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From Implicit Cultural Memory to Explicit Performance: An Autoethnographic Study of Jewish Musicians, Artistic Identity, and Political Contestation in International Performance

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Abstract

This article examines how Jewish musicians negotiate artistic identity, cultural memory and public visibility in international performance contexts characterised by political contestation and rising antisemitism. Drawing on a qualitative autoethnographic methodology, the study integrates fifteen years of reflective performance journals, field notes, participant observations, professional interactions and documentary evidence collected between 2010 and 2025. These materials are analysed using thematic analysis to investigate how lived artistic experience intersects with broader social, cultural and political processes.

Three interrelated themes emerged from the analysis: the politicisation of artistic identity, the transformation of implicit cultural memory into explicit public performance and the development of artistic resilience in response to exclusion, protest and institutional pressure. The findings demonstrate that Jewish musicians are increasingly required to encounter the tension between artistic expression and externally imposed political identities, often becoming representatives of contested geopolitical narratives irrespective of their individual intentions. Under such conditions, musical performance extends beyond aesthetic practice to become a site of cultural memory, ethical encounter and symbolic resistance.

By combining autoethnographic evidence with theories of tacit knowledge, cultural memory, diaspora and performance studies, the article contributes to interdisciplinary debates on the relationship between art, identity and political conflict. It argues that autoethnography offers a valuable methodological framework for understanding how embodied artistic practice reveals processes of cultural transmission and identity negotiation that are difficult to capture through conventional qualitative methods. The study contributes original empirical insight into the experiences of Jewish musicians performing internationally and demonstrates how performance functions as a dynamic space in which cultural memory is continually negotiated, contested and reaffirmed under conditions of political scrutiny.

Keywords: Autoethnography; Jewish musicians; cultural memory; tacit knowledge; performance studies; artistic identity; diaspora; antisemitism; cultural boycotts; political contestation; thematic analysis; embodied performance.

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Introduction

Musical performance has long been recognised as a medium through which cultural memory, identity and historical experience are embodied and transmitted across generations. Beyond its aesthetic dimensions, performance functions as a form of cultural communication in which inherited traditions, collective memories and social identities are negotiated within specific historical and political contexts. For Jewish musicians, whose artistic practices have developed within diverse diasporic communities shaped by migration, persecution, resilience and cultural continuity, performance frequently carries meanings that extend beyond the interpretation of musical works. Vocal style, repertoire, language, ritual traditions and embodied performance practices often express forms of tacit cultural knowledge that are acquired through lived experience rather than formal instruction. These dimensions of performance become particularly significant when artists perform in environments where identity itself becomes subject to political interpretation.

In recent years, international cultural life has been increasingly influenced by political polarisation, rising antisemitism, cultural boycotts and intensified public debate surrounding the Israeli Palestinian conflict. Artists identified as Jewish or Israeli have experienced protests, performance disruptions, institutional pressure, cancellations and demands to publicly declare political positions before participating in cultural events. While these developments have generated considerable discussion within media, cultural institutions and political discourse, comparatively little scholarly attention has been devoted to understanding how such conditions affect the lived experiences of Jewish musicians themselves. Existing research has explored cultural memory, diaspora, artistic identity and the politics of performance independently, yet few studies have examined how these perspectives intersect within the everyday realities of professional musical practice under conditions of political contestation.

This article addresses that gap by examining how Jewish musicians transform implicit cultural memory into explicit public performance while negotiating increasing political scrutiny in international performance settings. Building upon Michael Polanyi's concept of tacit knowledge, Jan Assmann's theory of cultural memory, scholarship in diaspora studies and contemporary performance theory, the article investigates how embodied artistic knowledge becomes publicly visible and politically interpreted. Rather than treating musical performance solely as artistic expression, the study argues that performance constitutes a dynamic process through which inherited cultural memory is communicated, negotiated and, under particular political conditions, contested.

The central research question guiding this study however is **How do Jewish musicians transform implicit cultural memory into explicit public performance under conditions of political contestation and increasing public scrutiny?**

To address this question, the article adopts a qualitative autoethnographic methodology that combines systematic reflection on fifteen years of professional artistic practice with documentary evidence and broader cultural analysis. The empirical material comprises reflective performance journals, field notes, participant observations, professional interactions and publicly documented incidents involving Jewish and Israeli affiliated musicians between 2010 and 2025. Thematic analysis is employed to identify recurring patterns across these materials, enabling personal experience to be interpreted within wider social, cultural and political developments. By positioning lived artistic experience as a legitimate source of scholarly inquiry, the study seeks to illuminate dimensions of cultural performance that remain difficult to capture through surveys, interviews or quantitative measures alone.

The article identifies three interrelated processes that characterise contemporary experiences of Jewish musicians performing internationally. First, artistic identity increasingly becomes politicised before performance begins, with musicians frequently perceived through national, ethnic or ideological ideas rather than as individual artists. Second, forms of tacit cultural knowledge embedded within repertoire, language, vocal practice and embodied performance

become transformed into explicit public symbols through audience interpretation and political context. Third, repeated encounters with protest, exclusion, institutional pressure and public hostility contribute to the development of distinctive forms of artistic resilience, in which continued performance itself becomes an expression of cultural continuity and ethical commitment.

The contribution of this article is threefold. Empirically, it provides original qualitative evidence drawn from long-term professional experience, offering insight into the everyday realities of Jewish musicians performing in politically contested environments. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of autoethnography as an approach for investigating the relationship between embodied artistic practice and broader social processes. Theoretically, it integrates perspectives from cultural memory studies, performance studies, diaspora studies and tacit knowledge theory to explain how cultural identities are enacted, negotiated and transformed through live musical performance.

Rather than portraying Jewish musicians solely as passive subjects of discrimination or political conflict, the article argues that performance remains an active site of cultural agency. Although political hostility may alter the meanings attached to artistic practice, it does not erase the capacity of performance to sustain cultural memory, facilitate ethical encounter and encourage dialogue across social and political boundaries. By examining the intersection of lived experience, artistic identity and public performance, this study contributes to broader debates concerning cultural transmission, identity politics, artistic freedom and the role of performance within increasingly polarised societies.

Literature Review

Cultural Memory, Tacit Knowledge and Musical Performance

Musical performance has long been understood as more than the technical reproduction of a musical score. Within performance studies, musicians are increasingly viewed as bearers of embodied cultural knowledge whose artistic practices transmit historical memory, identity and social values across generations. Rather than existing solely within written texts or archival records, cultural memory is enacted through bodily practices, ritual, language, repertoire and artistic interpretation. For performers, knowledge is therefore not only cognitive but embodied, acquired through repeated participation in musical traditions and sustained engagement with cultural communities.

Michael Polanyi's concept of tacit knowledge provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding this process. Polanyi's assertion that "we know more than we can tell" highlights that much human knowledge cannot be fully articulated through language but is instead expressed through practice, intuition and experience. Musical performance exemplifies this form of knowing. Technical mastery, stylistic interpretation, expressive phrasing and emotional communication are developed through prolonged participation rather than explicit instruction alone. Musicians therefore embody knowledge that often exceeds verbal explanation.

This embodied understanding complements Jan Assmann's theory of cultural memory, which distinguishes between communicative memory transmitted through everyday interaction and cultural memory preserved through ritual, artistic practice, and symbolic representation. Performance occupies a unique position within this framework because it transforms inherited traditions into contemporary acts of communication. Each performance simultaneously preserves cultural continuity and allows traditions to acquire new meanings within changing historical circumstances. Consequently, musical performance represents a dynamic process through which communities continually reinterpret their cultural inheritance rather than merely reproducing the past.

Together, tacit knowledge and cultural memory provide a conceptual assumption for understanding how artistic practice functions as a medium of cultural transmission. For musicians, inherited traditions are expressed through repertoire, vocal style, gesture, linguistic expression and interpretative choices that frequently remain implicit until they become publicly visible during performance. Under conditions of political conflict or heightened public scrutiny, however, these embodied practices may become subject to ideological interpretation, transforming implicit cultural knowledge into explicit political symbolism.

Jewish Musical Practice and Diasporic Identity

Jewish musical traditions provide a particularly rich context for examining the relationship between cultural memory and performance. Throughout centuries of migration, displacement and cultural adaptation, Jewish communities developed diverse musical practices that preserved religious, linguistic and historical continuity despite changing geographical and political environments. Liturgical chant, cantorial traditions, klezmer, Sephardic song and contemporary concert repertoire each reflect different historical experiences while contributing to a broader framework of diasporic cultural identity.

Diaspora scholarship has emphasised that Jewish identity has historically been maintained not through territorial continuity alone but through portable cultural practices. Boyarin argues that Jewish communities developed interpretative traditions that enabled cultural continuity across multiple societies without dependence upon a single geographical homeland. Music occupies an important position within this process because it preserves memory through

embodied performance rather than written documentation alone. Melodies, vocal techniques, ritual practices and communal performance traditions therefore function as repositories of collective historical experience.

At the same time, Jewish identity cannot be understood as a homogeneous category. Contemporary Jewish communities encompass considerable diversity with respect to ethnicity, nationality, religious practice, language, political orientation and musical tradition. Individual musicians negotiate multiple identities simultaneously as artists, citizens, members of religious or secular communities and participants in international cultural networks. Recognising this diversity is essential for avoiding essentialist interpretations that reduce artistic practice to fixed expressions of collective identity.

Performance studies offer an important corrective by emphasising that identity is continually negotiated rather than simply inherited. Artistic identity emerges through interaction between performers, audiences, institutions and broader social contexts. Consequently, Jewish musical performance should not be viewed solely as the expression of predetermined cultural identity but as an evolving practice through which belonging, memory and artistic agency are continuously reconstructed.

Performance, Politics and Public Visibility

Performance has never existed independently of political and social contexts. Cultural institutions, concert halls, festivals and public performances frequently become spaces in which wider social conflicts are expressed and negotiated. While artistic performance may aspire to transcend political divisions, audiences, media and institutions often interpret artistic activity through prevailing ideological frameworks.

Recent scholarship examining the relationship between culture and politics has highlighted the increasing visibility of artists within contemporary public discourse. Social media, digital communication and twenty-four-hour news cycles have intensified public scrutiny of performers, making artistic identity more immediately accessible and politically interpretable than in previous decades. Musicians are increasingly expected to respond publicly to political events, while cultural institutions themselves face growing pressure regarding programming decisions, institutional partnerships and artistic collaborations.

These developments have become particularly evident in debates surrounding cultural boycotts. Supporters frequently argue that cultural institutions cannot remain politically neutral and that artistic engagement inevitably reflects broader structures of power. Conversely, critics maintain that artistic exchange represents an important space for dialogue, mutual understanding, and intercultural communication that should not be restricted by political exclusion. This debate reflects broader tensions concerning the relationship between artistic freedom, ethical responsibility, and political activism.

For Jewish and Israeli-affiliated musicians, these tensions frequently become personalised. Public discussions surrounding geopolitical conflict may result in artists being perceived primarily through assumptions regarding nationality, ethnicity, or religion rather than through their artistic practice. Consequently, musical performance may become interpreted as symbolic political representation irrespective of the performer's individual intentions. Such conditions fundamentally reshape the relationship between artistic identity and public reception.

Autoethnography and Artistic Research

Investigating these experiences requires methodological approaches capable of capturing the relationship between lived experience and wider cultural processes. Autoethnography has emerged as an important qualitative methodology for examining phenomena in which personal experience intersects with broader social, political, and cultural structures. Rather than treating subjective experience as anecdotal, contemporary autoethnographic scholarship argues that systematic reflexive analysis can generate valuable insights into collective social realities.

Within artistic research, autoethnography is particularly well suited to investigating performance because artistic knowledge is frequently embodied, situated and experiential. Musicians routinely acquire forms of tacit understanding that cannot be fully documented through interviews or questionnaires alone. Reflexive engagement with rehearsal processes, concert performance, audience interaction and professional practice therefore provides access to dimensions of artistic experience that remain inaccessible through many conventional research methods.

Importantly, contemporary autoethnography extends beyond personal narrative. Rigorous autoethnographic research combines reflexive documentation with systematic analysis, theoretical interpretation and engagement with external sources. Through triangulation between personal experience, documentary evidence, and existing scholarship, researchers are able to situate individual experiences within broader cultural and political developments while maintaining methodological transparency.

Research Gap

Although substantial scholarship exists on cultural memory, diaspora, tacit knowledge, performance studies and contemporary antisemitism, relatively few studies have examined how these perspectives intersect within the lived experiences of Jewish musicians performing internationally under conditions of political contestation. Existing research has tended to privilege theoretical analysis, institutional perspectives or political discourse, while comparatively little attention has been given to the embodied experiences of performers themselves.

This article addresses that gap by integrating theories of tacit knowledge, cultural memory, diaspora and performance with empirical evidence derived from long-term autoethnographic research. By examining how political contestation shapes artistic practice, public visibility and the performance of cultural identity, the study contributes original qualitative evidence to ongoing debates concerning artistic freedom, cultural transmission and the relationship between performance and contemporary political conflict.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative autoethnographic research design to examine how Jewish musicians negotiate artistic identity, cultural memory and public visibility within contemporary international performance environments characterised by political contestation. Autoethnography was selected because the research question concerns the intersection of lived artistic experience and wider social, cultural, and political processes. Rather than treating the researcher's experiences as anecdotal evidence, the study employs systematic reflexive analysis to examine how individual experiences illuminate broader patterns affecting Jewish musicians performing internationally.

Following Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011), autoethnography is understood as a qualitative methodology that combines autobiographical experience with cultural analysis. Within artistic research, this approach is particularly valuable because musical knowledge is largely embodied, experiential and context dependent. Performance is not only a technical activity but also a social practice through which identity, memory and cultural belonging are enacted and interpreted. Consequently, the researcher's lived experiences provide an important source of empirical evidence for understanding processes that are often inaccessible through interviews, surveys or documentary analysis alone.

The study is informed by an interpretivist epistemology, recognising that knowledge is socially situated and constructed through interaction between individuals, institutions and cultural contexts. The objective is therefore not statistical generalisation but the development of analytical insight into how political developments shape artistic practice and the public interpretation of Jewish identity within international cultural settings.

Researcher's Positionality

The author's dual role as both researcher and professional musician is central to the methodological design. Over a professional career spanning more than fifteen years, the author has performed as a soloist and ensemble musician across Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia, collaborating with orchestras, opera companies, festivals, universities and cultural organisations. These professional engagements have provided sustained opportunities to observe interactions between artistic performance, institutional practices, audience reception and broader political developments.

Rather than attempting to eliminate subjectivity, the study adopts reflexivity as a methodological strength. Throughout the research process, the author maintained a reflexive awareness of how personal experiences, professional identity, cultural background and emotional responses influenced both data collection and interpretation. Reflexive writing accompanied the documentation of performances and professional encounters, enabling initial impressions to be revisited critically during the analytical process. This approach recognises that knowledge generated through artistic practice is situated while remaining capable of contributing to broader scholarly understanding.

Data Corpus

The empirical material analysed in this study was collected longitudinally between 2010 and 2025 and consists of six complementary sources of qualitative evidence.

The primary dataset comprises reflective performance journals and field notes recorded before, during and immediately after concerts, rehearsals, tours, educational projects and professional meetings. These records document artistic preparation, audience interaction, institutional responses, emotional reflection and observations concerning the relationship between artistic identity and public reception.

A second source consists of participant observations recorded during professional engagements across multiple international cultural contexts. These observations include rehearsal processes, public performances, backstage interactions, institutional communication and informal conversations with conductors, fellow musicians, artistic directors, festival organisers, educators, audience members and cultural practitioners.

Third, the study incorporates documented professional incidents involving discrimination, protest activity, performance disruption, institutional pressure, cancellation of artistic engagements and other experiences directly affecting the author's professional practice. These incidents were documented contemporaneously whenever possible and subsequently compared with similar publicly reported events.

Fourth, documentary materials were collected from publicly available reports, policy statements, media coverage, institutional announcements and publications addressing antisemitism, cultural boycotts, artistic freedom and controversies involving Jewish or Israeli affiliated artists.

Finally, archival and scholarly sources relating to Jewish musical traditions, diaspora, cultural memory and performance studies provide theoretical context through which empirical observations are interpreted.

The integration of these complementary datasets allows triangulation between personal experience, documentary evidence and broader cultural developments, thereby strengthening the analytical credibility of the study.

Case Selection

Year	Country	Incident Type
2025	France	Protesters set off flares and smoke bombs during an Israel Philharmonic Orchestra concert in Paris.
2025	Poland	Activists threw red paint onto the stage during a performance by David D’Or in Warsaw.
2025	Belgium	A Flemish festival dropped a German orchestra over concerns regarding its Israeli conductor (Lahav Shani)
2024–2026	Europe	Calls to boycott Israel’s participation in the Eurovision Song Contest over the war in Gaza. In 2026, five countries (Spain, Ireland, Slovenia, Iceland, and the Netherlands) did not participate.
2024	Netherlands	Two concerts by the Jerusalem String Quartet scheduled at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam were cancelled due to planned protests.
2024	Poland	A Jewish Festival concert in Kraków was cancelled over security fears linked to unrest in the Middle East.
2023	United Kingdom	Leading artists criticised the Barbican Hall’s collaboration with the Israeli Embassy for a concert by the Jerusalem Orchestra East West.
2022	Australia	Boycott of the Sydney Festival due to Israeli funding.
2019	Norway	A boycott campaign against Yaniv D’Or and Ensemble NAYA, linked to military service issues, led to the cancellation of a concert tour in Bergen.

Year	Country	Incident Type
2015	Spain	A Spanish festival dropped U.S. singer Matisyahu after he refused to express views on the Israel–Palestine conflict.
2013	Spain	The Galician Education and Culture Council objected to peace activist Achinoam Nini because of her alleged “sympathies to military Zionism.”
2013	South Africa	An Israeli Opera performance featuring Yaniv D’Or at the Lyric Theatre in Johannesburg was targeted with stink bombs and stage protests.
2012	United Kingdom	Protesters disrupted performances by Israel’s Batsheva Dance Company during the Edinburgh Festival.
2011	United Kingdom	Protests disrupted a Proms concert by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra at the Royal Albert Hall in London.
2010	United Kingdom	Protesters disrupted a live BBC Radio 3 broadcast of the Jerusalem String Quartet at Wigmore Hall in London.

In addition to personal experiences, the study examines documented incidents involving Jewish and Israeli affiliated musicians between 2010 and 2025. Cases were identified through systematic review of publicly available reports, institutional statements, media documentation, professional networks and the author's own observations.

To ensure methodological consistency, incidents were included only when they met four selection criteria:

1. the event involved Jewish or Israeli affiliated musicians, ensembles, festivals or cultural institutions;
2. there was documented evidence of protest, boycott, cancellation, institutional pressure or disruption affecting artistic activity;
3. sufficient independent documentation was available to verify the event
4. The incident directly related to the research question concerning the politicisation of artistic identity within international performance contexts.

The resulting corpus does not claim to represent every documented incident during the study period. Instead, it constitutes a purposive sample selected to illustrate recurring patterns across different countries, artistic disciplines and institutional settings. The cases are analysed comparatively to identify common forms of political contestation and their implications for artistic practice.

Data Analysis

The empirical material was analysed using thematic analysis following the six phase framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Analysis proceeded iteratively through repeated engagement with the complete dataset rather than as a linear process.

The first stage involved familiarisation with the material through repeated reading of field notes, reflective journals, observational records and documentary sources. During this phase, preliminary analytical memos were recorded to capture recurring observations and potential conceptual relationships.

In the second stage, descriptive codes were assigned to meaningful segments of text. Coding focused on experiences relating to artistic identity, cultural memory, public visibility, audience reception, institutional behaviour, discrimination, resilience, performance practice and emotional responses.

The third stage involved comparing and consolidating related codes into broader conceptual categories. Through constant comparison across personal narratives, observations and documentary evidence, recurring patterns became apparent across multiple contexts.

The final analytical framework comprised three overarching themes:

- **Politicisation of Artistic Identity**, examining how musicians became publicly identified through ethnic, religious or national categories before artistic engagement occurred;
- **From Implicit Cultural Memory to Explicit Performance**, exploring how embodied cultural knowledge became publicly interpreted through political and ideological frameworks.
- **Artistic Resilience and Cultural Continuity**, analysing how musicians responded to experiences of exclusion, hostility and institutional pressure while maintaining professional and cultural commitments.

Throughout analysis, emerging interpretations were continually compared across different data sources to strengthen analytical consistency and minimise reliance upon isolated experiences.

Trustworthiness

Several strategies were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the research.

First, methodological triangulation combined reflective journals, participant observations, documentary evidence, media reports and archival materials to corroborate emerging patterns.

Second, the longitudinal nature of the dataset, spanning fifteen years of professional practice, reduced the likelihood that findings reflected isolated events or exceptional circumstances.

Third, reflexive memo writing was maintained throughout the research process to distinguish descriptive observations from subsequent analytical interpretation.

Fourth, emerging themes were continuously compared with existing scholarship in cultural memory studies, performance studies, diaspora studies and qualitative research to ensure theoretical coherence.

Rather than pursuing statistical reliability, the study seeks analytical credibility by demonstrating that interpretations are grounded consistently within multiple forms of empirical evidence.

Ethical Considerations

The research addresses politically sensitive topics involving discrimination, identity and international cultural relations. Ethical considerations therefore informed every stage of the research process.

Where experiences involved identifiable colleagues, institutions or audience members, anonymity has been preserved unless incidents had already entered the public domain through documented reporting. Reflective narratives focus on the researcher's own experiences while avoiding unnecessary attribution of motives to other individuals.

The study recognises the diversity of political, religious and cultural perspectives within Jewish communities, artistic institutions and international audiences. Consequently, the purpose of the research is not to generalise about particular groups but to investigate recurring patterns affecting artistic practice within specific professional contexts.

Limitations

As an autoethnographic study, the research is grounded primarily in the experiences of a single researcher-practitioner. The findings should therefore be interpreted as analytical rather than statistically representative. Experiences of Jewish musicians differ according to nationality, musical genre, institutional context, political orientation, gender and personal biography.

Nevertheless, the value of autoethnography lies precisely in its ability to illuminate processes that remain difficult to observe through conventional research methods. By combining long-term professional experience with systematic qualitative analysis and documentary evidence, the study offers original insight into the relationship between cultural memory, artistic identity and political contestation within contemporary international musical performance.

Findings:

The findings demonstrate that **contemporary political contestation fundamentally reshapes the relationship between musical performance, cultural memory and artistic identity**. While previous scholarship has established that performance serves as a medium for transmitting cultural memory and embodied knowledge, this study reveals that political context has become a decisive factor in determining how performances are interpreted. Rather than being evaluated primarily as artistic practice, performances by Jewish musicians are frequently understood through political frameworks, creating a significant disconnect between artistic intention and public reception. As a result, artistic identity is increasingly negotiated not only through musical expression but also through externally imposed assumptions regarding ethnicity, religion, nationality and geopolitical affiliation.

A central contribution of this study is the demonstration that tacit artistic knowledge becomes politically visible under conditions of heightened scrutiny. Extending Polanyi's concept of tacit knowledge, the findings show that embodied practices, including repertoire selection, vocal expression, stylistic interpretation, ritual performance and accumulated artistic expertise acquire meanings beyond the intentions of performers. What musicians experience as artistic or cultural expression may be interpreted by audiences and institutions as explicit political symbolism. This transformation highlights that performance is co-produced through the interaction between performers, audiences, institutional settings and wider political narratives rather than through artistic intention alone.

The study further demonstrates that cultural memory is not simply preserved through performance but actively reconstructed in response to contemporary political realities. Supporting Assmann's conception of cultural memory as a dynamic process, the findings show that musical performance functions as a site where inherited traditions are continually renegotiated. Rather than serving as passive repositories of historical memory, performances become spaces in which the meanings of history, identity and belonging are reinterpreted within changing political contexts.

Another major finding is that diasporic identity remains central to understanding contemporary Jewish musical practice. Participants consistently described navigating multiple professional, cultural and personal identities, yet public responses frequently reduced these complex identities to simplified political categories. This demonstrates that the negotiation of belonging continues to define diasporic experience and that contemporary performance environments often intensify these identity negotiations rather than transcend them.

Perhaps the study's most significant empirical finding is that **the politicisation of artistic identity frequently occurs before performance even begins**. Participants repeatedly encountered situations in which artistic work was judged according to assumptions about national or ethnic affiliation instead of artistic quality. This finding substantially advances performance studies by demonstrating that political expectations shape audience engagement before a single note is performed, transforming concert halls, rehearsal spaces and festivals into symbolic arenas where wider geopolitical conflicts are enacted.

Importantly, the findings also reveal that political contestation does not solely produce vulnerability but can also strengthen resilience. Although experiences of protest, exclusion, institutional pressure and public hostility affected professional practice and personal well-being, many musicians responded by reaffirming their commitment to artistic integrity and cultural continuity. Continued performance therefore emerged not as an act of political activism but as an expression of professional responsibility, cultural preservation and resilience. These findings challenge simplified assumptions that public expressions of Jewish identity are inherently political.

Methodologically, the study demonstrates that autoethnography provides a uniquely valuable approach for examining embodied artistic practice. By integrating reflective practice, documentary evidence and thematic analysis, the research captures emotional, relational and tacit dimensions of musical performance that remain largely inaccessible through conventional methods. This methodological approach strengthens the credibility of the findings while illustrating how individual artistic experience can illuminate broader social and political processes.

Collectively, these findings make three principal contributions. Empirically, the study offers one of the few sustained qualitative investigations of the lived experiences of Jewish musicians performing internationally during a period of heightened political polarisation. Theoretically, it extends scholarship by integrating tacit knowledge, cultural memory, diaspora and performance studies to explain how artistic identity is negotiated when performance becomes entangled with political conflict. Methodologically, it demonstrates the capacity of rigorous autoethnography to generate substantive insights into the relationship between embodied artistic practice and wider cultural processes. Overall, the findings establish that musical performance should be understood not merely as artistic expression but as a dynamic social practice through which cultural memory, identity, resilience and ethical engagement are continually negotiated within contested political landscapes.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the relationship between musical performance, cultural memory and artistic identity has become increasingly shaped by contemporary political contestation. While previous scholarship has established that performance functions as a vehicle for transmitting cultural memory and embodied knowledge, this study shows that political environments profoundly influence how such performances are interpreted. The

empirical material indicates that Jewish musicians frequently experience a disconnect between artistic intention and public reception, with audiences, institutions and media often interpreting performance primarily through political rather than aesthetic frameworks. Consequently, artistic identity is no longer negotiated solely through musical practice but also through externally imposed assumptions concerning ethnicity, religion, nationality and geopolitical affiliation.

This observation extends Polanyi's concept of tacit knowledge by demonstrating that embodied artistic knowledge acquires additional meanings when performed in politically contested environments. Polanyi argued that individuals possess forms of knowledge that cannot be fully articulated through language but are expressed through practice, intuition and embodied action. Within musical performance, such knowledge is manifested through repertoire selection, vocal production, stylistic interpretation, ritual practice and accumulated artistic experience. The findings suggest that these forms of tacit knowledge become increasingly explicit under conditions of political scrutiny. Elements that performers regard as artistic or cultural expression may be interpreted by audiences as political symbols, irrespective of the musician's intentions. The transformation from implicit to explicit performance therefore emerges not simply through artistic communication but through the interaction between performer, audience, institutional context and prevailing political narratives.

The study also contributes to scholarship on cultural memory by illustrating how memory is continually reconstructed through performance rather than merely preserved. Assmann conceptualises cultural memory as a dynamic process sustained through ritual, symbolic practice and collective participation. The present findings support this perspective while demonstrating that contemporary political conflict reshapes the social meanings attached to cultural performance. Rather than functioning solely as repositories of inherited tradition, performances become sites in which historical memory is renegotiated in response to present-day political realities. This process highlights the adaptive nature of cultural memory and underscores the importance of performance as an active rather than passive form of cultural transmission.

The experiences documented in this study further reinforce the significance of diaspora as a framework for understanding Jewish musical practice. Jewish musical traditions have historically developed within communities characterised by migration, displacement and cultural adaptation. The findings indicate that this diasporic condition remains relevant in contemporary international performance contexts, where musicians often navigate multiple and sometimes competing identities simultaneously. Professional artists may identify primarily as musicians, educators or cultural ambassadors, yet public responses frequently reduce these complex identities to simplified political categories. The resulting tension illustrates how diasporic identity continues to involve the negotiation of belonging across diverse social and cultural environments.

A particularly significant finding concerns the politicisation of artistic identity before performance itself begins. Participants in the documented events—including the author as researcher-practitioner—frequently encountered situations in which artistic work was evaluated through assumptions about national or ethnic affiliation rather than through artistic merit. Such experiences demonstrate that political contestation increasingly precedes aesthetic engagement. In these circumstances, the concert hall, rehearsal studio, and festival venue become spaces in which broader geopolitical conflicts are enacted symbolically. This finding contributes to performance studies by demonstrating that the social meanings of artistic performance are shaped not only by the performance itself but also by expectations and narratives that audiences bring into the performance space.

The findings also illuminate the complex relationship between vulnerability and resilience. Experiences of protest, exclusion, institutional pressure and public hostility undoubtedly affected professional practice and emotional well-being. However, rather than leading uniformly to withdrawal from public performance, many documented experiences reveal processes of adaptation and resilience. Continued artistic practice frequently became understood as an affirmation of cultural continuity rather than as an explicitly political act. This distinction is important because it challenges simplistic interpretations that equate all public expressions of Jewish identity with political activism. For many musicians, continuing to perform represented a commitment to artistic integrity, professional responsibility and cultural preservation rather than participation in partisan political discourse.

The analysis further demonstrates the value of autoethnography for investigating embodied artistic practice. Many dimensions of musical performance including emotional preparation, audience interaction, professional relationships and tacit forms of knowledge are difficult to observe using conventional research methods alone. By combining long-term reflective practice with documentary evidence and thematic analysis, the study captures aspects of artistic experience that are often absent from institutional or policy-based research. Autoethnography therefore contributes not merely personal testimony but a systematic means of examining how broader social phenomena become embodied within everyday artistic practice. The integration of multiple qualitative data sources strengthens the credibility of these interpretations while illustrating the methodological potential of reflexive artistic research.

At the same time, the findings should be interpreted within the limitations of the research design. Autoethnography privileges depth over breadth and does not seek statistical generalisation. The experiences documented here reflect one researcher's professional trajectory within particular musical and institutional contexts. Jewish musicians are neither culturally nor politically homogeneous and experiences of political contestation vary considerably according to nationality, genre, institutional setting and individual biography. Consequently, the findings should be understood as analytically transferable rather than universally representative. Future research incorporating comparative autoethnographies,

interviews with performers from diverse backgrounds and cross-cultural case studies would further strengthen understanding of how political conflict influences artistic practice across different musical traditions.

Despite these limitations, the study makes several original contributions. Empirically, it provides one of the few sustained qualitative examinations of the lived experiences of Jewish musicians performing internationally during a period of heightened political polarisation. Methodologically, it demonstrates the capacity of autoethnography to generate rigorous insights into the relationship between embodied artistic practice and wider cultural processes. Theoretically, it integrates tacit knowledge, cultural memory, diaspora and performance studies to explain how artistic identity is negotiated when performance becomes entangled with contemporary political conflict. Collectively, these contributions suggest that musical performance should be understood not only as artistic expression but also as a dynamic social practice through which cultural memory, identity and ethical engagement are continually negotiated within changing political landscapes.

Conclusions

This study set out to examine how Jewish musicians transform implicit cultural memory into explicit public performance under conditions of increasing political contestation and public scrutiny. Drawing on a qualitative autoethnographic methodology that combined fifteen years of reflective artistic practice with documentary evidence and thematic analysis, the research explored the intersection of embodied musical knowledge, cultural memory, artistic identity and contemporary political conflict. By situating lived artistic experience within broader theoretical perspectives from performance studies, cultural memory studies, diaspora studies and theories of tacit knowledge, the article contributes new empirical insight into an area that has received limited scholarly attention.

The findings demonstrate that musical performance is not merely an aesthetic activity but a dynamic process through which cultural memory is embodied, communicated and publicly interpreted. Under conditions of political polarisation, artistic identity may become politicised before performance even begins, with musicians frequently perceived through assumptions about nationality, ethnicity or religion rather than through their artistic practice. In such contexts, forms of tacit cultural knowledge embedded in repertoire, vocal expression, performance practice and artistic interpretation become transformed into explicit public symbols whose meanings are negotiated by audiences, institutions and the wider political environment.

At the same time, the study shows that political contestation does not simply constrain artistic expression. The empirical evidence suggests that experiences of exclusion, protest, institutional pressure, and public hostility may also reinforce musicians' commitment to cultural continuity and artistic integrity. For many performers, continued participation in

international musical life represents neither political activism nor withdrawal from public engagement, but an affirmation of artistic practice as a means of preserving cultural memory, fostering dialogue, and maintaining professional identity in increasingly polarised environments. Performance therefore emerges as both a site of vulnerability and a space of resilience, where inherited traditions are continually reinterpreted in response to contemporary social realities.

Methodologically, the research demonstrates the value of autoethnography for investigating embodied artistic knowledge and professional practice. Musical performance involves emotional, physical and relational dimensions that are often inaccessible through conventional qualitative methods alone. By integrating reflective journals, field observations, professional experiences, documentary sources and thematic analysis, the study illustrates how systematic reflexivity can generate rigorous scholarly insight into the lived realities of artistic work. The findings also demonstrate the importance of triangulating personal narratives with documentary evidence and existing scholarship to strengthen analytical credibility and situate individual experience within broader cultural and political processes.

The study likewise contributes to ongoing theoretical debates by integrating Polanyi's concept of tacit knowledge with Assmann's theory of cultural memory and contemporary scholarship on diaspora and performance. Rather than viewing these theoretical perspectives independently, the article demonstrates how they converge within the everyday experiences of professional musicians whose performances become sites where embodied knowledge, historical memory and public identity intersect. In doing so, the study extends existing scholarship by showing that the transformation of implicit cultural knowledge into explicit performance is shaped not only by artistic intention but also by the social and political contexts in which performance is received.

Several limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. As an autoethnographic investigation, the research reflects the experiences of a single researcher-practitioner and therefore does not claim statistical representativeness. Jewish musicians perform within diverse cultural, geographical, institutional and political contexts, and their experiences inevitably vary according to individual biography, musical genre, and professional setting. Future research could build upon this study through comparative autoethnographies, collaborative qualitative research involving performers from different backgrounds or mixed-method investigations combining interviews, ethnographic observation and audience studies. Such research would further illuminate how political conflict influences artistic practice across a wider range of cultural traditions and performance contexts.

Ultimately, this article argues that understanding musical performance requires greater attention to the lived experiences of performers whose artistic identities are increasingly shaped by political realities beyond their control. At a time when cultural exchange is frequently challenged by ideological division, artistic performance remains a vital space in which memory, identity and humanity are communicated across social and political

boundaries. By demonstrating how implicit cultural memory is transformed into explicit public performance, this study contributes to broader debates concerning artistic freedom, cultural transmission, identity politics and the enduring role of music as a medium of dialogue, resilience and ethical encounter in contemporary society.

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