

# Creative Approach to Addressing Crises- An Analysis of How Music is Used to Address National Crises and Help with Nation-Building

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## Abstract

Nations and societies often turn to culture and cultural expressions in times of crises to help find meaning and to navigate uncertainty. Music stands out among diverse cultural expressions as a powerful force that transcends language barriers and entertainment and unites people. Historically, music has served as both a catalyst and a mirror, reflecting collective struggle while also inspiring healing and nation-building. Recognizing this, this research examines music's function as a creative instrument for responding to a national crisis and as a tool for nation-building. This paper analyzes the role of music in shaping collective identity, social cohesion, emotional resilience, and policy development in times of uncertainty using qualitative research based on secondary data. Through peer-reviewed literature, the public health communication, community building, cultural preservation, and political expression of music were explored using thematic analysis. The results indicate that music goes beyond entertainment; it becomes a means of value transmission, unity cultivation, and psychological support during times of crisis. Furthermore, the study demonstrates how music constructs national consciousness, acts as a mnemonic device, and empowers the silenced. The main focus is the policy implications of music, particularly concerning the youth, multicultural participation, and mental health policies. This research strengthens the argument that music serves as an invaluable tool for resilience and identity in disruptive times, thereby emphasizing its role in nation-building.

**Keywords:** Music and Crisis, Music and identity, Social change, Music and Pandemic, Collective Healing

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## Introduction

The connection of music to national crises has always been a way to foster resilience, drive social change, and aid in nation-building. In times of extreme strife, music acts not as an art form but as a force of nature for healing and fostering unity (Vaudreuil et al., 2019; Esimone et al., 2024; Palomeque & de-Lucio, 2024). Besides the ability to transcend linguistic hurdles, music evokes feelings that can serve as a mode of communication when a country is in turmoil, be it during a pandemic, war, or other catastrophe. Such acts provide warm and comforting spaces that address concrete solutions to mental health problems, collective grief, and critical debates about issues that concern the nation (Niederkrötenhaler *et al.*, 2021; Ndiaye & Rowley, 2021; Fay, 2017). A vivid example of music's response to upheaval is the swift "musicalization" of Senegalese health messages during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ndiaye & Rowley, 2021). These songs went far beyond simply hygienic and preventive discourse; they catalysed conversations about communal fragilities. This detail specifically demonstrates how music can serve as a medium for "COVID-literacy," which aids in understanding the pandemic in a more nuanced and layered way through culture (Ndiaye & Rowley, 2021). Similarly, music has also been utilised to foster and celebrate identity during the exhausting years of WWII and the Weimar Republic (Riley, 2025; Fay, 2017).

## Music as a Tool for Social Cohesion & National Identity during Times of Crisis

Winstone and Witherspoon (2015) maintain that music is potent in defining emotions, recalling shared memories, and aiding in healing during crises. It promotes social togetherness while improving one's mental strength by reinforcing their sense of nationalism. Throughout history, songs and anthems have been used for celebrating triumphs and periods of deep emotional release, allowing people to come together under a shared feeling or goal. Consider the "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy" - sung in the WWII era, it was a national morale booster for citizens and troops! Music in the war was not only a source of concern; it was also an emotional sanctuary. Another example is "We Shall Overcome", which served as a strong anthem during the American Civil Rights Movement. Gkinopoulos and Hegarty (2018) argue that the song helped participants of the systemic oppression build collective power to fight against the systemic oppression. It represented strength and optimism. During the especially challenging period of COVID-19, music became a powerful instrument. The pandemic was unprecedented for the world, and music became a tool that healed and united people from different regions. The songs being performed on the balconies by Italians during their lockdown, and later their sharing through virtual concerts, showcased a

collective practice of humanity during the pandemic (Hu *et al.*, 2024). In addition to developing empathy, music alleviated solitude, while demonstrating connection among disparate cultures and dignified even distance. Moreover, civic and folkloric songs reveal the nation's culture and ethnicity, which surfaces even in the face of an identity crisis. The ability of music to capture and preserve rituals and commemorations fosters cultures even when detached from their homeland, or in diaspora. This is often seen concerning reconciliation and peace building in post-colonial or post-conflict societies, where social recovery. In other words, despite emerging from sentiments, music shapes identity and therefore constructs social identity. While the ability to traverse barriers proves essential in times of crisis, it is most needed when communities are required to unify.

### Historical Contexts and Case Studies

The profound impact music has had on social cohesion and national identity can be observed throughout history. One such instance is the "Huxiang Flow" in Hunan province which illustrates how a particular region's hip-hop sub-genre can transform its cultural heritage by incorporating resistance sprouts of youth and local authenticity (Hu *et al.*, 2024). This transformation enables cultural identity negotiation and reconstruction, allowing marginalized groups to articulate their lived experiences, and (Hu *et al.*, 2024). During crises on a national scale, politically motivated wars for example, music has always been a rallying point. Analyzing ceremonial political speeches in Greece before and during the financial crisis shows how leaders construct ingroups and outgroups with national identity through language and commemoration—or rhetoric—in accordance with Gkinopoulos and Hegarty (2018). Gkinopoulos and Hegarty (2018) further explain how music, an expression of culture, can challenge or reinforce these identity constructions, providing alternative discourses while promoting social cohesion. The British national anthem shapes in young children the sense of national identity (Winstone & Witherspoon, 2015). There is evidence that children as young as five years old begin to recognize certain symbols of nationality, including anthems, which serve these children to foster a sense of identity and respond emotionally to them (Winstone & Witherspoon, 2015). Furthermore, the fact that music can go beyond societal and cultural barriers makes it a suitable means of encouraging tolerance and understanding in culturally varied societies. A study performed in the UK suggests that having diverse social contacts in conjunction with higher education leads to more positive attitude towards differences in society (Duru *et al.*, 2016). Music, being a part of shared culture, has the potential to bridge divides and help people from different societies to empathize with one another (Duru *et al.*, 2016). Similarly, the analysis of crisis management in megaprojects highlights the need to consider the relatedness of different crises and management responses (Daood *et al.*, 2023). Effective communication and teamwork are critical components of addressing multifaceted problems, which, in turn, may be enhanced by shared social or cultural activities such as music (Daood *et al.*, 2023). Music is a powerful means of collective expression, evoking emotions, memories, and cultural values that facilitate solidarity (Winstone & Witherspoon, 2015).

In addition to fueling cultural creativity, politics, and the construction of nations, music acts as a vehicle for social awareness and mobilization. Music has always been used to advocate for important causes, to help in uniting people, and to encourage transformation within the society (Osugwu, 2019; Bianchi, 2018; Bucciferro, 2017).

### Music for Social Awareness and Mobilization

The ability of music to communicate social and political issues is widely known (Pradipta *et al.*, 2023; Osugwu, 2019). In particular, protest music has always played a crucial role in social change by exposing social injustices and promoting solidarity among oppressed people (Sadler, 2022). The punk band Pyong-Pyong from Semarang City, Indonesia. They critique social conditions through their music, showcasing how art can be a vehicle for social critique (Pradipta *et al.*, 2023). Likewise, music has been used to critique social problems in Nigeria, although the reception and understanding of these messages differs, highlighting the need to consider audience perception (Osugwu, 2019). Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, for instance, the late Nigerian Afro-beat musician, altered the style of his music as he sought to engage with the everyday lives of the common people, which he expressed through social critique songs (Olatunji, 2009). Green and Street (2018) argue that music forms an integral component of political activism, which can be separated into two categories: 'pragmatic' and 'refigurative.' It permeates all political activism and matters in diverse ways by influencing the structure and relations within activist movements (Green & Street, 2018). In Turkey, protest singer-songwriter Ahmet Kaya used his music to give voice to the silenced and document social struggles, challenging industry norms and promoting inter-ethnic solidarity (Diler, 2024). His songs connected with people from many different backgrounds, showcasing the unifying power of music beyond socio-political barriers (Diler, 2024). During the Gezi Park Occupy movement in Turkey, music's function transformed from framing the protest to actively encouraging political engagement, highlighting its multifaceted role in social movements (Bianchi, 2018). Many different cultures throughout history have taken advantage of music to change social attitudes and organize people. In post-independence Côte d'Ivoire, Tiken Jah Fakoly has effectively used reggae to promote unity and civic engagement (Jemiluyi, 2024). Corruption, frequent power outages or cuts, and overall poor governance were the major issues of concern for Ghanaians in 2014 (Davies & Wager, 2021; Noll & Budniok, 2023). While social media influencers in the country used the social media

platforms available to them, artists also took to music to address the economic crisis. Notable among these artists was Sarkodie. Sarkodie is a Ghanaian rapper who has won multiple national and international awards (Boateng, 2015; Bedwiadzi, 2016). Sarkodie released a timely song titled *Inflation*. The message of *Inflation* addressed the power cuts, corruption by government officials in leadership, and the high cost of living in the country (Bedwiadzi, 2016). Many citizens believed the song not only addressed the current crisis that was prevalent in the country at that time, but also believed Sarkodie's song had enough political impact to gain the attention of both the ruling party and the opposition party. In a different context, Bangladeshi hip-hop emerged as a politically charged genre, inspired by American political hip-hop, but tailored to local political issues (Hasan & Kundu, 2022). In India, Dalit rappers such as Arivu are leading the Dalit rap movement, drawing on Dalit musical heritage to foster cultural defiance and identity (Jose & Yeldho, 2023). Through music, marginalized groups are able to assert themselves in contesting spaces and negotiate their cultural and political identities (ASAI, 2016). Historical examples show that music has been and can be an effective tool for social mobilization.

Amidst the waves of social and political change that 1968 ushered in, music was a central feature in the protests for Vietnam War, French May Riots, and the assassination of Martin L. King Jr. (Hill, 2022). In America, the social unrest in the mid-20th century fueled the production of so-called “protest songs,” which sought to address the military undertakings of the United States and promote a peaceful stance during times of international conflict (Замотин & Zamotin, 2024). Something similar happened in Latin America, where the music of exile composed by persecuted artists during the times of dictatorship served the purpose of fostering unification in the fight for democracy (Bucciferro, 2017). Even nowadays, protest music is still alive, and thanks to TikTok, new means of expressing and linking over them are being discovered, even if some of its uses may be decontextualized or commercialized (Sadler, 2022). The reason for music's efficiency as a means for raising awareness and mobilizing people into action is because of its ability to access emotions, build community, and serve as a voice for voiceless people. Through protest songs, cultural forms, or even in the form of political speech, music embodies the spirit of contestation and continues to push for positive social transformation (Kipyegon, 2025; Gooding *et al.*, 2021; Case, 2022).

### **Music and Social Cohesion**

Music can help resolve social synchrony challenges stemming from global conflicts and mass population movements (Marsh, 2019). It creates a narrative framework within which meaning can be jointly constructed for conflict resolution and from which diverse perspectives can be articulated (Marsh, 2019). Music education accompanied by community music therapy in areas affected by war or conflict is aimed at cultural healing, social-developmental impact, and regeneration (Howell, 2018). Music is a powerful social identity marker that arouses animosity between groups or may reinforce a valued identity (Harwood, 2017). It has the potential to reduce bias between groups and promote understanding (Harwood, 2017). In post-conflict contexts, music aids in fostering interracial relations (Skylstad, 1996).

### **Music Therapy and Trauma**

Through the use of music, individuals with trauma and PTSD can receive treatment (Landis-Shack *et al.*, 2017). PTSD involves intrusive memories, avoidance behaviors, and a range of emotional and hyperarousal symptoms (Landis-Shack *et al.*, 2017). Music therapy has demonstrated benefits for stroke, depression, trauma, Alzheimer's, dementia, autism, and Parkinson's patients (Ebo, 2022). Specific forms of music have been shown to alleviate certain traumatized emotions and moods (Ögünsanya, 2024). Music therapy can access the traumatized brain's neural networks and prefrontal cortex, hippocampus, and amygdala, which coordinate awareness and responsiveness to awareness and responsiveness to stimuli (Payne, 2022).

### **Cultural Expression and Reconciliation**

Cultural diplomacy, which leverages culture to achieve diplomatic objectives, recognizes the ability of culture to mediate difficult political situations (Shannon, 2024). Incorporating culture, both historical and contemporary, into peace-building approaches is useful for many nations afflicted by conflicts (Schneider, 2023). Through its melodic and poetic narratives, Kashmiri folk music not only fortifies social cohesion but also nurtures cultural heritage (Najar, 2024). Community music programs can foster youth's racial-ethnic-cultural identity through involvement in music and imagery activities (Case, 2022). Some traditional reconciliation *Pela* practices in Maluku, Indonesia, utilize cultural capital like football (*Pela Bola*) for conflict reconciliation and sustainable peace (Afdhal, 2024).

### **Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative research design that mainly relies on secondary data to assess the role music plays as a creative means in solving national crises and in nation-building. The approach is interpretive and analytical in that it seeks to draw from existing literature, case studies, reports, and journal articles of a particular research focus. The keywords, ‘music and crisis’, ‘music and nation building’, ‘music and social cohesion’, ‘music and identity’,

and ‘music and pandemics were used, and the results were analyzed thematically. The data was read and coded to capture how music was utilized in times of crises, paying attention to recurring themes and patterns.

## Results

**Table 1:** Music and Social Cohesion

Aspect	Description
<b>Role of Music</b>	Music reflects, shapes, and connects cultural dynamics, especially in globalization. It fosters social integration in intercultural contexts.
<b>Crisis Response</b>	Online participatory music-making helps build psychological resilience and alleviates negative emotions during crises.
<b>Social Reproduction</b>	Music acts as a technology that influences the processes of social reproduction.
<b>Community Building</b>	Music events on social media help form communities and play a role in brand crisis management.
<b>Integration Tool</b>	Music and dance serve as tools for promoting social integration in intercultural and multi-religious societies.

Scholars have long noted that music cultivates a kind of social glue, mirroring local customs even as those customs bend under the weight of globalization (Akbar *et al.*, 2024). When the COVID-19 lockdowns turned the world upside down, musicians posting tracks online discovered some psychologists quickly endorsed a portable way to shore up emotional defenses (Zheng & Zhang, 2024). Beyond mere therapy, the very act of organizing and distributing songs acts as a gatekeeper for which traditions endure and which fade, a point Draott makes when he talks about media-centered social reproduction (Drott, 2019). Add social networks to the mix and you arrive at a live concert that doubles as a crisis control room for brands, a phenomenon (Nararatwong *et al.*, 2014). Finally, space permitting, rhythm and movement remain surprisingly effective at knitting together intercultural and multi-faith neighborhoods (Carnà, 2020).

**Table 2:** Music and National Identity

Aspect	Description
<b>Identity Construction</b>	Music shapes national identity through state cultural policies and historical community engagement.
<b>National Symbols</b>	National symbols, including music, acquire deeper meaning during crises of sovereignty and national identity.
<b>Multiculturalism</b>	Music reflects cultural taste, identities, and local heritage in multicultural societies.
<b>Policy Making</b>	Popular music is considered in devolved policymaking, connecting national identity to the well-being of future generations.
<b>Historical Context</b>	National identity is shaped by historical and social contexts, especially in the experiences of refugees.
<b>Aboriginal Music</b>	Aboriginal popular music mediates viewpoints and agendas, playing a key role in preserving and expressing cultural identity.

Public policy and popular culture position music as a decisive actor in the ongoing drama of national identity (Seeman, 2012). When disaster strikes, anthems and other official tunes often emerge as the most immediately legible symbols of belonging (Boguslaw, 2019). In culturally mixed societies, everyday soundtracks reveal personal preferences while quietly piecing together the patchwork of local memory (Hoeven *et al.*, 2019). Lawmakers increasingly scan the charts not only to measure public mood but also to reassure themselves that tomorrow citizens will inherit an inclusive heritage (Thomas & Carr, 2022). A nations past and the social hierarchies it entrenches inevitably shape the identity lens through which newcomers-whether students or refugees-read their new surroundings (Fulya, 2025). Aboriginal chart music serves as a crucial site for negotiating outside opinions, allowing Indigenous Australians to assert who they are while inviting the nation to listen (Wu, 2014). Research suggests that peoples shared songs become vehicles for the panic and hope they attach to political or economic turning points (Assche *et al.*, 2022).

**Table 3:** Music in Crisis and Historical Contexts

Aspect	Description
<b>Crisis and Emotions</b>	Collective emotions during crises are closely linked to expressions of national identity.
<b>Historical Analysis</b>	Music anthropology investigates music's role as a cultural mirror and connector through time.
<b>Historical Drama</b>	Historical dramas interpret the past through specific theoretical frameworks, shaping public perception.
<b>Case Study: Kosovo</b>	National symbols, including music, become especially meaningful during crises of sovereignty.
<b>Case Study: Qatar</b>	During the blockade, collective emotions connected to music reinforced national identity.
<b>Case Study: Syria</b>	Historical and social structures strongly influence the shaping of national identity in crisis situations.

Music frequently becomes the quick emotional lingua franca in times of crisis, binding the public to its flag in ways that scholarship traces back at least a century (Assche et al. 2022). Ethnomusicologists have long debated whether tunes primarily reflect intra-societal anxieties or knit them back together (Akbar et al. 2024). The view from the theatre-historian benches is more performative: dramatic soundtrack choices, Kim observed, stage the past just as much as any powdered wig. Stories collected on the field tell the same tale in a dozen manuals: sirens in Kosovo morph into acoustic coats-of-arms when legitimacy wobbles (Boguslaw 2019), horns in Qatari souqs turn festive the day the land blockade lifts (Assche et al. 2022), and Syrian pop spits historical wounds onto TikTok because the nation is still arguing what its capital even means (Fulya 2025).

## Discussion

Music sits at the intersection of art and social science, shaping who we say we are and who we choose to be in public. Researchers often find that songs, chants, and street beats help hold strangers together, forge a national mood, and steady people when collective memory feels fragile. When it comes to knitting communities, nothing quite matches the looping refrain of a familiar tune. Akbar et al. (2024) point out that melody both mirrors the marketplace of ideas and subtly re-edits them, a truth that rings louder as borders blur. Similar observations by Carn reflect the same theme; in crowded, multi-religious cities, rhythm and movement quietly insist that divergent groups share the same floor if only for a chorus or two. The COVID-19 lockdowns, threatening to sever everyday routines, unexpectedly thrust music into the foreground as a go-to emotional lifeline. Shared online jam rooms and pop-up choir apps gave users more than a distraction; they turned sound-making into a portable shield for mental health while neighbours stayed physically apart (Zheng & Zhang, 2024). From this angle, song and rhythm emerge less as mere entertainment and more as a grassroots mental-health toolkit when the world tips sideways.

Drotts (2019) idea of music as a technology of social reproduction deepens that picture. When people repeat the same tune at graduations or family weddings, the songs quietly smuggle communal rules and memories from one generation to the next, preserving a fragile glue of belonging. Nararatwong and colleagues (2014) have shown that the pattern holds online, too; viral listening parties on Facebook and midnight Twitch sets serve, at least in part, as digital town squares, letting brands pivot and reassure customers when public trust suddenly wobbles.

## Music and the Construction of National Identity

Scholars have long noted that songs do more than entertain; they can literally help stitch a country together. Seeman (2012) points out that governments sometimes back musical programs because melodies carry state-approved stories deeper than textbooks ever could. When people hum familiar refrains, they unknowingly file away moments of triumph, trauma, and everyday life and then call those memories national history. Those grooves and choruses exert even more pull when the nation seems to wobble on its legs. Boguslaw (2019) argues that music steps forward as a visible flag during sovereignty storms, gathering strangers under one audible roof. At such crossroads, well-worn anthems, fierce protest tracks, or suddenly relevant memorial pieces swell up in public squares and online feeds, reminding listeners that they are, for better or worse, in the same boat. In communities woven from many cultural threads, music remains a frontline vehicle for claiming heritage and selfhood. Hoeven et al. (2019) observe that minority and indigenous groups deploy song and rhythm to stake their presence in the sweeping story a nation tells about itself. A parallel study of Aboriginal pop by Wu (2014) shows that the beats and lyrics can juggle rival claims while quietly locking in traditional memory. Policymakers, keen to harness any tool that cools social tension, have begun to fold music into official plans, especially where local councils hold real power. Thomas and Carr (2022) note that the charts are now being flagged as a low-cost way to boost the wellbeing of tomorrow's citizens and, by extension, to anchor shared national sentiment. Research by Fulya (2025) pushes further, arguing that the musical lens shifts whenever refugees recall flight, loss, and home. Collectively these studies warn that the role of music in national identity varies wildly by context-it can unite, exclude, or simply fade- and that it keeps changing

as new groups, new griefs, and new hopes enter the frame. Music often steps forward-as a protest chant, a rally hymn, or simply a song hummed in an empty room-when public life threatens to unravel. Crises, be they economic meltdowns or sudden political upheavals, give rhythm to both collective grief and stubborn hope. Assche *et al.*, (2022) observed in that peoples shared feelings spiral outward with every refrain, turning melodies into an instant public pulse where sentiment and state rhetoric keep remixing. Historians and sound studies scholars have long debated the archive hidden in an old tape. Akbar and co-authors argued in 2024 that music-shrill brass, soft strings, the click of castanets-traces cultural memory even when no one thinks of it that way. The same idea echoes Kim 2008, who pointed out that televised period dramas lean on their scores to nudge audiences toward one version of the past rather than another. Case studies of contemporary conflict repeatedly carry the discussion into the street and the marketplace. Kosovo residents turned to anthems and folk melodies during the 1999 sovereignty crisis, a kind of sound-based barricade that, in Bogus laws words, steeled both resistance and national unity. Years later, Qatar faced its own blockade, only to erupt in a quieter musical renaissance; local radio and backyard jam sessions became the only approved platforms for bragging about a country's stubborn pride, a transformation. Assche *et al.*, (2022) call spontaneous citizenship through song. From camp to camp in Syria, songwriter and fieldworker Fulya notes, asylum archives, classroom flags, and old cassettes.

## Conclusion

This investigation establishes that music is far more than a festive accessory or a means of entertainment; it actively engineers social bonds, constructs nationhood, and modulates communal reactions when crises strike. Operating on personal, societal, and state tiers, music embeds values, upholds collective narratives, and supplies comfort during crises. By crafting shared rhythms and anthems, sound reinforces psychological robustness, forges connections among strangers, and quietly transmits the customary rules that govern everyday behavior. Within the national frame, music pinpoints chapters of collective memory and sparks pride even under duress, yet it also reveals how those same songs adapt to accommodate multicultural realities and amplify sidelined narratives. In moments of historical rupture, a melody can dictate the emotional lens through which citizens archive their experiences. Given this wide-ranging influence, policymakers should treat music as essential equipment in frameworks for mental wellness, intercultural dialogue, and general social progress. Future research moving forward could measure how playlists correlate with public behavior or chart how streaming platforms reengineer identity formation in online environments.

**Biographical note:** Viola Torkornoo is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Communication, Culture, and Media Studies at Howard University. Her research centers on music, with a particular emphasis on African music, and explores the intersection of popular culture, strategic communication, and cultural diplomacy.

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