them the photographs I took. This allowed me to quickly give something back, as it is easier and faster to share pictures with participants than it is with film, and photographs don’t require time to edit as does film. This also allowed me to take advantage of my professional background as photographer. The musicians published the pictures on social media to promote themselves as musicians. Of interest to me was being able to see the comments these pictures received. Comments were mostly compliments about how beautiful the person is or how nicely they play. People commenting were mostly Afghans, living either abroad or in Afghanistan. The comments were mostly written in Dari. Further analysis of these comments is beyond the scope of this research, I therefore only mention them briefly at this juncture.

3.2.3 The Nauruz Party:

The Nauruz party, organised by Mansoor, forms both the starting and central point of this research. The Nauruz party is the Persian celebration of New Year, happening the first day of spring, following a solar-based calendar. Nauruz celebrations have a long history, dating from before the Islamic period, with its roots in Zoroastrianism. “In Afghanistan Nowruz is generally celebrated by the northern people.” (Ibrahimi ed all., 2015: 9). The celebration organised by Mansoor had music with dancing as the focus of the evening, with a break for food in between two music sessions. Food was prepared by some of Mansoor’s friends, including rice with chicken and a chickpea sauce as well as fried potatoes. Some brought firni, an Afghan sweet mainly made out of milk, rose water and cardamom, for desert. The party was set up in the communal space of the Charmille neighbourhood in Geneva, a place that is ideal for communal activities. Roughly sixty people attended the festivities, with a striking majority of men. Only three women were present during the evening, including me and a friend of mine. Only one Afghan female singer was present and she sang two or three songs towards the end of the party. In terms of age, the majority of participants were in their twenties. Few participants had been in Switzerland for more than ten years and most participants arrived with a recent migration movement around 2014/15. Party participants were mostly informed about the event on a private WhatsApp group created by Mansoor. Therefore participants were all in some way linked to Mansoor. A gender division was also observed at other events, except the concert at “Poussières du monde” which was part of an official festival program. When I asked Mansoor about this division, he told me that mostly he invites his friends to concerts and that he knows very few Afghan women in Geneva. Those he does know he had invited for the Nauruz party, but they did not come. I asked the same question to an older musician about women’s activities as musicians and he mentioned that their numbers are increasing. However, he thinks that the evident distinction may exist because for a long time being a musician was not a highly respected activity and that this perspective is even more negative for women.
Figure 10-45: Impressions from the Nauruz party.
3.2.4 Research Participants

I have used a single musicians’ practice as a starting point, circulating around his audience and co-
practitioners to get a fuller picture of Afghan musical practice in Geneva. This methodological choice
meant that almost all of my informants were in the same age range and had arrived in Switzerland
at similar times. Most participants are therefore in their twenties and arrived in Switzerland around
2014 and 2015. Only few participants have lived in Geneva for longer. As previously mentioned, the
Nauruz party formed the research’s starting point. All the research participants were present at this
event. The musicians who played on this evening are not completely identical to the group, Ham Awa,
that I followed during the rehearsals. The musicians that played at the Nauruz evening mainly play
with Mansoor in two different groups: Les Intergalactiques, a group of musicians defining themselves
through their migratory backgrounds, mixing Afghan, Indian, Eritrean, Kurdish and Algerian music,
and Ham Awa, a group playing Afghan music formed less than a year ago by its four members, three
Afghans and one French musician. During the Nauruz celebration, all three Afghan members of Ham
Awa were present, accompanied by two French members from Les Intergalactiques. My decision
to further follow Ham Awa during their rehearsals was based on the fact that the current research
focuses on the role of Afghan music for Afghans living abroad. Out of the two groups, Ham Awa is
the only one performing uniquely Afghan music. More importantly, I followed Farhad’s invitation to
film their rehearsals to get a better impression of Afghan music as, according to him, the music they
play with Ham Awa is more representative of Afghan music than what they played at the Nauruz
party (I later understood this musical difference he spoke of, as I will describe under the subheading
‘Research Findings’). In consequence, I filmed a total of four rehearsals of Ham Awa, which generally
take place on Saturday afternoons. Three rehearsals took place in the elementary music school in
Gaillard, France, and one took place in Farhad’s living room, as this allowed him to work in his
kiosk later that evening. With Ham Awa, I also recorded a concert during the festival “Poussières
du Monde”, which took place in Geneva. The concert was promoted under the festival’s program,
thereby attracting a mainly European audience, unlike the other events I followed. As with the Nauruz
party, Mansoor organised a smaller concert with Ham Awa for the Eid al-Fitr festivities at the end of
June. All the other persons that were interviewed, except for my partner Hassan, were suggested by
and contacted through Mansoor, who understood the aim of the research from the beginning. The
people he suggested for me to interview all share an interest in Afghan music and, as already mentioned,
know Mansoor well. We tried to ensure that the research participants came from different regional
origins or grew up in a neighbouring country in order to see if this might alter their relationship with
Afghan music.

To briefly summarise the backgrounds of the research participants, I will provide some facts that
might be of interest regarding the importance they each attach to Afghan music. This information was
shared with me when I asked them to introduce themselves. I didn’t specifically ask for their age, only
for the place where they grew up and if their family is still in Iran or Afghanistan. I also didn’t ask for
their legal status, but I am aware that most are either still waiting their asylum decision or have already
received subsidiary protection or refugee status.

Hassan Shahzada had a central role in this research due to the fact that he is my partner and he
followed the whole process as translator and interviewee. He arrived in Switzerland in 2012. He was
born and grew up in Mazār-i-Sharif, Afghanistan. He regularly listens to Afghan music but doesn’t
have family ties to musicians. He is 27 years old and all of his family still lives in Afghanistan.

Hasan Suleimani was born and grew up in Iran and came to Switzerland in 2015. All of his family still
lives in Iran. His mother and aunt listened to Afghan music on an irregular basis, but he was mostly
familiarised with Iranian music. His family originally is from Kabul and he is 20 years old.

Ali D was born and grew up in Iran but was introduced to Afghan culture and music by his father. His
family originally came from Herat, the western part of Afghanistan. He has been in Switzerland for
three-and-a-half years and is 20 years old.

Samir T is originally from Badghis Province, located in the northwest of the country next to Turkmenistan
and the province of Herat. He is in his mid-twenties. He did not mention when he arrived in Switzerland.
He does not live with his family and has limited contact with them.

Bakhtiar R was born in Afghanistan but grew up in Iran. His father frequently listened to the danbura,
a main instrument of Hazaragi music, as his family is part of the Afghan Hazara minority. He arrived
in Switzerland almost three years ago and the rest of his family still live in Iran.

As for the musicians:

Qais H arrived in France two years ago and currently lives in Grenoble. He is 24 years old and
is originally from Kabul. He started making music in the Kuche Kharabat, the famous musicians’ quarter in Kabul. His family listened to Afghan music regularly, but he is the first member of the family to become a musician. Now his brother, who is still in Afghanistan, has also become a musician. Qais used to play in music shows at the Kabul-based ‘1TV’ TV station. He is presently undertaking an apprenticeship and plays music in his spare time.

Farhad D came to Switzerland during the 1990’s after living for several years in Iran. Besides his work and family obligations, he plays the rubab in his spare time.

Mansoor lives together with his brother in Geneva, where he arrived three years ago. His father played music and taught Mansoor how to play the tabla and harmonium, although they are not a family of professional musicians. Mansoor was born and grew up in Mazar-I-Sharif, the main city of Balkh province in the north of Afghanistan, close to the Tadjik and Uzbek border. Besides his activity with Ham Awa, he also plays with Les Intergalactiques. Les Intergalactiques is a group formed around the musicians’ migration backgrounds and mixes all the member’s different musical influences. Mansoor also keeps his music as a side activity but he hopes to one day focus only on his musical career. His family remains widespread due to asylum policies. His father was transferred to Germany under the Dublin Regulation and the rest of his family is waiting for resettlement under the UN Refugee Agency in Turkey. Mansoor’s father continues to play music. I first met Mansoor when Hassan invited him and his father (before he was deported to Germany) to play for my birthday approximately three years ago. Hassan and Mansoor share a special link in that they are both from the same city, although they did not know each other before meeting in Switzerland. For Hassan, Mansoor was also a main figure who brought Afghan music into his Swiss context. Hassan began to attend music events only after he met Mansoor.

The fact that the three musicians are originally from different regions is of particular interest because, as explained in the chapter on Afghan music, regional differences in music are significant and Kabul, Herat and Mazar-I-Sharif are the three main musical centres in Afghanistan. The music from Herat is more influenced by Iranian music, whereas the music from Kabul and Mazar-I-Sharif has more in common with Indian music.

I should mention that, not without hesitation, I decided to not include the two Geneva-based ustad’s Hussein and Khaled Arman. Even though they are knowledgeable authorities on Afghan music, I decided not to include them despite having already made contact with them. I made this decision because they were not present at the Nauruz party and they are not much involved in music events for young Afghans. Most research participants had never seen Khaled Arman in concert because their group, “Ensemble Kabul”, mostly performs at events intended for a ‘World Music’ audience, often with expensive tickets which prevents the research participants from attending. The group also does not appear to have had many public performances in the past few years, which is the period in which most research participants arrived in Geneva and France.

3.2.5 Language and Interview Locations

As most research participants arrived only recently in Switzerland and France, they are more comfortable expressing themselves in Dari. Accordingly I opted to work with a translator for all the interviews. This choice was further founded on the fact that I myself have absolutely no knowledge of Dari or Pashto, the two main Afghan languages. Having a translator allowed me to partly follow the informal discussions they had between them. Participants mostly understood when I communicated with them in French but depending on their French level they asked Hassan, my translator and partner, to translate their answers. In general I observed that their explanations in Dari were more detailed, but when I asked questions in French some tried to answer in French, partly due to the fact that they thought this would be easier for me when editing the film. Generally I asked my translator to politely explain that I prefer that they speak Dari, as it was more important to me that their answers were exhaustive than that I understood their answer immediately. After the first two interviews I always insisted that although I would ask the questions in French, if they didn’t understand the translator could translate the question for them. I also advised that they could switch from French to Dari at any moment. In hindsight I realised that the majority of participants answered in French regardless. To avoid this I should have asked my translator to directly ask the questions in Dari which would probably have influenced the language in which they answered. To facilitate the editing of the film, I asked my translator to briefly translate each answer that was given in Dari, allowing me to pre-select parts of the interview that seemed relevant to my research questions. Once I had selected the most relevant footage I asked him to translate precisely what was said. This technique carries the risk of missing parts that may have been interesting. However it was not realistic to ask my translator to translate every word in the many hours of footage.

Mansoor and Hassan had central roles in this research. Both were present most of the time I was filming as well as during part of the editing process. Therefore, both had a double role in the process both in front of and behind the camera. This is most evident for Hassan, who switches constantly between translator and research participant. Unlike the other persons interviewed, Hassan was present at almost all the interviews in his role as a translator, except the one with Farhad and Bakthiar, as I knew both of them better than my translator did and I was aware of their high level of French. Like Mansoor, Hassan also knew most the participants beforehand.

Initially I chose to interview people separately, with only Hassan present as translator. This was to ensure that everyone had the space to speak, as I feared that interviewing several people at the same time would lead to only the dominant characters speaking. I was also aware that some people might feel uncomfortable speaking in front of others. Here, I used Hassan as a “mentor”, as described by Shlemy (Shlemy 2006: 21), moving him from his role as translator to the role of discussant, sharing his point of view and nourishing the interviewee’s input. “A third interlocutor in the ethnographic interview is, of course, the “monitor”, the ethnographer (in this case myself), “who evaluates the narrative as it is negotiated and seeks to ascertain that it is complete.” (Ibid.). In order to avoid a frontal setting between the camera (with me behind the camera) and the interviewee, I encouraged Hassan to react to people’s answers and to feel free to add his own thoughts whenever
he deemed them interesting. Giving so much importance to the translator of course brings with it the ‘danger’ that he starts interpreting questions in his own way and directs interviews with his own answers. However, it seemed more important to foster a discursive environment which encouraged them to speak more freely about the topic, rather than have them directly answering my questions.

In a same spirit, I asked Mansoor if he wanted to assist with some interviews in order to facilitate open discussions and to avoid frontal interviews. With this kind of setting there may be some bias in the interviewees’ answers on their appreciation of Afghan music and some styles (also played by Mansoor) in particular. For interviews where Mansoor was present, it cannot be excluded that his presence may have influenced some answers. However, this would have been the case even without him present, as all participants already knew of our friendship. Second, my own presence may have influenced some answers, as stated by Shelemay: “In the case of the ethnographic interview, the ethnographer’s strong interest in testimony may inflect both the memories brought to the fore and the emotions associated with them.” (Ibid., 30). As I or my translator / interpreter had already explained a rough outline of my research to them, they knew about my interest in Afghan music and may have emphasised their interest in Afghan music more so than they would have in conversation with someone who was not researching this topic. This kind of bias can be excluded in interviews with musicians, as for them it seems natural to speak about their passion and they all warmly welcomed the opportunity to talk about Afghan music.

Further, I always asked research participants to suggest a place where they would feel at ease to be interviewed. Unfortunately this was not always the best place for sound quality, as evident in the interview with Samir in the park. Ideally I would have held the interview before or after an event, but unfortunately during the realisation of this research, no other event like the Nauruz party occurred. Therefore I had to organise interviews separately.

3.2.6 Technical Aspects

Classes in filmmaking, the use of research, critical questioning of systems of domination and current preconceptions of culture and identity taught during my MA undoubtedly were of help in this research. Due to my professional background as a photographer I was already equipped with some of the necessary materials. I therefore decided to use my own photo camera to film. Not having to hire equipment also gave me independence and flexibility for situations where there might be a last-minute opportunity to film an event, rehearsal or spontaneous music presentation in a kiosk or at Mansoor’s residence. Whilst this was an advantage, I later realised that my camera was not ideal to film with. The musicians were very happy to be recorded by the musicians and my friend. The musicians were very happy to be recorded with professional sound quality and even suggested that we could create a video clip in a nice natural setting such as a park near the lake or the Salève. Due to the limited timeframe of this research, this recording will take place after conclusion of this study.

3.2.7 Videos from Social Media and Video Hosting Sites

As stated by Cook and Crang, “The most pressing problem for the geography student setting out to make an ethnographic film which will be both the finished product, and the research material, concerns the skills and resources needed to do this.” (Crang and Cook 2007: 118) As indicated previously, I initially underestimated the double role of researcher and filmmaker and had a misguided confidence of my technical skills due to my experience as a photographer. Nevertheless, I managed to capture on film most of the moments I wanted. But, as most participants told me about videos they put on social media, I became aware of the significance of including them in the final film. As this material wasn’t filmed by me, it also gives a more intimate view on spontaneous and informal music sessions. I also asked Mansoor and Hassan to film moments of spontaneous music making, which mostly occur at Mansoor’s residence or in parks. In consequence, Mansoor sent me some videos that he mostly
filmed while playing with other musicians, but only few included interactions with the audience. Some of the interviewees also shared with me videos they had filmed themselves and uploaded to social media and allowed me to use them for my film. When I asked if I could use videos they had posted on Facebook their general reaction was very puzzled, sometimes jokingly asking: “Why you think I put it on Facebook? It is already accessible for everybody, so there are no worries if you want to use it.”

3.2.8 Editing Process and Film

To start my inquiry I filmed the Nauruz concert. Most of the following steps were suggested by my research participants. I soon abandoned the idea of keeping a strict storyline, as Baily said in relation to his own work, he would rather show something than tell a story, following principles of observational cinema (Baily 2009a: 57). I considered it to be more enriching research-wise to follow events and moments to film that were suggested by the research participants, rather than deciding myself on a predetermined storyline to follow. But, contrary to Baily in what he describes as ‘the Fieldwork Movie’, I kept a more rigid formula by including interviews. Even though I considered Baily’s approach to filming interesting and enriching, due to time restrictions and length of the final film I decided to include more formal interviews which enabled me to compress information. As stated before, some interview questions helped the participants to focus on stories I heard and interactions I observed off-camera.

A crucial part of the film was the editing process. As stated, Baily’s films were of particular use to guide me on how to edit my rushes. As previously mentioned, I am mostly interested in Afghan music for the events it creates. Therefore, I decided to cut the film around events I could follow, with the Nauruz party as returning element. I also decided to add a voice-over in order to bring in a more personal note, to give space to personal reflections and to bridge time and space jumps. The voice-over also allows me to reaffirm my presence in the field and to make explicit the fact that the “reality” shown is not an objective one but negotiated between the participants and myself. Ultimately all shots have been taken through my own filter (Maggi et al. 2008: 11). Following Hancock, making my presence explicit makes its impact not concealed but revealed, affecting the apparent authenticity of what is documented (Hancock quoted in Young 1975, 74). The voice-over also allowed me to compress information that otherwise would need to be cut together from different sections and may have resulted in confusion. It therefore was important that I did the voice-over myself, as often it expresses my thoughts and allows me to bridge my mental leaps in an efficient way. To hear my voice allows the viewer to get some supplementary information about the researcher, therefore following Banks who emphasised the importance of context to a visual’s comprehension (Banks 2001)” et “Enfin, dans l’analyse de la voix-off, on ne peut pas négliger la qualité de l’oralité qu’elle porte et qui la dénote. La connotation de la voix (sexe, age, etc), le style de la diction, ainsi que les intonations employées contribuent largement, on le sait, à la signification du contenu du texte communiqué” (Paggi 2011: 2)

The biggest challenges of the editing process are to find a good balance between the final product and the documentation of the research process, keeping in mind the research question, and constructing a logical progression that is comprehensible to an audience who didn’t follow the research and are not accustomed to the specific field. In that sense, I took the decision to not include the interview with Qais. Due to the fact that he arrived only towards the end at the Nawruz party and did not attend any other events I was filming, he is visible in very few sequences. Therefore, his appearance in the film was not clear and no visual links to him could be made.

I further decided to include photographs of the two main events in the film, as they enabled me to show another perspective and to mark key moments, giving an effect of ‘freeze frame’. Except for the last photograph sections, the photographs are always combined with the voice-over, in order to visually differentiate these moments of the film. Throughout the film, the voice-over becomes less important and the participants’ speech increases. Finally, the last picture section remains without voice-over, letting the pictures speak for themselves and allowing the participants’ words to resonate in the observer’s mind while watching the film’s final sequence.
V Discussion of Results

Gathering the (filmed) data of the current research created significant opportunities to obtain deeper insights into music’s role in creation of (social) identity and reflections on its socio-cultural context. The presence of the camera and my interest in Afghan music triggered participants’ reflections on the role music plays for them in their daily lives. To complement the film, I will highlight some key issues that came out of the different interviews and informal exchanges I had during the research process. This discussion aims to develop further some points that could not be elaborated on in the film due to time constraints or the fact that the issues arose during exchanges that were not captured on film.

4.1 Nostalgia/Memories

A central aspect that arose in every discussion is the link between nostalgia, memory and music. All research participants mentioned being reminded of something while listening to Afghan music. For some, the memories involved concrete places or persons. All of the eight research participants told me they were reminded of their family or their city of origin when they heard the music of Afghan singers. This is illustrated in the following quotes taken from the interviews I filmed:

“(…) quand il chante des chansons, ça me rappelle mon pays, surtout, lorsqu’il chante une chanson pour Mazar-l-Sharif. Mazar-l-Sharif c’est la ville d’où je viens. C’est surtout quand il chante cette chanson, que j’ai les larmes dans mes yeux et puis, j’ai des souvenirs qui viennent dans ma tête et puis je revis des instants quand j’étais en Afghanistan.” (Hassan)

“Oui bien sûr il y a des chansons qui me rappellent des souvenirs d’Afghanistan, et ça me rappelle les périodes et les moments de cette époque. Et bien sûr, chaque chanson a ses propres souvenirs, et souvent ce sont de beaux souvenirs. Quand je chante à propos de Mazar, je regarde le shrine de Hazrat Ali, la mosquée bleue, quand je chante je regarde ça…” (Mansoor, translated from Dari)

“Je me rappelle des moments où j’étais avec ma famille et puis, ça me calme et puis, j’oublie tout quand j’écoute sa musique, la musique de Sarahang.” (Alii)

Especially touching was the answer given by Hasan on the question of what his favorite song was:

“(…) il y a une chanson qu’il chante pour la mère, le titre s’appelle « mère » je pense. (…) bien sûr c’est quelque chose qui me rappelle des souvenirs, surtout qu’il chante pour la mère, c’est normal que ça me rappelle ma mère, et ça fait trois ans maintenant que je suis loin de ma famille. Du coup ça me fait du bien de temps en temps.” (Hassan, translated from Dari) However, he said that he never listens to music to bring up these kinds of memories on purpose, except: “Non, je ne fais pas ça. Je n’écoute pas de musique pour me rappeler mon passé, mais des fois, j’ai envie de penser à ma mère. Mais d’habitude je ne fais pas ce genre de choses.” (Hasan, translated from Dari)

Alternatively, music is also utilised by the participants for its potential to make them forget their reality, their status in the migration process and how far they are from their home country and family. “Surtout ça me fait très plaisir que les amis soient en contact avec moi et qu’ils veuillent organiser des soirées musicales pour oublier leurs soucis, leurs problèmes et leurs souffrances.” (Mansoor, translated from Dari) Ali also confessed that he regularly joins musical events as they allow him to forget difficulties in his life (“(…) pour oublier les difficultés de la vie.”).

Of particular interest regarding my initial investigation into the role of Afghan music for Afghans who never lived in their country of origin, is Bakthiar’s answer to the question of whether listening to Afghan music evoked specific memories for him: “Oui, oui, quand j’écoute de la musique afghane, j’imagine l’Afghanistan. La musique décrit com-ment est l’Afghanistan. Du coup, j’imagine à quoi ça ressemble. Et parfois j’écoute la musique Hazaragi, du coup ça me rappelle ma famille.” (Bakthiar)

These quotes nicely illustrate music’s emotive potential, especially its ability to expose feelings of nostalgia, which according to Barett, is stronger when the song “(…) was autobiographically salient, arousing, familiar, and elicited a greater number of positive, negative, and mixed emotions.” (Barett 2010: 390). It is important to highlight that nostalgia mostly serves to “(…) counteract sadness and loneliness.” (Barett 2010: 390), testifying here to the life of a migrant living far from home country and family. The Dari term “awarä” is applicable as it implies “the idea of being separated from one’s homeland and having to change one’s location unwillingly […]”. Ghorbat is another word associated with âwâragi. It describes the status of being stranger and lonely in a place different from one’s homeland. (Abbasi and Monsutti 2017: 6). Evidently, music here serves as an indicator of their emotional state in a process of migration.

4.2 Maintenance and Concerns of Afghan Music

As mentioned previously, this research mostly focused on traditional and classical Afghan music. The classical Afghan music is also what often is referred to as ‘art music’ from the famous musicians’ quarter in Kabul, the Kutcheh Kharabat (Baily 2015). One of the styles played by these musicians is ghazal, which is also one of the styles mainly performed by Ham Awa, and is the favorite style of Mansoor. This might explain why most research participants mentioned listening to ghazal music at certain points. It is interesting to mention here that all five audience participants that I interviewed told me that they enjoy listening to traditional and classical music, ghazal in a particular. Samir even said that ghazal is his favorite style of music. All mentioned that listening to ghazal calmed them down and that they especially enjoyed that style for the richness of its lyrics, which consists of poems, mainly about love for a person or country. Also, Samir and Ali both noted the lack of poetic quality in most of the contemporary songs, which do not match the poetic richness of ghazal, and that they therefore never forget about traditional music “(…) because ghazal is what one understands. Sometimes, contemporary music, what they say, one does not understand very well what the point is, it is less clear, I less listen to it.” (Ali, translated from French). In a same sense, Samir stated: “Pour moi c’est très important, par exemple Sarahang, il chante des poèmes de Hafez. Le texte est très important, malheureusement il y a des jeunes qui chantent n’importe quoi, ça m’intéresse moins.” (Samir, translated from Dari).
Ali’s and Samir’s concern is shared by renowned Afghan musicians, as expressed when invited to Studio 7, the former BBC World Service’s music program mentioned earlier. Studio 7 held discussions with musicians on Afghan music’s current state within as well as outside of the home country, reflecting on problems like the following: “(...) the lack of training opportunities and the need for institutional support, the poetic quality of current song lyrics, and the use of modern instruments such as the electronic keyboard.” (Baily 2011: 185). Confirming what Ali and Samir noted about poor quality lyrics, Madadi, one of Studio 7’s guests, stated: “Very poor and low-grade lyrics are used [today], The singers themselves usually put words together to suit their music, but it is not poetry” (Ibid., 187). Amir Jan Sabori further adds that musicians’ interest has switched from the lyrics to the rhythm and that this would be particularly damaging (Ibid.). This was also mentioned in the interview I had with Mansoor, but contrary to Amir Jan Sabori, Mansoor stated that this switch is linked to an altered interest in music by its audience, and that it is not a result of the musicians’ lack of sensitivity towards their music:

“D’abord, j’ai joué et chanté de la musique comme ghazal, c’est une musique calme. Mais quand je suis arrivé en Suisse, beaucoup de gens ici aimait la musique pop, un peu rythmée. Ils aiment les musiques un peu rythmées pour danser pour (...)” (Mansoor) This quote is almost to the word the same statement that Baily heard from an Afghan musician living as a taxi driver in exile in Australia, Zahir Yusuf, “He told me that he preferred to sing ghazals but his audience wanted pop music for their parties.” (Baily 2015: 181) Mansoor here further highlighted the difference in tastes between a European and an Afghan audience: “(...) Les Suisse, les Européens, ils aiment bien écouter de la musique folklorique afghane, ils aiment les chansons traditionnelles. Les Afghans aiment les musiques un peu rythmées pour danser.” (Mansoor).

This problem of a lack of musical sensitivity from the audience was raised in a more striking way by Farhad during an informal discussion, where he told me that in his experience playing at events organized for Afghans, Afghans have lost their sensitivity for music: “La nouvelle génération n’as pas vraiment connu ce qu’il y avait déjà côté culture en Afghanistan.” These concerns are a reflection of the many years of war and ongoing problems in Afghanistan, such that the young generation does not know their own culture. Music and culture become deprioritised when people are preoccupied about safety and security. Farhad commented that this loss of sensitivity for music means that people don’t know how to enjoy good music anymore. He illustrated this claim citing an event he played at in Lucerne, where people asked him to turn down the volume of the music because it interrupted their card game, “Ton pling pling dérange notre jeu de cartes.” According to Farhad, people now are more interested in card games and dancing than listening to music. Music remains a pleasant background sound, but is rarely recognised on its own. These concerns about Afghan music’s current state, from the perspective of the musicians or the audience, reflect what has already been observed by Baily: “These voices articulated a very clear critique of the situation of Afghan music in 2006. It is worth noting that the weakening of Afghan music culture was attributed to the effects of 30 years of warfare on the institutions that promoted music in the past, rather than blamed on the anti-music policies of Islamic fundamentalists, and there was an acknowledgement that there had been a loss not only of music but also of musical sensibility” (Ibid., 175)

4.3 The Musical Event: Place of Encounter, Identification and Maintenance

“Des fois, il y a des propositions, genre une soirée pour Nouvel an par exemple. Là, on accepte, parce que là, ils parlent de notre culture. En même temps, ça permet de montrer, de faire découvrir notre musique à certains qui ne la connaissent pas. On leur apprend des choses que pour ça continue. Peut-être pour les générations d’après vont être intéressées pour apprendre, ou découvrir au moins, ce qu’on a eu comme musique en Afghanistan.” (Farhad)

Like Farhad, Qais and Mansoor also mentioned the importance of playing Afghan music to show their own culture. All three musicians claimed that they want to perform their music to an Afghan audience as well as to a European audience, to demonstrate Afghanistan’s cultural richness. They all stated that many young Afghans don’t know Afghan culture very well, and that one of the aims of these events is to familiarise Afghans with their own cultural origins. Mansoor specifically identified Afghans who grew up outside their home country as refugees in neighbouring countries:

“Certains de nos amis sont venus d’Afghanistan et ont grandi avec la culture et la tradition afghane, ils connaissent par exemple la danse atan [danse traditionnelle afghane] et ils connaissent aussi toutes les chansons. Malheureusement, certains de mes amis qui n’ont pas grandi avec la culture afghane et qui ont grandi dans d’autres pays en tant que réfugiés ne connaissent pas leur propre culture. Ils ne sont pas familiers avec leur propre culture, ils ne connaissent pas la musique et la tradition afghane et ont suivi les autres cultures étrangères. Et ils essaient de suivre les gens qui les connaissent [culture et musique].” (Mansoor)

This motivation to demonstrate Afghan music was shared by Bakhtiar, one of the research participants, who produced a film on the Nauruz (New Year) party in 2017 portraying Mansoor as a musician in his film. When I asked him about his intentions for his own film, Bakhtiar replied with the following: "(...) mon idée était de montrer la culture d’Afghanistan, avec la musique d’Afghanistan, pour les gens européens et les personnes qui ne connaissent pas bien l’Afghanistan." It is interesting to mention here that Bakhtiar grew up in Iran and told me that before he arrived in Geneva he did not know any other Afghan music except the one from his native ethnic group, the Hazara. Therefore he only discovered instruments like the rubab (the national instrument) when he arrived in Geneva. He said that events like the Nauruz party allowed him to discover Afghan music:

“Pour moi, oui, c’est important, parce que moi j’ai grandi en Iran, et du coup j’écoute toujours de la musique iranienne. La première fois que j’écoute de la musique afghane c’était une nouvelle expression pour moi, et j’étais trop content que l’Afghanistan ait de bons musiciens, de bons rythmes comme ça. (...) Oui, avant, je n’avais pas vu des rubabs et quelques autres instruments. Je connaissais seulement Danbura hazaragi. Du coup quand je suis arrivé ici, j’ai vu que Mansoor, il jouait, j’écoute, et je me disais, que c’était super joli.” (Bakhtiar)

Hasan also replied in an affirmative way when I asked him if Afghan music plays a more important role in his life since he arrived in Switzerland. Like Bakhtiar, Hasan grew up in Iran and was mainly
familiarised with Afghan music due to music events in Switzerland and the TV show Afghan Star. Hasan told me he enjoys Afghan music more now than he did before, as he has become accustomed to different styles of Afghan music and also knows better the variety of rhythms. Therefore, he listens to Afghan music more often now living in Switzerland than he did when he still lived in Iran.

Besides displaying Afghan musical culture, these events give exiles an escape from reality for the duration of the performance, as it recreates an atmosphere of their home country which is distinct from their host country. This was poignantly expressed by Ali when I asked him about the importance of decorative elements during music performances: “C’est la vue en fait, c’est beaucoup plus joli comme ça. On regarde, et on ne sent pas qu’on est dans un pays étranger, on se sent dans notre pays et comme ça. C’est pour ça que ça fait du bien pour les gens qui sont là et ça montre aussi notre culture.” (Ali) He further added that he mainly attends these kinds of events “(...) pour rencontrer les amis, pour être ensemble, pour danser, pour oublier les difficultés dans la vie.” Mansoor also mentioned that these events help people to forget about difficulties in their life (at least for the duration of the event): “Surtout ça me fait très plaisir que les amis soient en contact avec moi, et qu’ils veuillent toujours avoir des soirées musicales pour oublier leurs soucis, leurs problèmes et leurs souffrances.” (Mansoor)

Events like the Nauruz party also bring together Afghans living in different places, allowing them to meet peers they either knew before and are unable to meet on a regular basis or to make new friends. According to Ali, the event is seen as “(...) un lieu de rencontre”. He elaborated, “Oui, on peut toujours trouver de nouveaux amis(...). Par exemple lui [points to Hassan] je l’ai connu dans les festivals avec Mansoor. Et puis il y a plein d’amis que je connais maintenant, c’est grâce à quelques festivals, quelques fêtes traditionnelles” (Ali). Hasan as well shares Ali’s opinion: “(...) la plupart du temps, Mansoor quand il organise des soirées, il y a des gens qui viennent des autres villes suisses, et surtout avant je connaissais juste les gens qui venaient d’arriver, mais du coup, ça m’aide aussi à faire des rencontres et aussi à rencontrer d’autres personnes autre que celles de mon entourage.” (Hasan, translated from Dari).

Mansoor appears to be a central figure for organising musical events for his peers. For most, Mansoor is the only musician they know personally: “A Genève, je ne connais pas d’autre musiciens, je connais juste Mansoor, et puis avant Mansoor, il y avait pas forcément des musiques de fêtes comme on a vu pour la soirée de Nauruz. C’est grâce à lui qu’ont commencé ces événements, c’est après lui qu’il y a des fêtes, des festivals afghans ici à Genève.” (Ali). This might be due to the fact that most Afghan musicians living around Geneva arrived in Switzerland in the 1990’s and that there is, according to my observations, very little contact between recent arrivals and the well-established Afghans. Also, over the past three years it is Mansoor who seems to have initiated all the musical events in Geneva that have been addressed to a mainly (young) Afghan audience (unlike concerts that might be labeled as ‘World Music’). “On a fait un groupe WhatsApp, et du coup c’est Mansoor qui gère le groupe, quand il y a des événements, c’est lui qui avertit les autres, c’est lui en fait qui commence.” (Ali).

As mentioned previously, the Nauruz party was the biggest musical event that took place during the period of this research. Occasions during which music was played for an audience mirrored those observed by Baily during his own research in London: “They performed mainly at wedding parties and on festive occasions such as concerts held during the two ‘Eids. Now Ruž (Afghan New Year, 21 March), and the western New Year (1 January).(...) Much of music played at such concerts was dance music (...)” (Baily 2015: 175/76).

Even though all research participants affirm their interest in showing Afghan culture to non-Afghans and state that they would like to have a mixed audience, non-Afghans who do not have Afghan friends are very unlikely to be aware of these kinds of concerts as there is no public publicity. Further, even though the events are not designed to be exclusively for men, at most events I was the only female participant. At the Nauruz party, only three women were present, including myself, a friend of mine who helped with filming and an Afghan singer in her fifties. According to what I have been told by Hassan, she is the only female Afghan singer he knows in the greater Geneva area. For the private gatherings at Mansoor’s I was always the only woman present. I observed through my partner Hassan’s reactions that bringing a female partner to such events is not a common occurrence, as they mostly gather in uniquely male groups. Despite this, I never felt in any way unwelcome, with or without my camera.

Throughout the Nauruz event, several participants started dancing and towards the end they formed circles whilst some danced solo in the middle. Here again, the audience, the dancing and promotion of the party were identical to what Baily described based on his studies in London: “The open concert (...) and the area in front of the stage was dominated by large numbers of young men dancing together. (...) Many of these young men were asylum seekers and illegal immigrants, cut off from their families, living in hostel or cheap flats provided by local councils. (...) The audience at either type of concert, open and family, consisted almost entirely of Afghans: the concerts were not intended for people outside the Afghan community, who simply did not know that such events were taking place, for they were not part of the ‘World Music’ concert scene in London.” (Ibid., 177). Here I would like to comment on what Baily recognised as being events that were intended exclusively for Afghans. Based on my observations in the Genevan context I am prompted to question this purported intention. All of my research participants told me that they are very happy to have Afghan music events in Geneva and that it is nice to meet co-nationals. They all mentioned that they do not want these events to be exclusive to Afghans and that they would welcome having other nationals in attendance. Due to my interest in Afghan music, Mansoor approached me with a request that I do a promotion for the Eid al-Fitr concert he organised for the 15th June 2018. This event was to take place in my neighbourhood where several Afghans also lived, mainly in social housing. Even though I received a positive response from several neighbours, only my flat mates and student neighbours ultimately participated and mixed mainly with the Afghans living in my neighbourhood.
4.4 Music in the Migration Situation: Loss of Status and Difficulties of transmission

One problem repeatedly mentioned by the musicians was their loss of status. Hassan explained to me that: “Gagner sa vie est un peu difficile, du coup les gens ils font autre chose a côté et la musique reste une deuxième option dans leur vie. Je connais des musiciens qui sont des très grands musiciens en Afghanistan, mais quand ils sont arrivés ici en Suisse, ils ne pouvaient pas tout de suite gagner leur vie en faisant de la musique. Par exemple il y a un ustad qui s'appelle ustad Badhe, qui vit ici à Genève. Il est médecin, du coup il travaille en tant que médecin. S'il a le temps à côté, il peut aller participer à des concerts, mais ça reste un hobby, ce n’est pas quelque chose de professionnel, ce n’est pas quelque chose avec quoi il gagne sa vie.” (Hassan during the interview with Ali). Qais also told me twice that his first priority is to learn French and to do his apprenticeship, and only afterwards he will try to rebuild his career as a professional musician. This was strongly advised to him by an Afghan friend, a musician himself, who arrived in France at the end of the 1980’s.

The fact that exiled musicians are scattered all over the globe makes the diffusion of musical knowledge more complicated. Getting lessons from an ustad (music master) can be challenging as every musician has his or her own style and sometimes the closest ustad might be miles away: “Le prof avec qui je prends des cours est en Allemagne. C’est clair si on veut comparer ma situation avec ceux qui sont sur place en Afghanistan, ils peuvent avancer beaucoup plus que moi.” (Farhad).

Also, instructions over video-sharing platforms do not seem to be a satisfying alternative to physical lessons, as transmission over video is considered to be rather complicated. Farhad explained that before he met his present music master he tried to learn using videos and he had also tried to instruct others via video: “Oui, j’ai été contacté par pas mal de jeunes qui voulaient apprendre, par exemple dernièrement j’ai eu un jeune qui m’as contacté depuis l’Allemagne, un autre depuis les Pays-Bas et on autre habite en Arabie Saoudite. Ils voulaient que je leurs apprenne ma manière de jouer, et je les ai formés comme je pouvais, mais par vidéo ce n’est pas vraiment pratique, ce n’est comme si la personne était en face de toi.” (Farhad). Before meeting his rubab teacher, Farhad regularly went to Iran to meet with Afghan musicians over there: “Avant de rencontrer mes amis en groupe Ham Awa c’était les autres musiciens que j’ai rencontrés quand j’étais en Iran. De 2005 à 2007, j’étais souvent là-bas, j’ai rencontré des autres musiciens de mon origine.” Farhad also discussed with them how migrating to Europe might affect their careers as professional musicians: “A chaque fois qu’il y a des problèmes de sécurité en Afghanistan, ils essaient de se déplacer en Iran parce que c’est plus proche et puis il y a pas d’autre moyens. On ne peut pas dire que ce n’est pas possible, mais leur vie ne peut pas passer dans un bon sens, s’ils viennent en Europe. Un ami musicien m’a dit qu’il voulait venir en Europe, mais moi je lui ai dit que s’il venait il détruirait sa vie professionnel de musicien, parce qu’en Afghanistan et en Iran c’est une star.” (Farhad).

Finding Afghan musical instruments can be just as difficult as finding adequate Afghan music lessons. As Farhad explained, he first bought a rubab in a store in Germany as was unable to find one in Switzerland. Apparently this rubab was not good quality and could not be compared to a rubab created in Afghanistan. It was only when ustad Arman, a famous Afghan musician now based in Geneva, offered to bring him a rubab from Kabul that Farhad felt he finally had a respectable instrument that he could play seriously.

4.5 Questions of Authenticity

After seeing two French nationals playing alongside Afghan musicians during the Nauruz party and one French member of Ham Awa, I wondered how Afghans perceive non-Afghans playing Afghan music. From the perspective of the musicians, this question was clearly answered with regard to knowledge of the music. All musicians thought that anyone who is interested in Afghan music and culture can become an Afghan musician with sufficient training and the will. The audience, however, had a different perception. Audience feelings appeared to be mixed regarding whether non-Afghans can compete with musicians who learned to play in Afghanistan. Some insisted that only musicians
who have been instructed in Afghanistan or at least grew up in the country could play Afghan music authentically: “Je pense qu’il y a toujours un lien avec le chanteur ou la personne qui fait la musique. La musique, c’est quelque chose que tu dois avoir en toi. Ce n’est pas quelque chose que tu peut mettre en toi. Du coup, souvent les gens qui jouent la musique qui sont de là-bas jouent mieux que les gens qui ont juste appris par correspondance ou je ne sais pas comment.” (Hassan). Samir and Hasan went into further detail and mentioned that they disagreed on whether Afghan singing would be possible for non-Afghans. According to Hasan, non-Afghans “wouldn’t be able to sing properly” as singing without an accent would not be possible for foreigners: “Oui je pense qu’il y a une grosse différence, un Afghan qui a grandi en Afghanistan chante mieux qu’un Français qui apprend, même s’il apprend super bien il reste avec un accent. Dès qu’il chante on se rend compte, c’est la même chose avec un Afghan qui vient ici, il ne sera jamais capable de chanter parfaitement, il y aurait toujours un petit accent” (Hasan).

Similarly, my question as to what extent Afghan music can be altered received mixed responses. The musicians themselves were unanimously in favour of this, whereas the audience seemed more skeptical. Ali stated that he wouldn’t think this to be possible: “Je ne pense pas, parce que la musique Afghane c’est une musique traditionelle. Il faut jouer avec les instrument anciennes, c’est bon avec tabla, pas avec la batterie par exemple. Ça vas avec l’armonia, et pas avec un piano, le son et tout ça, c’est différent”. Contrary to Ali, Samir noted that including flamenco style in one of his favorite musician’s songs (Delagha Surood - Bi Tu) is very welcome to him and that he liked it very much.

4.6 Social Media and Video Hosting Sites

All participants mentioned using social media and video hosting sites to share and to follow musical performances. Some also explained that their use of video hosting platforms such as YouTube was a result of the lack of concerts by famous Afghan musicians such as Ariana Saed and Farahd Dariya in Switzerland. Consequently they had to watch these concerts online.

Others like Hasan mainly became familiarised with Afghan music through TV shows such as Afghan Star, a TV show hosted by the Kabul-based private channel Tolo: “Par rapport à la musique afghane, j’ai vu seulement sur internet, il y a un grand festival chaque année à Kaboul, qui s’appelle Afghan Star, c’est un super festival, il y a des nouveaux chanteurs qui viennent. C’est très intéressant. Du coup, je connais des chansons par rapport à ce festival.” (Hasan).

Another use for social media is to share events happening in Geneva with peers living too far away to attend. This also works in reverse, allowing Geneva-based Afghans to follow what is happening in other countries such as Germany or France, as described by Ali: “J’ai des amis en Allemagne et en France qui aiment bien la musique et qui voulaient être ici, à Genève pour ces événements. Mais malheureusement, ils ne peuvent pas à cause de la distance. C’est pour ça que je partage en direct, comme ça, ils en profitent aussi.” (Ali). “Oui, je regarde ce qui se passe en Allemagne. En France je
V Conclusion

After discussing the main results, I conclude, based on my observations, that two main problems are emerging:

Firstly, I would like to highlight music’s ability to gather information on the life of those caught in the migration process. Music is an important trigger for nostalgic emotions and its ‘curative’ properties helps migrants to forget “(...) leurs soucis, problèmes et souffrances” (Mansoor) and make them feel at home for the duration of the event: “On regarde, on ne sent pas que l’on est dans un pays étranger, on se sent dans notre pays” (Ali). Musical events give migrants a break from their everyday reality and allow them to dance, feel happy and enjoy themselves. Therefore, music has a therapeutic quality in helping them to forget their situation of being an âwâra, a wanderer, somebody that is living far from what is called his home country and his loved ones, even for a moment.

On the other hand, there is the maintenance of the music itself. As discussed earlier, Afghan music suffered from its masters being scattered all over the world and the loss of a central ‘authority’ on music like Radio Kabul. Musicians’ ambitions do not always meet the needs of the people, who first and foremost want to forget and enjoy themselves and are not always are aware of musical quality. So-called ‘art music’ is that generally preferred by musicians mainly addresses a more ‘World Music’ audience. This was the case for the Geneva-based ‘Ensemble Kabul’, including two ustad’s who toured to numerous festivals all over the world but are very little known to Afghans living in Geneva. Therefore, musicians’ ambitions for music and migrants’ needs do not always match.

Further, there is the problem of financing. As described in the previous section, most musicians lose their status after migrating to Europe, and therefore only keep their musical activity as a leisure-time activity. This has two main consequences: most musicians have little time to evolve their practice, and, as Farhad explained to me, this means that they decide to only play at events where they fully can enjoy the playing. The events they most enjoy are those where they can play their favourite musical styles, which are usually ‘World Music’ events rather than events designated to an Afghan-only audience. As a result, unless they personally know other musicians in the region (and almost all the research participants indicated they only knew Mansoor), most young Afghan refugees do not get the opportunity to build a relationship with Afghan art music, even though they may be interested in this. Migrants are not necessarily insensitive towards classical music like ghazal, it is rather based on the problem of maintenance of the music itself. There is also a gap between the two migrant generations, the generation that fled the Soviet invasion and the generation that fled post-2011. These two groups rarely meet and consequently, musical practices do not pass easily between them. The financial situations of most migrant musicians also makes it difficult for them to perform many free concerts addressed to young Afghan migrants. It should also be noted that concerts hosting the stars of Afghan music are too expensive for Afghans who are still undergoing the asylum procedure and are living with minimal financial support. Additionally, Baily recognises that these concerts are mostly organised by private persons, making them expensive and not affordable for recently arrived Afghan migrants (Baily 2015).

Despite this, there appear to be young Afghans from the post-2011 migrant generation who grew up during or after the Taliban rule (after the time of Radio Kabul) who maintain an interest in Afghan music and insist on the importance of the poetical value of the song lyrics. From what I observed in this field study, Afghan music would need some specific attention and funds to guarantee its longevity and to support young Afghans who are interested in practicing Afghan music. I therefore agree with the claim made by Samrast during a Studio 7 broadcast, that: “(...)Our music] is in a disorganized and chaotic state. Like any other part of Afghanistan’s culture, music needs serious attention and care on the part of both governmental and non-governmental organizations.” (Samrast quoted in Toynbee and Dueck 2011: 187).

This so called ‘chaotic state’ might be seen as a chance to reanimate Afghan music. Even though institutions like Radio Kabul, who had “a skilled board that checked the songs in terms of quality.” (Baily 2011: 187) no longer exist, there are new initiatives to provide new platforms for emerging Afghan musicians, such as the television program Afghan Star. Programs like this are watched by Afghans all over the world and foster a reconnection with Afghan music. This was identified by Hasan, who defined Afghan music through what he knew about it from the Afghan Star television shows. Even though this new generation of musicians might not know the composers of older songs whose names may be lost, they rediscover and reinvent these old songs and interpret them in their own manner.

Recognising the need for new platforms for Afghan music, Baily stated the following about the BBC WS decision to cancel their two programs dedicated to Afghan music: “(...)It is ironic that another radio organization, namely the BBC WS, which offered support for the renewal of Afghan music through two very effective and popular radio programs, should decide to axe them. But then the recent history of Afghanistan since 2001 is a story of unsustainable initiatives and unfulfilled promises.” (Ibid.,193).

All this should illustrate that music (and art in general) should not be a last priority. Music allows migrants to keep up with their home country and feel rooted. It has the capacity to help them overcome difficulties and bridge gaps in the process of integration, which in turn gives them security to invest in their host country. Music can also act as an effective form of resistance towards harsh migration policies and a way for migrants to share and integrate with their host community, rather than being positioned as outsiders to it.

Even though musical events studied for this research do not unify all Afghans living around Geneva, with obvious gender and generation gaps remaining, it still facilitates the gathering of a significant number of young Afghan migrants around musical performance and inspires memories and fantasies of homeland in exile. As mentioned by Bakhtiar, Afghan music as such varies notably from one region to another. In his case, it was only in exile that he was introduced to what might be called Afghan music. Afghan music in exile levels regional differences and creates a more syncretic Afghan identity, to the point that Bakhtiar felt pride for ‘his own music’ and felt inspired to display Afghan culture through its music in his own film project: “(...) mon idée était de montrer la culture d’Afghanistan, avec la musique d’Afghanistan, pour les gens européens et les personnes qui ne connaissent pas bien l’Afghanistan.” It seems, therefore, that Bakhtiar identifies himself with Afghan music that he wants to display to ‘others.’
Bibliography


---

**Films**


