



Music, migration and the city

Philip Kasinitz & Marco Martiniello

To cite this article: Philip Kasinitz & Marco Martiniello (2019) Music, migration and the city, Ethnic and Racial Studies, 42:6, 857-864, DOI: [10.1080/01419870.2019.1567930](https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1567930)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1567930>



Published online: 11 Mar 2019.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 17



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Music, migration and the city

Philip Kasinitz^a and Marco Martiniello^{b,c*}

^aDepartment of Sociology, Graduate Centre, City University of New York, New York, USA;

^bFaculté des Sciences Sociales, Université de Liège, Liège, Belgium; ^cFonds de la Recherche Scientifique, Bruxelles, Belgium

(AT) a time when nativism is surging, anxiety over borders and immigration is rising and the executive branch of this country seems determined to make it whiter, the song's success highlights the truism that the soul that moves so many of us, that we groove to, that animates our lives, that in some ways binds us as a global community—pop music—is the opposite of nativist. It's promiscuous. It doesn't respect borders or stick to racial categories. It borrows willy-nilly, encouraging cross fertilization of cultures and styles.

Moises Velasquez-Manoff, "Despacito in the Age of Trump" (2017).

Background

North America and Europe are both facing a crisis of immigrant incorporation. While sometimes justified in economic terms the current rise of populist nativism is in many ways profoundly cultural. In both Europe and North America multiculturalism has increasingly come under attack. Among some parts of the "native" populations on both sides of the Atlantic we have seen what Duyvendak and his collaborators have termed a "culturalization" of citizenship (2016). New, culturally based forms of exclusion focusing on everyday life practices and preferences – how people dress, what they eat, even what sports teams they root for – are increasingly used to separate "us" from "them"; insiders from outsiders in the national community.

At the same time however, the experience of everyday life for people living in what Vertovec has termed "superdiverse" (2007) cities on both sides of the Atlantic has become has often become deeply and profoundly multicultural, particularly among the young (Harris 2013). We see this in popular culture from cuisine to sports. Indeed during the 2018 soccer World Cup, the variety of ethnic origins in many of the teams was widely noted and commented on. *The Washington Post*¹ went as far as saying that "the World Cup is a victory for the immigrant dream" referring to the multiethnic, multiracial

CONTACT Philip Kasinitz  pkasinitz@gc.cuny.edu  Department of Sociology, Graduate Centre, City University of New York, 365 Fifth Avenue, New York 10016, USA

*Equal contributions. Names listed in alphabetical order.

© 2019 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

and multicultural composition of many of the teams including the 4 semi-finalists sides (Belgium, France, England and even Croatia). We observe something similar in the taken for granted conviviality of neighbourhood shopping streets (Hall 2012, 2015; Wessendorf 2013, 2014; Hiebert, Rath, and Vertovec 2015; Zukin et al. 2015). We see it in what Anderson (2011) has termed “cosmopolitan canopies” – those spaces (literal and social) in which groups who might otherwise be hostile to each other come together not just in tolerance but in actual enjoyment of each other’s presence. In such settings the everyday interactions of contemporary urban life become scenes of encounter with ethnic and other forms of difference. In such places, diversity, as Tomas Jimenez argues, is sometimes be seen as a burden, but it is also often understood as an amenity, and is, in any event, a taken for granted feature of community life (Jimenez 2017).

Nowhere is the contrast between the growing nativism and racial division of national politics and the cosmopolitanism of everyday urban life more evident than in the arts (DiMaggio and Fernandez-Kelly 2010, 2015; Martiniello 2018). This is particularly true for popular music. The sociology of music has long demonstrated how music becomes an arena for creating and expressing group identity, bonding social groups and establishing emotional connections between people (Roy and Dowd 2010). Sometimes this takes nationalist and exclusionary forms – consider the role that Wagner played in 19th German nationalism or the attempts various twentieth century nationalist governments to limit the corrupting influence of “decadent” popular music on their nation’s youth. Nation building projects have often used music to “fabricate authenticity,” imagine cultural purity and reject ethnic and other outsiders. Perhaps the most comic example of this was Henry Ford’s campaign to promote square dancing in the curricula of American secondary schools and colleges to combat the pernicious influence of “negro” and “Jewish” Jazz on the morals of American youth (Peterson 1997).

Yet it is worth noting that efforts to use music to reinforce ethnic, racial and national boundaries usually fail. More often, music, particularly popular music, is a space in which the boundaries between insiders and outsiders blur. It is, as Velasquez-Manoff notes, a “promiscuous” enterprise which encourages cross fertilization and discourages the idea of cultural purity. Of course, this can raise another problem, that of “cultural appropriation.” When the music of the subaltern catches the ears of the dominant group (or more often their children) it is rarely the subaltern that reaps the benefits. Still, artistic production is often the place where ethnic boundaries can be reimagined, where outsiders become insiders and hybridity and genre blurring can produce some of their most widely appreciated results (Kasinitz 2014).

There are a number of reasons why this might be so. Artistic production is an endeavour in which innovation is highly prized. This may give migrants and

their ambivalently native born yet not-quite-native children some ironic advantages (Kasinitz et al. 2008). Bringing different frames, tastes and repertoires from their cultures of origin may give migrants something new to add to the creative mix. And seeing their new homelands from both the insider's and outsider's vantage point may give their children a unique perspective, something akin to Duboisian "double consciousness" which they bring to even the most familiar artistic forms (Du Bois 1903). Further, as Hirschman observes, artistic production is one of those high risk but potentially high reward enterprises which often attract migrants and other outsiders (Hirschman 2005, 2013). Music is among the most ubiquitous and accessible forms of art in contemporary life (DeNora 2000) and compared to more traditional art forms popular music tends to have low costs of entry, few traditional gate keepers and is thus relatively accessible to newcomers. Migrants often know the music of the places to which they migrate before they speak the language, and members of the host society often become familiar with the newcomer's music before they know much else about them. Indeed, music crosses borders, even when human bodies cannot (Sardinha and Campos 2016).

We are also not so naive as to suggest that a taste for minority music will necessarily change the attitudes of the majority. American history (to cite but one example) is full of cases of white musicians and audiences who developed a deep and sincere appreciation of (and a willingness to steal from) African American music without altering their biases against African Americans. That said, music remains an arena in which group identity can be expressed and re-imagined as well as a venue for encounters between members of different groups. As such it seems an arena that students of migration, race and ethnicity should take more seriously, if only because so many of the people we write about do.

The framework of the special issue

This special issue of *Ethnic and Racial Studies* examines the relevance of popular music in the contemporary theoretical and policy debates about immigrant incorporation now taking place in the diverse cities of immigrant receiving societies on both sides of the Atlantic. It came about through a series of conversations between social scientists, musicologists, musicians and critics which culminated in a 2016 conference under the auspices of the Advanced Research Collaborative of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.² Like many interdisciplinary projects it was the sort of effort that was more difficult to put together than it initially appears. There was a considerable danger of "falling between the cracks," being too focused on the details of the music itself for the social scientists while not being detailed enough about the aesthetic practices for the musicologists

and the performers. We would like to thank the editors of *Ethnic and Racial Studies* for taking a chance on the project, as well as the many reviewers of the individual articles, most of whom seemed to “get” what we were trying to do and were willing to support work that in many cases steps outside of traditional disciplinary boundaries.

That said, we should make it clear that our goal in publishing these pieces in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* was to make the case that the study of music has much to contribute to our understanding of race and ethnicity as lived experiences in today’s diverse cities. As such our primary imagined audience was always scholars of race, ethnicity and migration. We hope that our efforts will be of interest to musicologists and specialists in the sociology of music as well. Yet we recognize that they may find our arguments for the relevance of music less surprising and perhaps even naïve. We chose from the outset of the project not to focus on one particular musical style or genre. It is rather our hope that in looking at widely different musical genres and settings we can give readers a general sense of the various social and political roles music plays in diverse societies.

The issue focuses on three domains, which taken together constitute the framework of the research: local arts and culture, social relations, and local politics.

At the cultural level, one aim is to examine how musical productions by immigrant, diasporic and ethno-racial minorities change the local artistic scene, for the migrants and their children, but also for the natives as well. It explores how migrants and ethnic minorities’ music change and enrich local cultures (particularly youth cultures) through processes such as “cultural métissage,” fusion and invention.

This takes place in a variety of ways. As Mazzola notes, music may be a venue in which local identity (“Neapolitan”) can unearth connections between the city and its newcomers (“Mediterranean”) as opposed to ones (such as the nationalist versions of “Italian-ness”) that excludes them. Kasinitz suggests that a musical form that is closely associated with the receiving society and the identity of a particular city (the Broadway musical) can also be a venue for newcomers – in this case mostly the children of immigrants – to reimagine what it means to be “American” or a “New Yorker.” Music is thus a space in which the “mainstream” can be remade (see Alba and Nee 2003). Martiniello shows how multi-ethnic working class young and not so young people in Liege look to Hip Hop culture as a venue for expressing an identity that is neither “Belgian” nor rooted in their parents’ homelands, but rather that expresses attachments to their city and neighbourhoods. Viladrich shows how the Argentinian diasporic musicians have contributed to make of New York one of the major global hubs for tango, thus enlarging the already wide musical landscape of the city.

At the social level, musical expressions can help to build bridges and facilitate the encounters (Vertovec 2007) between different origin populations who find themselves sharing the same city or the same neighbourhood. In other words, popular music can become a means of communication and dialogue between different groups to build some form of shared local citizenship. It is an arena in which diversity is experienced in everyday life and “the other” is encountered, often in a positive context. In various ways, musicians of immigrant backgrounds enrich established local identities as shown by the articles on New York and on Liège. But they can also challenge the traditional lines of division between local groups in the case of Montréal where White shows how rappers use a specific linguistic mix in order to refuse the traditional dichotomy between francophone and anglophone Montrealers. Here hip hop artists come into conflict with guardians of ethnic purity as they embrace the dreaded “Franglais.” As such they point out the sharp ethnic but also generational contrast between the world view of the veterans of the struggles for a distinct Quebec national identity and the ethnically diverse youth culture of the Montreal’s streets.

At the political level, popular music can be the basis for forming collective identities and can play an important role in social and political mobilization (Mattern 1998; Martiniello and Lafleur 2008). Musical expressions can serve the protest against and denunciation of the local social and political order but also the expression of a support for the established local order and for its mystified values – a fact not lost on local politicians (Lafleur and Martiniello 2010).

Hernandez-Leon, demonstrates how a regional musical form was transformed first into part of a national cultural project by the Mexican state, but then became a mobilizing force (and the soundtrack) of the immigrant’s rights movement in California – this despite the fact that very few of the immigrants actually trace their origins to the region from which the music comes. Askoy shows how the meaning of traditional forms is transformed when performed in diaspora – the same song has a different social and emotional significance when performed in a pub in urban Germany rather than at a home in rural Turkey. And Allen shows how transnationalism can transform the music, when, in the case of Soca, the diaspora became more central than the home country in the ecosystem of musical production and distribution. In this case not only did the innovations from the diaspora spread the music beyond the migrant enclave. They changed the nature of the music as it was performed and consumed in the “home” country as well.

Music: why does it matter?

Integration and incorporation of migrants and their descendants are crucial issues facing both in Europe and in North America. The arts and culture

have been relatively neglected aspects of this process both in the social scientific literature and in social policy (Martiniello 2015). In the face of the urgency of the refugee crises in Europe or at the US southern border, the rise of populist anti-immigrant politics and the ongoing battles over race on both sides of the Atlantic, it would be easy to dismiss the study of popular music as relatively unimportant or perhaps even a distraction from more urgent concerns. Obviously we disagree. We believe that music is an increasingly important social space for the creation of identity. And the question of identity – what sort of North Americans and Europeans today's immigrants and their children will become – and what sort of Europe and North America will be created in the process – will shape these societies for years to come. As such we believe popular music and other forms of artistic expression are areas that merit serious and critical scholarly attention.

The articles gathered in this special issue collectively demonstrate that we neglect everyday cultural activities at our peril. Whatever the definition of integration or incorporation that we endorse, the issues of arts and culture are crucial to understand how migrants fit into the cultures they are now a part of as well as how they and their descendants will redefine, enlarge and enrich those cultures. It our hope that the transatlantic academic dialogue we have encouraged on the links between immigrant incorporation and culture at the local level can stimulate new theorizations on the links between arts, social cohesion and incorporation. This will, we hope, help us to understand better the dynamics of local urban identities (ethnic, post-ethnic, trans-ethnic, etc. (Martiniello 2014)) and their impact on immigrant incorporation in super-diverse cities. Even in our age of digital communication and music downloads, music remains anchored locally through performances and face-to-face encounters between musicians and their audiences. The case studies presented here demonstrate that music matters as a means to enrich local cultures (see the papers by Kasinitz, Allen, White), both for the migrants and their descendants as well as their "native" neighbours. It also can be a resource for social and political mobilization (see the papers by Hernandez and Martiniello). Finally, music can help create new trans-local collective identities and reshape social boundaries (see for example the papers by Aksoy, Viladrich, and Mazzola).

We hope readers will agree. Yet we are also painfully aware of the difficulty inherent in this argument. There is a common aphorism that "writing about music is like dancing about architecture." No matter how successful our contributors are in describing, analyzing and critiquing musical activities, there is still something slightly absurd about trying to understand the meaning of musical expression based on words printed on a page. So, if we have been lucky enough to stimulate any curiosity in our readers, we urge them to go a step further; take advantage of the age of digital downloads and give a listen to some of the music discussed in this special issue. Or, better still,

find a venue where some of this music is being performed. For anyone hoping to understand the world emerging in today's super-diverse cities, it will be time well spent.

Notes

1. The Washington Post, 12 July 2018.
2. We owe a particular debt of gratitude to the Advanced Research Collaborative and its director, Donald Robotham, without whose support neither the conference nor this special issue would have been possible.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

References

- Alba, Richard, and Victor Nee. 2003. *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Anderson, Elijah. 2011. *The Cosmopolitan Canopy: Race and Civility in Everyday Life*. New York: Norton.
- DeNora, Tia. 2000. *Music and Everyday Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- DiMaggio, Paul, and Patricia Fernandez-Kelly. 2010. *Art in the Lives of Immigrant Communities in the United States*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- DiMaggio, Paul, and Patricia Fernandez-Kelly. 2015. "Immigration and the Arts: A Theoretical Inquiry." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38 (8): 1236–1244.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. 1903. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Duyvendak, J. W., P. Geschiere, and E. Tonkens, eds. 2016. *The Culturalization of Citizenship. Belonging and Polarization in a Globalizing World*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Hall, Suzanne. 2012. *City, Street, and Citizen: The Measure of the Ordinary*. London: Routledge.
- Hall, Suzanne M. 2015. "Super-diverse Street: A 'Trans-Ethnography' Across Migrant Localities." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38 (1): 22–37.
- Harris, Anita. 2013. *Young People and Everyday Multiculturalism*. New York: Routledge.
- Hiebert, Daniel, Jan Rath, and Steven Vertovec. 2015. "Urban Markets and Diversity: Towards a Research Agenda." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38 (1): 5–21.
- Hirschman, Charles. 2005. "Immigration and the American Century." *Demography* 42, November: 595–620.
- Hirschman, Charles. 2013. "The Contribution of Immigrants and Their Children to American Culture." *Daedalus* 142 (3): 26–47.
- Jimenez, Tomas R. 2017. *The Other Side of Assimilation: How Immigrants are Changing American Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kasinitz, Philip. 2014. "Immigrants, the Arts, and the Second-generation Advantage." In *New York and Amsterdam: Immigration and the New Urban Landscape*, edited by Nancy Foner, Jan Rath, Jan Willem Duyvendak, and Rogier van Reekum Rogier, 263–286. New York: New York University Press.

- Kasinitz, Philip, John H. Mollenkopf, Mary C. Waters, and Jennifer Holdaway. 2008. *Inheriting the City: The Children of Immigrants Come of Age*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press and the Russell Sage Foundation.
- Lafleur, Jean-Michel, and Marco Martiniello. 2010. "Si se Puede! Music, Musicians and the Latino Vote at the 2008 US Presidential Election." *Migrações. Journal of the Portuguese Immigration Observatory* 7: 213–231.
- Martiniello, Marco. 2014. "Artistic Separation Versus Artistic Mixing in European Multicultural Cities." *Identities* 21 (1): 1–9.
- Martiniello, Marco. 2015. "Immigrants, Ethnicized Minorities and the Art: A Relatively Neglected Research Area." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38 (8): 1229–1235.
- Martiniello, Marco. 2018. "Local Communities of Artistic Practices and the Slow Emergence of a "Post – Racial" Generation." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41 (6), May: 1146–1162.
- Martiniello, Marco, and Jean-Michel Lafleur. 2008. "Ethnic Minorities' Cultural and Artistic Practices as Forms of Political Expression: A Review of the Literature and a Theoretical Discussion on Music." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34 (8): 1191–1215.
- Mattern, Mark. 1998. *Acting in Concert. Music, Community, and Political Action*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Peterson, Richard A. 1997. *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Roy, William, and Timothy Dowd. 2010. "What is Sociological about Music?" *Annual Review of Sociology* 36: 183–203.
- Sardinha, Joao, and Ricardo Campos, eds. 2016. *Transglobal Sounds: Music, Youth and Migration*. New York: Bloomsbury Press.
- Velasquez-Manoff, Moises. 2017. "Despacito in the Age of Trump." *The New York Times*, August 5.
- Vertovec, Steven. 2007. "Super-Diversity and its Implications." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30: 1024–1054.
- Wessendorf, Susanne. 2013. "Commonplace Diversity and the 'Ethos of Mixing': Perceptions of Difference in a London Neighbourhood." *Identities* 20: 407–422.
- Wessendorf, Susanne. 2014. *Commonplace Diversity: Social Relations in a Super-diverse Context*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Zukin, Sharon, Philip Kasinitz, Xiangming Chen, and Global Cities. 2015. *Local Streets*. New York: Routledge.