

Community music, identity and belonging among Dutchies in Australia: Comparing assimilation to multiculturalism

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Abstract

This article discusses variations in the experiences of Dutch identity and belonging to a music-making group in the Dutch migrant community in Melbourne, Australia. It answers the research question “Which variations of ‘Dutch identity’ are there for the participants and how does music-making relate to this?”. Feelings of identity and belonging are shaped by federal policies and micro-interactions. This article builds on the concepts related to migrant identity and ethnomusicology in the context of two distinct federal integration policies: the White Australia policy (which is characterised by an assimilation policy) and multiculturalism. The findings showed that community music has the potential to bridge generational, gender and class differences. Multiculturalism, enabling the participants to meet and sing in Dutch, empowered them to explore their dual identity as Dutch Australians, intersecting with disability, racial differences, age and education level. This study improves our understanding of the impact of diverse emigration and immigration resettlement policies that form part of the complexities of diverse generations and backgrounds of the Dutch-Australian diaspora.

KEYWORDS

choir, community music, Dutch-Australian migration, multiculturalism

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Australia, like the United States, Canada, France, Germany and the United Arab Emirates, is one of the countries that receives the most migrants worldwide (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2016). Australia is mostly a multicultural society with high levels of support for cultural diversity: Almost 40 per cent of the current population in Melbourne, Australia, was born overseas (ABS, 2016).

Migration studies have long focused on social justice and related questions. However, a recent systematic review found a lack of evidence regarding the impact of local community art on social equity (Heard et al., 2023). In this article, the researchers discuss feelings of Dutch identity and belonging that emerged through Zing! a community music-making group in Melbourne, Australia. Zing! attracts Dutch Australians of various ages, genders, socio-economic backgrounds and different waves of migration. These findings extend the current research on migrant identity (Ahmed et al., 2003; Marotta, 2020) by viewing migration and integration policies through a historical and ethnographic lens and noting the impact on identity formation that results from micro-actions in Australian communities (Hiller & Franz, 2004). The researchers built on the ethnomusicological works of Gilroy (1993), and more recently, Stokes (2020) to analyse how participating in community music creates different experiences of Dutch identity and feelings of belonging.

This study seeks to answer the research question “Which variations of ‘Dutch identity’ are there for the participants and how does music-making relate to this”? This study examines the lives of Dutch migrants in Melbourne, Australia. A significant number of Australians have Dutch ancestry; in the 1950s and 1960s, the Dutch were among the largest migrant groups. In 2016, more than 70,000 Australian residents had been born in the Netherlands (ABS, 2016). Overall, more than 330,000 Australians claim Dutch ancestry, of which one-third speak Dutch at home (Clyne, 2006). This study offers a unique view of the experiences of two generations of Dutch migrants, aligning with Australia's two major immigration policies.

This study addresses this gap in the literature on Dutch immigrants in Australia. It focuses on how successive Australian government policies have affected Dutch immigrants' identity formation. This study differs from other investigations on non-Anglo immigrants in Australia because of the variation in age and gender within communal music-making settings. For example, a study on Danish families in Melbourne by Christensen (2020) centres on the split people can feel between two countries and the longing to be “back home.” The migration of the Danes triggered questions about their identity, home and sense of belonging. However, Christensen (2020) focused on individual experiences and not on a group actively working on a shared identity.

Another example is a study of music-making within the Swiss community in regional Victoria (Sorce Keller, 2007). Unlike the Netherlands, Switzerland is a multicultural country comprising three distinct groups (ibid). This translates into a unique experience of reconfiguring identity in Australia, unlike that of the Dutch, who did not come from a multicultural country. In addition, Southcott and Joseph (2015) examined a choir comprising older Italian women, a very specific group. Although Southcott and Joseph's findings are interesting, the participants in our case study were a mixture of different genders and generations, allowing us to study various waves of migration.

Likewise, a study of elderly Russian migrants in Melbourne (Southcott & Nethsinghe, 2019) showed that music and social engagement help combat infirmity and isolation. Southcott and Nethsinghe's participants were mostly far older than the participants in this study of a Dutch choir. Overall, the combination of different generations and genders that create music in a group makes a unique contribution to migration research. Compared with existing studies, this article reports on (1) a larger mixture of age groups and hence migrant waves participating in the choir, and (2) a larger mixture of socioeconomic backgrounds.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. The next section provides the background and literature. The third section focuses on the methodology. The fourth section contains the findings and conclusions. The main finding of the paper is that there are many ways to identify as “Dutch” and that for all participants, music was a way to explore their identity and to feel more comfortable with themselves.

2 | BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE

2.1 | Dutch migration to Australia during distinct immigration eras

The Immigration Restriction Act 1901 (Cth), commonly known as the White Australia Policy, went into effect soon after Australia's Federation in 1901. The concept of assimilation was established and operationalised in 1937 by the Assimilation Act, a policy invoked by the Australian government to manage mixed-race Indigenous Australians (Haebich, 2015) to encourage children to abandon their cultural heritage and languages, and instead embrace the culture of the ruling British. The expectation of assimilation reinforces both the sense of homogeneity and superiority of Australia's largely Anglophone population (van Krieken, 2012; Vasta, 1992).

Assimilation implied that immigrants were expected to renounce their culture and language, abandon their past allegiances and become indistinguishable from the Anglophone population (Edgar, 1980, 281; Martin, 1978). In 1973, the Whitlam Government introduced a policy of multiculturalism. The multiculturalist narrative was intended to negotiate the symbolic requirements of nationalism and unity, and to deal with the pressure of internal ethnic and racial differences (Ang, 2010). Multiculturalism focuses on identity within a situation of difference, whereby a wide variety of fluid identities are created through intercultural contact (Sealy, 2018). It is often referred to as a celebration of ethnocultural diversity, celebrating customs, traditions, music, and cuisine, or the 3S model—samosas, steel drums and saris (Alibhai-Brown 2000 as cited in Beider, 2015)—a stereotype that might refer to symbols like tulips, clogs and Heineken for the Dutch. Multiculturalism is still supported by the Australian government.

2.2 | Defining migrant identity and belonging

Both identity and belonging are highly subjective experiences (Skrbiš et al., 2007; Vasta, 1992). Hall (1996, 2) reasoned that “identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal.” In this analysis, instead of “leaving” a home country and ethnic identity behind, this research follows a definition of migrant identity that fuses cultures together, developing into more complex identities. Many migrants feel that they are part of two (sometimes conflicting) cultures (see Park, 1928).

The definition of migrant group belonging is complex. Belonging is mostly defined as a social connection to a group or community where people feel accepted, respected and supported by that group (van Kooy, 2022). Compared with first-generation migrants, second-generation migrants face additional challenges in linking their parents' backgrounds to the new society. This study of the Dutch choir notes how the past experiences of the respondents influenced how they perceive their Dutch identity today: Assimilation policies may have prompted some respondents to hide their Dutch identity, whereas multicultural policies may have given more recent arrivals the notion that it is fine to be Dutch in an Australian context.

2.3 | Identity and belonging influenced by federal policies

Integration policy is closely associated with governance at the national-level and the ideas of national identity, nationalism and citizenship. Under Australia's Immigration Restriction Act 1901 (Cth) mentioned above, assimilation dominated the integration model. In this climate, the ultimate symbol of success, especially for migrant children, was seen as being part of the wider Australian population (Cahill, 2006). The assimilation policy discouraged the celebration of non-British traditions (Martin, 1978), thereby contributing to the loss of the Dutch language to second-generation Dutch (Walker-Birckhead, 1988). The youngest children only learned Dutch by talking, not reading or writing (Walker-Birckhead, 1988), and even so, it was not uncommon for Australian parents to stop migrant parents in the street to admonish them for not speaking English to their children (Clyne, 2006). While public life for many migrants was predominantly an Anglo-Saxon world, a Dutch home in Australia was often a place where some Dutch were spoken (often dialects).

With the advent of multiculturalism, ethnic diversity has become increasingly accepted in the public sphere. The everyday implication of this policy is that it allows people to maintain their sense of ethnic identity through contact with their co-nationals and integration into "mainstream" society (Koleth, 2010). This article on the Dutch choir explores how music operates as a key to identity in that it offers both a sense of self and of the collective. Music and singing evoke powerful memories and feelings of attachment to family and friends, past events, locations and different stages of life (Stokes, 2020).

2.4 | Ethnomusicology: Active creation of identity and belonging

The field of ethnomusicology has a long history in migrant studies; researchers "have never *not* been interested in the role of music in migration" (Stokes, 2020, 3; see also Green, 2011; Durrant, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 2008; Hudson, 2006; Marino, 2022). Offering an extensive contemporary mapping of the fields of migration and music, Stokes (2020) explored how music and migration shape (and are shaped by) identity and citizenship. Stokes shows how music, songs and dance have resisted state-enforced limitations on migrants; songs frequently communicate national and global struggles for rights and justice (Stokes, 2020). Ethnomusicology and the migration integration policies described above apply to the normative framework of the nation-state. Within this framework, music can assume an activist-like and mediating role when discussing matters of integration and civil rights. Music can help build group identity (Hudson, 2006). It is likely that existing power relations and limitations imposed on certain groups (such as migrants) negatively affect the ability of choir members to fully engage with music, or that their position in society compels them to adopt a certain identity (Hesmondhalgh, 2008).

Ethnomusicology underscores the importance and potential of music in ethnic identity formation and fostering belonging. Through participation in a singalong music event, various interpretations of what it means to be "Dutch" and how participants identify as such are actively created and shared, and memories are given new meaning in a fresh context.

Based on this brief review, this article explores what kinds of Dutch identity are created by choir members through music-making and how this affects their sense of belonging in Australia. This study also examines how singing impacts their sense of identity and belonging. How, unlike other Dutch communities, does the environment created by music-making attract and sustain relationships between Dutch individuals of various ages, genders and waves of migration?

3 | METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on diverse groups in terms of social class, gender, age, ability/disability and citizenship status. This study centres on a community music-making group, Zing! whose members were mostly Dutch migrants (first and second generations). The group was formed in mid-2016 due to an interest in the Dutch community as a place to sing in Dutch and meet other speakers. Led by a professional choir leader, the choir is open to all, regardless of whether they have previous experience singing, in choirs, or reading music. Most of the participants (but not all) were white and of diverse social backgrounds (i.e. social class, gender, age, disability and citizenship status). Despite their predominantly white skin, the respondents spoke about facing racism and racial inequality (Fitzgerald, 2018).

Data were collected between August and December of 2019. Ethnographic data were gathered during a community singalong in the town of Monbulk, Melbourne, and 11 interviews were held with Zing! choir members and event visitors later. The study was approved by the director of the community choir and by the RMIT University Ethics Committee (reference #0000022418-1). All respondents were given pseudonyms to allow for anonymity and were allowed the opportunity to read their transcripts and comment on them. Ethnography is based on observing and engaging in the same activities as the participants (as much as possible) and subsequently documenting these sociocultural activities (Goffman, 1989). Data collection methods provide suitable tools to look beyond the hegemonic opinion of (in this case) multiculturalism and residents' possibly fluid, multi-layered forms of identity formation and belonging (e.g. see Hall, 1990).

The singalong was organised by the community group in collaboration with the Monbulk City Council and took place in one of the rooms at the Monbulk Community Centre in the centre of town. Anyone who was interested was allowed to participate, and no selection was made. Monbulk is located in Melbourne East, a popular settlement area for Dutch migrants since the 1940s. The Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation have been traditional custodians of the land for over 60,000 years. The event room was, on this day, decorated with Dutch artefacts like buntings, balloons and a map of the Netherlands.

The purpose of the participant observation was to experience a first-hand community music event. The day programme offered various activities, including singalong performances of old and more recent Dutch songs, sharing short migration stories using artefacts (such as teddy bears, coffee pods and framed paintings), and teatime with Dutch cookies. Throughout the day, 20 visitors and 15 choir members interacted to create a friendly and informal environment.

Guided by the conceptual framework and ethnographic methodology, the following exploratory questions were central to the observations: Who visited the event and which connections were made? Which languages were used? How did visitors participate in singing, dancing and other activities such as sharing stories? Which items do people bring, and which stories are shared? Throughout the day, informal conversations with visitors took place about their migration stories, successes and challenges in Melbourne as well as their connections with the Netherlands. Toward the end of the day, visitors were invited to share their personal details in an interview if they were interested in further participation. Fourteen visitors and choir members expressed interest; all those who did so were approached for a follow-up interview and 11 agreed to take part.

The analysis combined inductive and deductive approaches. The interview grid was informed inductively by singalong observations and the authors' migrant experiences. The questions were also deductively informed by the two layers of theory presented above: identity formation after migration (Ahmed et al., 2003; Marotta, 2020) and ethnomusicology (Stokes, 2020). The interviews focused on four themes: (1) one's personal migration history (reasons for migration and settlement); (2) building a social network after arrival and how these connections changed

over time; (3) giving meaning to one's Dutch identity; and (4) their experiences with Dutch community music.

The second author participated in a singalong and held eight interviews with 11 participants (three double interviews): seven choir members and four event visitors. The first author is a choir member. Both the first and second authors are recent skilled migrants. The third author was born in the Netherlands to Dutch parents in 1944 during World War II (WWII). She then migrated to Australia with her family in 1949.

The researchers interviewed participants in two distinct groups: six children of migrants arriving in Australia post-war during the Immigration Restriction policy (arrival period: 1901–1973), and five people who migrated more recently during the time of multiculturalism (arrival period: 1973–current). The participants Mina (1956), Pete (1956), Johanna (1960), Henrika (1956) and Jack (1956) migrated after WW2, when the White Australia Policy reigned supreme (the participant's names are pseudonyms, and the year refers to the year of arrival, not year of birth). The researchers also interviewed second-generation migrant Charlie, born in Australia, Tom (1994), Marleen (1995) and Cindy (1995), who arrived during the period of multiculturalism as well as more recent arrivals (Mark 2014; Petra 2014). Cindy is of Asian ancestry and was raised in the Netherlands. The interview data were transcribed and analysed. Important to the analysis were the year of arrival, entry visa/policy, age at arrival, marital status, generation, reason for migrating, English-language capacity (language shifts) and social circles.

4 | FINDINGS

Three major themes emerged from the analysis of the participants from different generations (both men and women) with varied migration histories: (1) Moving to Australia: negotiating identity; (2) negotiating identity through music; and (3) the process of (re)creating an ethnic community identity. By analysing these themes, this study compares the two generations.

4.1 | Moving to Australia: Negotiating identity

One's reasons for moving to Australia and the journey itself affect the shaping of identity in the new place. They also affect the search for a community and hence the action taken to find one. The two generations had very different reasons for moving to Australia and different ways of getting there, which impacted their experiences of the early post-arrival period and their migration pathways. Pete, Johanna and Jack arrived by boat (*Johan van Oldenbarnevelt*ⁱ) in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

In the 1950s and 1960s, during a 4-week boat trip from the Netherlands to Australia, the migrants in transit established their first social connections. Some stayed in contact, others met after their arrival, and they supported each other in finding jobs and housing. Mina and Pete met in Australia in their early twenties and one of their three Australian children, Charlie, participated in an interview with his wife, Marleen, who spent her first 28 years in the Netherlands and then moved to Australia for an academic job in 1994. At the time of writing, Cindy, Tom and Petra had moved to Australia 27, 20 and 7 years ago for either adventure or love. Mark moved with his wife 10 years ago for lifestyle reasons.ⁱⁱ All the participants, except Cindy, had children. Cindy, a Dutch woman with an Asian appearance, indicated that she has experienced racism in Australia based on her hair and skin colour as well as her Dutch name and accent.

These groups shared similar impressions of Australia as an attractive destination because of its opportunities and climate. Little did they realise that there was as much of a housing crisis in Australia as in the Netherlands in the 1950s and 1960s. Upon arrival, Jack explained: “With the five of us we slept in a room on the veranda at the back of the house and my mum and dad

slept in the one-room shed in the backyard. They built a kitchen in the extension using a camp stove." Frequent house moves in the early years were common experiences for all migrants, both post-war and more recently. Mina explained: "If you migrate, you don't have a home. Everywhere is home. This is not difficult to achieve. In Holland, you are settled, but here, you live anywhere." Henrika and Johanna also recorded moving houses many times, which was not only a common experience in the 1950s but also in the 1960s, though less so after that time.

Good employment opportunities were the main reasons why the post-war interviewees moved to Australia. After the post-war period, there was an overabundance of jobs at the lower end of the job market. Most migrants were employed in accordance with the government's recruitment schemes, which were designed to repair essential services and advance the war-boostered economy, particularly in the manufacturing, building and construction sectors.

Cahill (2006) showed that Dutch migrant children were generally not as educated as their trade-skilled fathers in the 1960s. Both males and females were expected to leave school at age 15 to get a job to supplement their family income. Many second-generation Dutch pursued studies at night schools to improve their situation and become self-employed. The participant Jack is a prime example. Jack began his career as an apprentice to a printer at the age of 16, despite a significant physical disability. However, in his 30s, he studied accounting part-time until he obtained a bachelor's degree. He used his Dutch community base as a source of clientele.

Most of the immediate post-war participants met their Dutch partners in Australia during their families' settlement phases. Pete and Mina migrated at a young age, met at a church in Australia, married and raised three children. Mina stated: "Pete looks Dutch, he is tall. My mother and I do not look Dutch. We met at church, and he heard us speaking Dutch, so he approached us, and my mother invited him to coffee. Perhaps she did it for me"! This story resonates with the narratives of Henrika and Johanna. The two women, who migrated in their teens, met in Melbourne and had known each other for over 40 years at the time of the interviews, which took place at Johanna and her husband's house, located in a green and spacious suburb east of the central business district (CBD). Johanna said she invited people, neighbours or Australian friends into their homes to chat over coffee. She added: "But they would never invite us into their homes" and concluded that having coffee in their own homes is perhaps not how Australians socialise. Most first-generation Dutch who came to Australia as teenagers and adults and began their working lives there mentioned this experience of Australia in the immediate post-war period. These findings show that belonging is complex and fluid and is negotiated in local settings (Hiller & Franz, 2004).

Finding suitable and stable jobs was challenging for both migrant groups. Whereas post-war migrants entered migrant passage assistance programmes, it was much harder for more recent migrants to secure permanent residency in Australia. The younger generation—who arrived in multicultural Australia to study or via skills-based migration schemes—is predominantly university-educated (they have bachelor's and postgraduate degrees) and work in professional or managerial jobs (ABS, 2016). Those who obtained a visa via the partner programme (Tom, Cindy and Petra) had to prove that they were in a durable relationship with their Australian partner through evidence of a shared life (e.g. photographs and bank accounts). The skilled migration programme (in which Marleen and two of the authors participated) required applicants to find a sponsor or university in Australia, which could take several months or even years. Both partner and skilled migration schemes require connections to Australia before migration, whereas no pre-existing connections were required for post-war migrants.

How do pre-existing ties with Australia affect feelings of ethnic identity and belonging? Nearly 65 years after migrating, Mina's sense of ethnic identity is neither clearly Dutch nor Australian. She said: "I am not an Aussie yet also not Dutch." This comment suggests the multi-layered nature of identity formation and belonging (see also Hall, 1990). Building on the themes of migration and settlement, the participants were asked to describe their (ethnic) identity and feelings of belonging to Australia and the Netherlands. They were often unsure

of how to describe their Dutch identity. In contrast, they knew when something was missing. Jack remarked: “I got to have something that is missing, because I keep looking for it. This is my background. I am here and happy, but there is something missing, and I cannot identify what it is.”

Mina and Pete reflected on how they raised their children and the cultural aspects they incorporated into their lives. They gave their children the option of attending a Dutch language school on Saturday mornings. Pete said, “Charlie loved it, and he wanted to learn. The others asked, ‘Do we have to’?! Mina commented:

Our children were sorry and blamed us for not speaking Dutch at home. However, this is difficult. One Polish child at my school had trouble fitting in because he spoke Polish often. That made me think: With language and everything, he did not fit. You are in this country; let us get on with the language.

Mina's attitude toward language is in line with the assimilationist approach. Talking English instead of Dutch is a part of the hard work that goes into fitting in and blending in. Language proficiency differed greatly among the interviewees and was influenced by their pre-migration knowledge.

In the current multicultural climate, bilingualism is regarded as “cool,” as Tom's 20-year-old daughter mentioned from the other side of the room during the interview: “I think people think more highly of me because I speak Dutch.” Likewise, for recent arrivals Tom, Marleen, Mark and Petra, it was a conscious decision to speak Dutch at home to ensure that their children would be bilingual. In all these homes, Dutch is the predominant language between the Dutch-speaking parent(s) and their children. All five post-war migrants arrived with little or no English language ability, whereas English was less of a problem for more recent arrivals.

While individual differences remain, the stories of dominant identity and belonging among post-war migrants were shaped by the suppression of language and other cultural expressions, so they could pass for Australians; decades later, their stories are now dominated by learning, rediscovering and “coming-out” with a Dutch identity. This is in line with Sealy (2018), who stated that fluid identities are created through contact within and outside the own cultural context. There has been a clear shift from post-war migrants losing the Dutch language to building a bilingual life and the acceptance of diversity among more recent arrivals. For participants who migrated at a later stage in life, their Dutch identity and knowledge of Dutch culture were less of a question and more of a given.

These findings also support those of Ahmed et al. (2003), who claimed that one's home plays a very important role in identity formation. The homes of the participants in the present study displayed Dutch items and typical Dutch photographs, making the homes of some older participants little Dutch havens; objects in their homes included Delft blue China, photographs of windmills, skating on natural ice and people riding bicycles. Australia's assimilationist ideology made it difficult for the first- and second-generation Dutch to publicly proclaim their heritage, which meant that the concept of the Dutch home increased in importance. This was less of a dilemma for the Dutch who entered multicultural Australia.

These homes also displayed some Dutch knickknacks. This is in line with Skrbiš et al. (2007), who asserted that first- and second-generation migrants face different challenges in connecting to their new country, which also affects their preference (or dislike) for Dutch paraphernalia. We can assume that many migrants have experienced an enduring struggle regarding their identity, which is displayed at home. Creating an identity was, for many Dutch migrants, an extremely complex process, “never singular but multiple,

constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions” (Hall, 1996, 4).

4.2 | Negotiating identity through music

On the day of music-making, visitors were asked to pay for their ticket (AU \$5), write a name tag and leave a pin on a map of the Netherlands to indicate their place of heritage. Some participants had to leave their pin outside of the map as they were born in one of the former Dutch colonies in Indonesia or Aruba, or had mixed ancestry from other parts of the world. Cindy decided to place two pins: one in Thailand, where she was born, and one in her adopted country, the Netherlands. Throughout the event, people referred to the map and other places in the room to demonstrate their diversity. Material artefacts and interactions between visitors sharing an interest in consuming and performing Dutchness produced an intense opportunity to explore Dutch identity for a few hours.

For example, between songs, the day of music-making offered opportunities to share personal stories of migration. Visitors spoke about their Dutch and other birthplaces and shared memories of the countries where they spent their young childhoods. In addition, Dutch artefacts with personal meanings were shown and discussed, such as a teddy bear, small-framed paintings and a coffee jar brought from the Netherlands by themselves or their parents. These items and their associated stories connected the migrants' experiences and memories of the people in the room.

The story of skilled migrant Marleen illustrates her evolving need to connect to her Dutch identity. Shortly after migrating in 1995, she said, “I was still very Dutch; I had little desire to meet other Dutch people. This changed after two years.”

Jack, who arrived in the 1950s, actively ignored the Dutch community choir because “he had nothing to do with the Dutch.” Jack joined Australian choirs during his subsequent marriages to Australian women, and it was only after his last marriage ended that he wanted to connect with the Dutch community. He said that his Australian wives made it harder to get involved. He stated, “Sometimes I would go and bring them along, but they would not enjoy it. It just didn't work. No one was interested in my roots.” This story shows how Jack's decision to join the Dutch choir was influenced by his migration history.

The music itself evokes feelings of connection and identity for the Dutch in the choir (in line with the Italians in South Australia [Marino, 2022]). A recent migrant named Mark remarked: “I really identify with the songs I grew up with, from the 1980s and 1990s. That does not mean I do not like singing other music that is new to me. I find it even more interesting, although I do not identify with it.” Likewise, second-generation migrant Charlie said, “I like that I now know a lot more Dutch music. That is my background. Very enriching.” For Charlie and Jack, the community choir was part of their effort to learn more about their Dutch backgrounds. These quotes show that engaging with music, recognising songs from the past, and learning new songs helped the participants to develop their diverse identities and feelings of belonging to this part of the local Dutch community, which is a mix of migrant generations and knowledge.

While post-war migrants often lacked English language ability, recent migrants first experienced a *cultural cringe* (i.e. the need to get away from their ethnic background, as Marleen stated). After a few years, they recreated and fostered their ethnic identity. Cindy spoke of the community choir rehearsals: “It's that one evening a week with Dutch people that you don't need to explain yourself. That is wonderful. And keeping the connection with the Netherlands alive.” Cindy indicated that her Asian appearance is completely accepted in this setting, but she speaks and behaves like a Dutch person as there are many Dutch people from mixed backgrounds.

4.3 | The process of (re)creating an ethnic community identity

The music-making event demonstrated that the Dutch community choir Zing! and its events allowed post-war migrants, their children, and more recent migrants to connect and shape a local Dutch identity at the personal and community levels. This section presents data on the process of (re)creating a Dutch identity in relation to the participants and in their interactions with each other.

Learning about and accepting differences were recurring themes in the interviews. For some visitors, the music-making day was, and the choir in general is, an educational experience, learning about Dutch history, topography or diversity within the Dutch diaspora. Learning also took place through song lyrics. For example, the songs *Brabant* (artist: Guus Meeuwis), *In die grote stad Zaltbommel* (artist: unknown) and *Zoutelande* (artist: Bløf) narrate stories of the Netherlands, evoking memories among the choir and audience members of their faraway country of origin. *Brabant*, for instance, is about a province in the Netherlands, its culture of cosiness and local village pubs. The second song is about the city of Zaltbommel and, among other things, tells the story of a large flood and the missing top section of the church tower. This illustrates Dutch community music as a place for culture-making and experiencing through learning (Keil, 1966).

Accepting differences was a recurring theme in the interviews with the members of the Zing! choir. Some participants viewed the choir's diversity as an asset, as Tom said: "It is such a diverse team, that everyone fits in, anybody fits in; if you don't, that's an addition, because it is more diverse." Others indicated that conflicts could arise, especially around songs rooted in colonialism or the Netherlands as a strong seafaring nation, conquering other peoples and bringing back gold. For example, stories about the figure of Sinterklaas refer to the character of Black Pete, which reflects the Netherlands' past of slavery and colonialism. Some choir members felt the original songs and lyrics should remain. Others urged for the songs *Black Pete* and *Dear Pete* to be eliminated; this happened during a discussion among the choir members. As indicated by Durrant (2005), the role of the choir director is key to managing conflicts. The director demands respect from everyone, irrespective of age or ability, and is an active social justice advocate. The choir director carefully helps people to navigate their emotions and invests a lot of time in each choir member, ensuring that she bonds with them and that they bond with each other. She listens to their concerns. If issues arise (as in the case of *Black Pete*), she deals with them individually or through group conversations. Such skills are acquired through years of experience in managing community groups. One tactic she uses is to ask people to do research and provide advice based on their findings, which are then discussed in the group while she sets boundaries around the outcome (i.e. no discrimination and respect for everyone).

Marleen indicated: "There are people that want to learn about Dutch culture, or they have a Dutch partner; others grew up over there. [People work] well together as long as [they] are interested in the Dutch aspect." However, this means that choir members have heavy discussions and emotions can run high. As one choir member (not interviewed) indicated at the music-making event: "I was born in Indonesia. My parents speak Bahasa Indonesia, and we used to eat nasi goreng. That was all Dutch to me, just like your Dutch and this terrible *hutspot* [the Dutch version of mashed potatoes] you're eating is Dutch to you, yet I feel discriminated against here." With her abundant experience, the choir director solved this conflict by asking the members to introduce their favourite songs and sing them all (as long as they were not racist).

In line with findings from elsewhere in the world (Durrant, 2005), the participants' shared experience of performing created a community and sense of belonging in their new world (see Hudson, 2006). As Marleen concluded: "When we perform, we are really one choir, while during rehearsals the different identities are more noticeable." The reasons for coming to a

community choir differ and are frequently rooted in the sense of (re)creating a (lost) identity (Hesmondhalgh, 2008), yet the shared and embodied experience of performing for an outside audience bridges these differences and creates a community.

Through the active participation and embodiment of music and dance, Dutch music is performed and given new meaning in a context outside of its original creation (Stokes, 2020). Music is mobilised as a cultural learning tool by people new to their Dutch heritage, whereas for others, songs bring back lived or imagined emotions and memories, allowing participants to continue to create a Dutch identity. Moreover, through participation in Dutch community music, localities and temporalities merge and, to come back to Ahmed et al. (2003), 2, emphasis in original, “home is about *creating* both pasts and futures through inhabiting the grounds of the present.”

5 | CONCLUSION

This article discusses the experiences of Dutch identity and belonging to a Dutch migrant community, specifically a music-making group in Melbourne, Australia. Using an ethnographic approach, stories of identity formation were presented and how belonging was fostered through participation in the community music-making group. No other Dutch community in Australia offers a similar place for people to meet across generations to make music and share experiences. The participants' stories were embedded in their experience of migration and settlement, influenced by the policy era during which they migrated. This article also describes the suppression of identity among post-war Dutch migrants in post-colonial Australia. Later arrivals were more familiar and comfortable with their Dutch identity, which they openly explored and shaped through choral music.

This study makes a unique contribution to migration research. The analysis of two kinds of policies (assimilation during the White Australia policy, followed by the country's multicultural policy)—in conjunction with participation in music borrowed from ethnomusicology—offers tools to describe the top-down and bottom-up formation of identity. This study used both a historical and sociological perspective to investigate this matter.

The findings indicate that belonging is complex and fluid and is negotiated in local settings (Hiller & Franz, 2004). A community event organised in collaboration with the local government allowed individuals in the group to explore their identity, overcoming differences in their socioeconomic and racial backgrounds as well as age and gender. Fieldwork in this Dutch community choir provided an opportunity to discuss the diversity in which identity is experienced and lived on an everyday basis.

The study suggests that the focus on assimilation in the immediate post-war area in Australia involved racism and exclusion, and, while many people assimilated, they also lost a sense of pride in who they were. More recent arrivals, however, were able to maintain a sense of identity and were less ashamed of their “Dutchness.” Thus, this study provides no empirical evidence for the failure of multiculturalism (see Meer & Modood, 2014). Instead, multiculturalism may be held accountable for immigrants' success and happiness. This is in contrast to Entzinger's (2014) claim from the Netherlands. Entzinger argued that multiculturalism remains a useful way to facilitate conversations about differences at the macro-level in society and at the micro-level between individuals (see also Sealy, 2018). The present study showed that for these respondents, growing up during the assimilationist era created feelings of shame about their identity, which was further increased by low socioeconomic status, a lack of English comprehension, insecure housing and racism. Multiculturalism, enabling the participants to meet and sing in Dutch, allowed them to explore their dual identity as Dutch Australians, intersecting with disability, racial differences, age and education level.

The Australian Government, under the leadership of the former Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, the Hon Andrew Giles MP, reviewed its multicultural framework (Australian Government, Department of Home Affairs, 2023). They concluded that the culturally diverse arts and culture industries provide an important platform for Australia's diverse identities. This study provides similar support for Australia's multicultural policy. In line with other research (Durrant, 2005; Marino, 2022), this study revealed that participation in community arts positively affected feelings of inclusion and created a sense of belonging. Of course, it is not the first to find that when people sing together, they smile and their mood is lifted (Moss et al., 2018). However, the current study is the first to explore this issue in a Dutch choir in Melbourne, with people of all ages and genders represented from both historical and sociological perspectives. The embodied experience of people singing together also uncovered variations of Dutch identity in the participants. Moreover, these variations in identity varied from one person to the next and had little to do with the 3S type of multiculturalism (Kymlicka, 2010) for the younger generation. Although the older generation tended to think of Dutchness in terms of wooden clogs, windmills and Heineken beer, this was less so for the younger members of the choir. Hesmondhalgh (2008) also noted this desire to (re)create a version of Dutch identity, which was deeply embedded in the exclusion of non-Anglo cultures among the participants during the assimilationist period. Identity and belonging are negotiated within Dutch migrant communities in different ways. This study indicates that the repression of identity—which occurred during the assimilationist period for the older generation—led to the re-creation of this identity based on information available through the media (i.e. a preference for windmills, tulips and clogs). The younger generation, who grew up in the Netherlands and arrived in Australia as adults, felt less conflicted about their identities as they had experienced their own culture in their formative years. Moreover, they were allowed to celebrate their culture in Australia through multiculturalism.

This study demonstrates the importance of accepting differences in the lived experiences of migrants in Australia, and the ways in which they express and mould their own and shared identities. This study shows that compared with assimilation, multiculturalism allowed people to experience their ethnic identity more openly and fully within the “safe walls” of their ethnic community while supported by local governments. The need to explore and build this sense of identity was partly seeded by the structural exclusion of non-Anglo White Australian residents, especially in the 1950s and 1960s. The outcomes suggest that local governments should maintain a policy that supports local cultural communities, such as choirs, while continuous attention to the acceptance of differences is needed in all aspects of society.

The ethnographic approach enabled this study to derive deep insights into the mechanisms and macro-processes that affected Dutch identity and belonging at the micro-level. The shortcoming of this approach is that it remains unclear how these findings may be generalised to the broader population of Dutch migrants in Australia or to migrants in general (see also Heard et al., 2023 in this journal for a similar argument). Future research should investigate the relevance of these findings to other migrant groups that have more intersecting causes of discrimination, such as skin colour and religion. Furthermore, future research should explore the effect of community music-making on migrant identity and skills development in greater detail (Hickey-Moody, 2021). Focusing on skills development, community arts groups such as Zing! contribute to the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of high-quality, inclusive and equitable education; promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all; supporting gender equality; empowering all women and girls; and promoting full and productive employment and decent work for all (United Cities and Local Governments 2021).

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Karien Dekker: Conceptualization; funding acquisition; writing – original draft; methodology; writing – review and editing; project administration; supervision. **Jora Broerse:** Conceptualization; writing – original draft; methodology; validation; writing – review and editing; formal analysis; data curation. **Nonja Peters:** Conceptualization; writing – original draft; methodology; writing – review and editing; supervision.

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ Johan van Oldenbarnevelt (1547–1619) was a Dutch politician involved in establishing the VOC (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, translated: the United East India Company [1602–1799]). The luxurious *Johan van Oldenbarnevelt* passenger boat (1928–1963) sailed between Amsterdam and the former Dutch colonies in the East Indies before also sailing to and from new popular migrant destinations such as Australia.

ⁱⁱ Since the data were collected, Mark and his young family have moved overseas again for career reasons.

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