Musical agency in a cross-cultural context: Strengthening friendship and artist dreams by informal musical practices

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The findings conveyed in this paper were derived through an ethnographic study exploring how young people, living within cross-cultural contexts in Norway, perform their musical agency. Cross-cultural, in this connection, denotes the unique mix that occurs when children and adolescents grow up being influenced by several cultures, either simultaneously or alternately. Musical agency, on the other hand, is understood as individuals' ability to engage actively and make independent choices regarding their own relationship with music. The empirical data of the study was collected through extensive fieldwork, encompassing observations, interviews and informal conversations.

While the main research question of the project focused on the ways in which the participating adolescents performed their musical agency more broadly, for the purpose of this paper I have chosen to direct my interest towards the ways in which the pop-duo Gunninga strengthened their friendship as well as pursued their artist dreams through their collective musical agency. The pop-duo consisted of two 16-year old girls, Gunnhild and Inga, in which the former had Kurdish background and the latter was an ethnic Norwegian. In and through composing and performing pop music the girls built a strong cross-cultural music platform that made it possible for them to resist external pressure from groups that tried to separate them and devalue their music.

The findings indicate that music offered the pop-duo strong tools as they navigated between opposing role expectations. This can be understood as performing a strong collective musical agency characterized by creativity, improvisation and innovation. Creativity may thus be defined as the production of new personal
values, which differ significantly from existing available cultural patterns. The findings also show that the girls built their own music education in informal ways through composing and performing their own music.