# Resonance, Resilience and Empathy in Music Production with Asylum Seekers in Australia

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## ABSTRACT

This paper considers how complex emotional dynamics emerge in spaces of music-making between music facilitators, music producers and asylum seekers as they variously navigate experiences of dislocation and re-emplacement. I analyse these musical journeys in terms of resistance and resilience to consider how the musical reworking of grief and pain can become tools to humanize the 'empty spaces' of new worlds through a strategic reorientation of kinaesthetic and imaginative empathy. The paper illustrates how the vicarious recounting of painful journeys[1] by those who have listened to trauma stories immerses both singers and music producers in reciprocal recognition and reimagining of events that have the power to animate the 'empty space' of the singer's displacement. In turn, these movements simultaneously afford opportunities for "a new human sociality" of open-ended dialogue and polyphony which is "centred around, rather than built over against, the victim" (Alison, 1998, p. 307). In this empathic process, I focus on a case study of how one Australian music producer has sought to express emotional transitions in his production process with asylum seekers and Aboriginal Australians by moving through his own immersive narratives to elicit musically the poetics of song in a way that enlivens 'the Other', inviting moral action and reaction. I argue that such processes of intercultural production are not just a means of recording music as commodity but a form of co-creating empathy. Yet, the paradox of empowerment is such that it is because of the very vulnerability of asylum seekers and Aboriginal Australians, that their songs have become a powerful medium of validation that makes them both highly personal and intimately public. In turn, I suggest that both music producers as listeners (and ourselves as readers) become morally bound to act upon our appreciation of these stories in the context of state and national agendas, having the capacity to empower further recognition of asylum seeker musicians who are coping with fragile senses of liminality.

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[1] See also Lenette and Procopis (2016, p. 12) on 'emotional journeys' of volunteers.

## INTRODUCTION

This article considers how complex emotional dynamics emerge in spaces of music-making between music facilitators, music producers and asylum seekers in Australia as they variously navigate the telling and reception of narratives of dislocation and re-emplacement in music and song. In particular, it addresses how music facilitators have responded to how refugees and asylum seekers draw upon music for resilience by employing a range of music making techniques that 'bear witness' to the effects of trauma and allude to the need for apology, recognition, reparation and restitution (see also, Lenette and Procopis, 2016; Gobodo-Madikizela, 2008a) . In various conflict settings around the globe, research on music and refugees that falls under the umbrella of the term 'community music intervention' (Higgins, 2012; see also Bartleet and Higgins, 2018) has included the impact of music upon resettlement following migration, e.g., Afghans living in California, (Baily, 1999); music-making in Vietnamese refugee journeys, (Reyes, 1999); music as therapy following imprisonment and torture, (Dokter, 1998); transition and restriction in migrant camps in Turkey, Calais, Dunkirk and Kurdistan (Öğüt, 2015; Emery, 2017); and processes of music therapy as healing among Sudanese refugees in Australia (Jones, Baker and Day, 2004).

In the *Oxford Handbook of Community Music*, Gillian Howell (2018) recognises the ambivalence associated with the term 'intervention' that has been co-opted from fields of military operations and aid campaigns to apply to music programmes in conflict-affected contexts. She notes that the term nevertheless aligns with community music practices that entail competency in musicianship with a "focus on participation and active, inclusive music-making and their position outside the mainstream education environment" (Howell, 2018, p. 44). However, at a policy level, the label 'intervention' carries deep emotional resonances for those in some of parts of Aboriginal Australia where severe measures were implemented across Northern Territory Aboriginal communities on 21 June 2007 in response to political rhetoric that had exacerbated moral panic about alleged widespread child sexual abuse, and which led to nine key regulations being introduced via the Northern Territory National Emergency Response. Otherwise known as 'the Intervention', the implementation of these measures prompted an ensuing 'culture crisis' (see Altman and Hinkson, 2010). The legacy of the Intervention continues to challenge and shape Aboriginal cultural values and practices, as well as having significantly impacted upon relations of trust between communities and the state for those families subjected to the negative effects of these policies. As we shall see, these modes of disciplining an Indigenous body politic by the Australian state resonates with the effects of some Federal policies upon refugees and asylum seekers. Just as "ways of depicting Aboriginal selfhood in art, music and dance have become recognised modalities of cultural affirmation" (Magowan 2014, p. 221) among Stolen Generations artists who have been dispossessed of land, language and cultural practices, I will argue that music offers a medium for the renegotiation not only of traumatic pasts and disruptive memories but it also performs a recalibration of self-other identification in the host nation and affords a space for voicing complex conflict histories and Indigenous rights across the Australian continent. While I am drawing some broad parallels here between asylum seekers and Aboriginal Australians in terms pertaining to dislocation and dispossession, the contexts of forced migration of asylum seekers, whether from war, threat or personal injury, and the effects of early Australian massacres, Aboriginal child removal, assimilation and later Intervention policies in Aboriginal communities cannot be aligned uncritically and without careful unpacking of their differences.

Just as the term Intervention has been problematic in the Australian context, so too, has the nomenclature 'refugee' created a paradox as a collective identifier for this group, that nonetheless seeks to champion diversity (Sechehaye and Martiniello, 2019, p. 2). While Australia now highlights multiculturalism, inclusion and cultural diversity (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2012),[2] Australian support mechanisms for those seeking asylum have not always dealt with the aftermath of emotional, psychological and psychosocial effects of displacement, isolation and social rejection (Keyes, 2000; Gifford et. al., 2007). Indeed, the UN has strongly criticised Australia for its treatment of refugees, particularly regarding the "forcible return of refugees to their home countries, mandatory detention [in] Operation Sovereign Borders and offshore detention" (Cody and Nawaz 2017).[3]

## MUSIC MEDIATION

Given the sensitivities surrounding the politics and policies of 'the Intervention' for Aboriginal Australians, (which is to be distinguished from the type of measures, modes of surveillance and interventions that impact refugees), I suggest that the widely used concept of 'music intervention' techniques might be better discussed in the Australian context, as 'music mediation' to avoid the negative connotations of the term. As Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin (1998, p.17) put it, mediation is:

> that middle voice which opens up a channel of communication between separate energies. In the case of music, I am referring to musicians who through a mix of artistic talent, temperamental disposition, and what some would call historical accident, find themselves in a position where their natural accent speaks to opposite sides.

Music mediation may be viewed as a bridge, "that allows listeners [and music participants] access to parts of their [host] society and their experience of which they were unaware or perhaps just suspicious" (Ó Súilleabháin, 2018, p. 3; my insert). This applies particularly to refugees and asylum seekers who, due to their circumstances, find themselves having to mix in new communities with other asylum seekers of different backgrounds, religions and ethnicities, some of which they may have been wary of in their home countries. In the process of music mediation, we shall see how emotional resilience drives the impetus to participate and shapes growing confidence in senses of security, trust and the ability to open up to those also suffering from the effects of conflict.

While sound and music have long been deployed in conflict and post-conflict settings for protest and resistance as evidenced in a vast body of literature on music as political resistance around the world from the Ukraine to South Africa and Japan (Toksöz, 2016, p. 51), there is also a growing body of multidisciplinary research around singing to alleviate trauma and effect resilience among asylum seekers. The

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status of asylum seeker in the literature is often approached from the point of view of either being 'a victim suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or as a resilient survivor' (Robinson 2013, p. 90). In the latter vein, research on asylum seeker narratives has emphasised how music has been used to enhance individuality, agency and the creation of 'accidental communities'[4], as well as contribute to inclusion and social cohesion (Weston and Lenette, 2016). A study conducted by Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia in 2013-2014 with the asylum seeker group Scattered People has examined the impact of music-making on social determinants of health (Sunderland et. al. 2015; Lenette and Sunderland, 2014; Lenette et al., 2015); processes of creating community resilience through song (Lenette et al., 2015); shifts in gender norms through digital storytelling and participatory music making (Lenette et al., 2018a; Lenette, Procopis and Caballero, 2018b; Vromans et al., 2018); and music for social justice (Sunderland, Graham and Lenette, 2016).

The following analysis stems from research that I began in Australia in January 2017 and continued in December 2018, in Brisbane with some of the Scattered People community musicians, two facilitators who have produced three of their albums and two filmmakers who have been following their journey for a documentary. I take up Lenette and Procopis' (2016, p. 65) call in an earlier *Music and Arts in Action* volume that "more narratives such as the ones presented here should be documented to enrich discussions on this topic…" Through ethnographic research, I consider how struggles of loss and displacement have become productive sources of creativity and inspiration among music facilitators, as much as among asylum seekers themselves, and show how their albums accrue power and influence as they accumulate musical histories as expressions of human rights.

Rather than situate their music albums simply as a means of protesting against the injustices of the asylum system, I will argue that they serve to create spaces of healing in which absent memories of loved ones, may be safely held in songs of reattachment, while the grief of losing connectedness is channelled into singing hope into musical sociality. Furthermore, by seeking to recognise a broader 'extended consciousness' (Damasio, 2000) about how music can empower those who are structurally marginalised within a nation and who have experienced trauma, I will examine the interrelationship between renowned Australian rock band GANGgajang and Aboriginal musicians to illustrate how musical exchange creates an engaged social conscience about Indigenous rights, belonging and displacement in the Scattered People music videos. Secondly, this approach to Aboriginal rights is extended to the production of sounds and senses of asylum seeker belonging through the work of the band's lead guitarist, Robert James, who is the music producer for these asylum seekers. I examine his influence behind Scattered People compositions on their last album, *Sugarmill Road 2015*, and consider how he draws upon his Australian heritage and prior experience working with Aboriginal communities to generate compositional strategies which are co-productive of new spaces of intercultural empathy. Working with longstanding Australian producers like Robert James and with the support of a wide range of musicians, Scattered People highlight their struggle and persecution in stories of fleeing from oppressive regimes to arriving in detention, together with the loss, grief and difficulties of resettlement they experienced, at the same time as they seek to

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[4] An 'accidental community' refers to 'people who have lived in a refugee or internment camp together for a certain period' (Malkki, 1997, p 92 cited in Lenette, et al., 2018a, p. 27).

build a new community of the dispossessed through song. These compositional and music production processes further speak to an inclusive interculturality that is generative of hope and recognition for refugee futures and which resonates with and connects to the struggles of Aboriginal Australians.

## THE RESONANCE OF SONG AS SOCIAL FORCE

As asylum seekers share difficult and emotionally immersive testimonies, the process around the poetics of song production enlivens recognition of 'the Other', inviting moral action and reaction. Yet, we need to ask how and why do song and music become key to "empathic repair" (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2018, p. 11)? Ian Cross (2003, p. 19) argues that, "Music can only make sense if it resonates." The question of how it resonates, in what ways, for whom and under what kinds of circumstances has long taxed music psychologists. Some have analysed music and emotion through verbal and nonverbal cues in order to pinpoint specific attributes of sound or visual sources that trigger emotion. Juslin and Sloboda (2001) admit that this analytic deconstruction is difficult to assess and quantify and Gabrielsson (2001, p. 448) notes that "it remains a fascinating challenge, although frustrating at times, to investigate how, why, and in what context we can be so strongly affected by music". Scholars admit to this difficulty of defining the moment/s of musical response but that has not deterred ethnomusicologists and others from seeking to elaborate their contexts and effects. The force created in the context of productive musical tension is resonance. Coleman et al. (2014, p. 6) define resonance as "a dynamic of shared energy, connection and purpose within and between people and groups in a particular time and space". It is "a form of heightened energy that induces increased coherence which provides a sense of shared direction and meaning in a social system" (Coleman et al. 2014: 6), and in sharing experiences, participants can be transformed in the process. As Mezirow (2000, p. 8) notes, educating people through this empathic force can generate 'transformative learning' by changing:

> taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action.[5]

Speaking of the power of music to overcome division, Blacking (1983; 1985) (cited in Sager, 2006, p. 147) talked about the need for "Fellow-feeling…as an awareness and sensitivity to other people, to the 'other self' and to the world of nature". In this sensitivity, he also identified "'bodily resonance' or 'bodily empathy' – the sensation and awareness of synchronicity with the physical movements of others around one in a music situation" (Sager, 2006, p. 147) referring to this as "falling into phase" (Blacking, 1983, p. 57), an experience that other ethnomusicologists have analysed as "entrainment – the process of one rhythm adjusting to fit another" (Sager, 2006, p. 148; Kelly, 1988). By listening to one another as Blacking notes above, he not only highlighted the problem of how to think through division but, in doing so, challenged the boundaries and emotional borders of mind and body, inviting musicians to engage deeply through music, with the intention of "transcending cultural differences" (Magowan, 2005, p. 68).

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[5] Indeed, in relation to the production of the groove, musicians are able to enhance and 'constrain each other's musical production in ways that create a balance between individual expression and group cohesion, open up new communicative possibilities and the realization of new musical states' (Walton et al., 2018, p. 13).

For musicians, these unfolding dynamics of the forces of musical interaction can generate "feeling[s] of shared coherence and rhythmic flow" (Doffman, 2009, p.131) or "the groove" (Keil and Feld, 1994). However, flow also depends on a "theory of participatory discrepancies" (Keil, 1995), that is, of being out of time with one another, in order to be able to recognise the points at which musical bodies need to move more equally to become temporally conjoined with other players to lock into their rhythmic experiences of movement. How such creative tensions are replicated in everyday life pose dilemmas for understanding action, delay and response, though there have been some moves towards analysing group synchrony.[6] Thus, contrary to what one might think, the groove does not occur in the moment of full synchronisation but in the "ability to actively distort the musical structure" (Doffman, 2009, p. 144). It is only when "constraints on the system allow for dynamics that provide the right kind of tension, the right kind of push and pull between components" (Walton et al., 2018, p. 13) that synchrony arises with increased energy and a sense of transcendence. In other words, an awareness of synchronisation also facilitates the opportunity for increased empathy to be exchanged in the process. This, in turn, has the effect of breaking down assumed and perceived boundaries of assumptions about others or oneself. Yet, while the energy of synchrony can decrease tension and improve bodily resonance with others, it is often discussed in the moment, as if it works in isolation from resonances that are latent in the 'extended consciousness' and yet, which conjure memories of people, places and events. These systems are mutually intertwined and implicating. For example, the materiality of landscapes plays into the imagination of identity as well as the performance of bodily borders and boundaries and, therefore, tension and synchrony operate continuously in a multitude of ways when traumatic events are considered in relation to the musical process.

In a global context defined by loss of rootedness caused by conflict, peoples' relationships to places, environments and the music that is made in and about them continue to be impacted by what Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 300 cited in Murphie 1996, pp. 19-20) refer to as "a constant process of formation and dissolution". Speaking of "sonoric landscapes" which can "be traced through the spaces of listening and performing", cultural geographer, Mike Crang (1998, pp. 92-3, my emphasis) argues that re-territorialisation is not just about "associating bands with places, or even observational lyrics about places, but [it is] also [about] the way [in which] music forms spaces 'for' people". In other words, music has the "[…] ability to create new territories with multiple centres – territories that Deleuze and Guattari […] call rhizomes, territories of becoming" (Murphie (1996, p. 25).[7] As they note, sound "impels us, drags us, transpierces us…" and in doing so, it provokes us to act (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 348).

## MUSIC-MAKING AND EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

The organisation Scattered People stems from the outworking of rhizomatic action prompted by a chance encounter with music-making that arose from a government impasse in asylum policy decisions. It began as a refugee claimant choir, formed in 1998, that produced an award-winning CD in 2000 of the same name. Following

[7] In their argument, sound is privileged because it is 'at the cutting edge of deterritorialization' not because it has a superior quality to other sensory dimensions of emotional affect (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 348).

interviews with the director and some members of Scattered People in 2017 and 2018, I outline here how composers and music producers view intercultural music exchanges as generative of new kinds of emotional resilience. I will argue that this musical and emotional nexus has created a language of poetic persuasion around human rights, which goes beyond music-making. As refugees re-tune their sentiments of loss through resilient resonances in song, so music producers are enfolded into empathic witnessing in compositional response, and they become co-creators in the resoundings and renarrativization of refugee memories, heritages and histories.

For these refugees, song writing became a medium for empowering emotional solidarity. The first Scattered People album was written and produced in Brisbane in 2000, drawing together refugees from East Timor, Bosnia, Sri Lanka, El Salvador, Chile, Colombia, Eritrea, Russia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Iran, Algeria, Liberia, China, Tibet, Turkey, Bulgaria and others. All participants were considered equal enabling a "kindred spirit" to emerge (Procopis interview with the author, 2017). In 2011, The director was the first person to gain permission to play music with some of his Scattered People group at BITA the Brisbane Immigration and Transit Accommodation centre, which housed asylum seekers from Christmas Island. He noted, "Detainees would offer their poems written in their mother tongue asking that we make them into songs" (quoted from the album cover, *Sugarmill Road*, 2015). This process was one that not only gave voice to the voiceless, but it acknowledged the need to recognise identity, individuality and personhood.

Indeed, one of the key challenges facing refugees has been a history of the disavowal of personhood and, in turn, their relationship with state. In August 2001, the actions of the Australian Government dehumanised detainees who were rescued by the MV Tampa as they prohibited any "'personalising' or 'humanising images' [to be] taken of the asylum seekers" (Alafiah CD notes).[8] In contrast, the Scattered People's CD, Alafiah[9] individualises and personalises the stories of these refugees and, thereby, indirectly invites the government to recognise their legitimacy. The song, Alafiah, speaks of resilience in the face of dislocation and the extreme trauma of the journeys and violence they faced. In this song writing process, participants were responsible for the musical decisions in composition. By generating a space to facilitate questions that enabled them to reflect upon their struggles, youth felt able to voice their feelings of loss and dislocation. They drew upon their cultural heritage and roots in language and music to emphasise injustice and promote resilience. The impact of these songs was to create an alternative narrative for them when they left detention and it generated a collective profile that fed into broader international arenas. For example, one song on the Scattered People album, Labarik Sira Hotu, was extensively "used by the United Nations in East Timor in their advertisements to encourage young people to vote in 2001 in the emerging country's first democratic elections" (https://www.safecom.org.au/scattered.htm). Indeed, president Xanana Gusmao expressed his appreciation to the Scattered People production team.[10] The success of the music of Scattered People has been in

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8 The Norwegian freighter MV Tampa was prohibited from entering Australian waters despite having rescued 433 refugees and 5 crew.
9 Alafiah is creole for 'the search for freedom' in Sierra Leone, (CD notes).
10 Available at: https://www.safecom.org.au/scattered.htm [Accessed 7 July 2019].
Concerns for children and their suffering because of being removed from parents and family are expressed in this song alongside the need for 'empathic repair' (Gobodo-Madikizela 2018, p.11).

part its ability to speak to, as well as transcend, cultural divides, diverse ethnic backgrounds and international politics.

## THE DYNAMICS OF ABORIGINAL AND REFUGEE HISTORIES IN MUSIC PRODUCTION

To understand how intercultural sonoric landscapes and multiple centres of becoming are evoked in the music of Scattered People, we first need to understand the relationship and values established over time between facilitators and asylum seekers. As noted earlier, Robert James is the music producer of Scattered People and lead guitarist of the renowned Australian rock band, GANGgajang. Adelaide born singer and lead guitarist, James left for Sydney in the 1970s and was invited to join GANGgajang for the recording of their first album in 1985. I met Robbie in his spacious music studio, with bookshelves and a keyboard on one side and a large table in the centre with computers, mixing board and surround sound speakers. I began by asking him about non-Western and specifically Aboriginal influences upon his rock career. He commented, "A lot of our lyrics, we sing about this country as well, as there's an underlying Indigenous vibe to what we write even though it's not obvious". Yet, later songs like *Nomadsland*, released in 2000, includes didjeridu on the backing track and the music video juxtaposes the singer walking along a remote dirt track with superimposed images of the city, which points respectfully to the Arnhem Land pop group Yothu Yindi and their songs *Treaty* and *Tribal Voice*. This influence has its roots in an early encounter when the group was to make an enormous impact on James who was invited to become their lead guitarist in 2001 while both bands were touring together in Rio. As a skilled didjeridu player, GANGgajang's lead singer, Mark Callaghan, was also invited to play for Yothu Yindi during the Brazil tour and they were extremely encouraging of his contemporary didjeridu style. Ongoing Aboriginal influences in the band's work are exemplified in a 2016 single, *Circles in the Sand*, a collaboration between the band and the Anangu people of Uluru in Central Australia. GANGgajang is one of the first Australian bands to have been given permission to produce a hit single and music video with Anangu. *Circles in the Sand* speaks of Anangu kinship and connections to the land that are evoked in concentric circles in sand paintings and on artworks. The band's longstanding relations with Indigenous communities have been shaped also in part by their drummer, Buzz Bidstrup, who formerly managed the Jimmy Little Foundation that works to "improve the quality of life for Indigenous Australians" (http://www.jlf.org.au). All the band's members had worked with Jimmy Little at different times over the years.

Robbie explained how "a lot of [GANGgajang's] earlier songs were about specific places" but were not discussing Aboriginal culture per se. Yet, he sees compositions such as his full orchestral score with twenty-five different pieces, (also called *Nomadsland* after his earlier release), to be his own songline and an empathetic "reaching out to the Aboriginal people as [a] sort of bridge". In future performance of this work, he expressed a concern that it should include an equal mix of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal singers, which he sees as important in enhancing intercultural relations; just as the band Yothu Yindi was also of mixed backgrounds during his time playing with them. It is this history and affinity with Aboriginal musical heritages that have shaped his philosophy and underpinned his compositional practices with the group Scattered People.

## CO-CREATING EMPATHY IN SOUND

Robbie reflected upon his life in the rock limelight, his deep involvement with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory and Central Australia and spoke with

awe and admiration of the asylum seekers in his production work on the album *Sugarmill Road* for Scattered People. In this latter intercultural endeavour, he told me that his approach to fusion does not mirror that of world music, which has been considered to be marked by a shift from "traditional to hybrid sounds' and 'a quest for the exotic" (Brandellero, 2011, p. 110), but rather he seeks to acknowledge and retain the integrity of both Australian and Iranian musical heritages and performance styles as holding their own 'sonoric landscapes' complementing one another. Robbie said, "I didn't set out to make an Iranian album. We're in Australia; I wanted to demonstrate the two cultures could actually be one." As an example of this reterritorializing of musical and performative spaces of interaction, the second track on the album, *Broken Wing*, conjoins orchestral music and Iranian song.[11] For Robbie, accompanying this piece was a deeply moving experience. Inviting the Persian singer to his studio, he asked him to perform *a capella* in his own language without guidance as to tempo, key or rhythm. As the song unfolded in the key of E at 83 beats per minute, Robbie began to provide orchestral accompaniment. Speaking of the huge responsibility that this three-minute song generated, he said:

> I just threw this string quartet underneath what he had sung and I was waiting for it to fail, you know, when's it going to fall apart …and let's see… it, it was so beautiful, it just worked. It was incredible.

He then sent it to the director of Scattered People who played it to his wife who was moved to tears. Robbie said, "It was almost out of my control cos it, the thing did work, it was what it did on its own I didn't do it, I just threw it together but I just had this idea that it would work and it did and that set the tone for the whole album." The vicarious experience of listening to and musically accompanying the recounting of painful asylum seeker journeys in song immerses both singers and music producers in reciprocal recognition of events that have the power to animate the "empty space" of the singer's displacement. In turn, these movements simultaneously afford opportunities for "a new human sociality" of open-ended dialogue and polyphony which is "centred around, rather than built over against, the victim" (Alison, 1998, p. 307). As the singer recounted to Lenette and Procopis (2016, p. 64) "this song had special meaning and reminded him of his homeland".

As in *Broken Wing*, this process was also poignantly evoked in the *Sugarmill Road* album song *Remember*. The song was originally recorded by an Iranian singer on guitar, however, Robbie extracted the vocals, scoring them to orchestral music but leaving a reprise at the end with the original arrangement for guitar and voice to capture the singer's personal musical heritage. In one sense, the dissolution of the various song elements permits new "territories of becoming" to be shaped in conjoined compositional techniques. It shifts the perceived marginality of foreign sounds into the centre of classical composition and gives them primacy. In another sense, their reformulation generates an alternative imaginary of musical and cultural heritage from the homeland in resonant recombination with tonalities working dialogically and in synchrony. Robbie noted, the aim is "to create that setting of putting people in this country…so hopefully they'll be understood better by the general people".

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[11] For an additional perspective and extended discussion of the impact of this song on the lead facilitator see Lenette and Procopis (2016, pp. 10-11).

## REHUMANIZING RESILIENCE THROUGH SONG

While the seamless musical interweaving of Australian genres together with other musical heritages facilitates degrees of 'accommodation', 'adaptation' and 'aesthetic autonomy' for new senses of being, they also variously reveal and conceal narratives of "disjuncture, displacement and dispossession" (see Bohlman 2011, p. 157). A tension thus arises between musicians' stories of hardship and grief in relationships that have been torn apart alongside the collective messages of hope and resilience that these songs offer to asylum seekers and others. To illustrate the emotional tension as well as imaginative and kinaesthetic empathy that can emerge in this process, the final section of this argument turns to stories of two Persian asylum seeker singers who are part of the Scattered People and are the stars of a forthcoming documentary film to be released in 2019.[12] These stories take us through the traumatic journeys of asylum seeker musicians, Mir and Salma[13] who fled from Iran. For Mir, his music had come to be viewed as an unwelcome political intrusion and, for Salma, the musical censorship of women had become oppressive.

In 2015, 27-year-old Mir, who studied music at a conservatory, explained how it enabled him to express 'feelings' but it was the political articulation of these feelings that forced him to leave Iran for Indonesia. Within three days of making the decision he had booked a flight, abandoned his business and his girlfriend. Once in Indonesia, he paid his way to the fishing boats along with two hundred other people who were ferried across to the main boat. He recounted the physical pain he experienced being unable to move, along with his declining emotional state as he became despondent, losing all hope. After two days of sailing, they were picked up by the Australian Navy which seemed to offer a glimmer of promise when they were taken to Christmas Island. He quickly realised that detention meant he would be confined behind wire for a month before being transferred to the now closed Wickham Point Detention Centre in Darwin for another six months. In detention in Darwin, he was given a guitar and began teaching others to play.

The state of limbo that refugees like Mir are left in deprive them not only of sociality, relationship and personhood but also hope for the future and the potential to be productive and fulfilled. After six months, he was transferred from Darwin to Brisbane Detention Centre. His time in detention caused a period of depression which saw him withdraw from everyone including Scattered People, and though it was not a straightforward process, participating in music allowed him to deterritorialize the trauma-scapes of his past and create a therapeutic landscape, in part by voicing difficult memories that preoccupied him, thereby rechannelling his emotions and the meaning of his life into songs for healing. At that time, working with Scattered People meant that music provided the solace of an imagined future that had yet to be realised, as while remaining in limbo he was unable to take employment or to study.

Rather than following a path of musicianship like Mir in Iran, then 23-year-old Salma explained how listening to popular music had enriched her emotionally and brought awareness of social justice. Encouraged by her father as a young child, he told her "'…Salma, if you want to listen to music, listen to music that can change your life, [that] can say something to you." Listening to a cassette of Pink Floyd

songs that her father had given her as a child, she began to convey her feelings through singing along with the songs. Little did she know then that a decade later she would be performing a version of Pink Floyd's *On the Turning Away*, as the key item for the Scattered People documentary and in a concert.

The songs of Mir and Salma, together with the other Scattered People refugees, have become more than a voice, they provide a means of testifying about the treatment of refugees seeking asylum in Australia, as well as a mode of reimagining the future with senses of hope. This emergent space of musical and emotional displacement creates an emotive language of empathic persuasion, which goes beyond music-making. Indeed, musical journeys of emotion can become their own modes of resistance and resilience to oppression, with song as a facilitating tool which re-humanizes deadened spaces through the kinaesthetic and imaginative relating of their physical and musical journeys. Through hearing their stories, we are also invited to share our stories to be 'co-participants', reflecting upon their impacts at "deeply personal levels" (Godobo-Madikizela, 2018, p. 11). This call to collective action reconfigures senses of rights away from the self to understanding the experience of the loss of and need for restitution of rights of all those who have been held in detention and left without a sense of future and hope. Without an official legal arena in which to share their stories of suffering, music making has offered them a temporary sense of security in the extremely hostile and harsh environment in which they arrived and it granted these refugees personal recognition of their plight, as well as highlighting the need to be treated with respect, which they found was not always forthcoming. Thus, the process of recounting painful journeys simultaneously immerses these singers and listeners within a visceral recognition of past events that has the power to animate the singer's return and retune emotional responses from displacement to resilience. The impetus behind record production is not just a means of releasing music as commodity but also a process of co-creating empathic resonance which reorients how singers and listeners respond to conditions of displacement and loss in an appreciation of the pain of their narratives, as well as understanding the power of music and song in rehumanizing personhood. Yet, as we have seen, empowerment is an emotionally costly process; it emerges in bitter-sweet musical journeys that rely upon the paradox of a singer's vulnerability that is both highly personal and intimately public, revealing wounds that others variously validate as powerfully affecting. The cost of this paradox, however, ought not to be borne by singers alone, as listeners become morally beholden to provide new spaces of acknowledgement and recognition for those who are coping with the fragile senses of emotional liminality that asylum creates.

## CONCLUSION: EMPATHY AND MUSIC MEDIATION AS GLOBAL CAPITAL

Salma and Mir, together with the other asylum seekers and music facilitators of Scattered People, have harnessed the power of music to raise awareness of trauma, address the hostility they experienced in their new location and reorient their awareness of compassion, while pursuing a persuasive and empathic politics of humility. In doing so, they have increased recognition for themselves and others in working towards inclusive and compassionate expressions of loss. By reterritorializing their music, they speak out the need for equality, recognition, rights and restitution for other refugees. They also highlight the need to be sensitive and listen not only to the structural conditions of oppression, but also to the human cries of "woundedness" (Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, 2008b, p. 344) they and others experience. The power of their singing is not simply in listening to the albums or witnessing their performance but in the immersive and transformative journey of

feeling that is intended to provoke reaction and response as the audience journeys together with them enhancing their potential for resilience. The success of these singers is that they have powerfully reoriented the need for understanding how creative spaces for empathic listening and learning can profoundly affect those who travel through trauma and live with its effects.

Just as songs of protest or resistance have mobilised groups, so empathy in song has significant potential to generate global capital by unifying different kinds of causes. However, we should not be lulled into thinking that empathic concern is easy to achieve, as trends at the microlevel are also influenced by wider macro processes within and between nations globally.[14] Yet, music-making does have the capacity to facilitate different ways of listening to the past, as Godobo-Madikizela (2008a, p. 183) notes in relation to the concept of *ubuntu* in an African context, it:

> invites us all as fellow human beings to truly listen to one another in our social and political engagement, so that during moments of witness about our past and the different roles we played in it we can hear and connect with one another at critical points when our humanness shines through.

As the music producer and facilitator explained to me, there is also the need to understand how this kind of music mediation creates opportunities for new relationships and how it develops unevenly according to the impetus and sensitivities appropriate for each moment in time and place. As asylum seekers move on to new lives in the community and away to other cities, senses of connectedness take on other kinds of empathic imaginaries, reconfiguring the immersive kinaesthetic empathy once experienced in music-making. The albums produced by Robbie and the work of the facilitators, singers and musicians in Scattered People are testament to the ways in which melody, mood and meanings that participatory song-writing generates for empathic resonance has much to teach us about how we think about and approach a politics of peace, as well as how we act upon and enact rights, belonging and recognition interculturally.

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[14] In recent statistical analysis of global peace, four measures have been shown to be in decline in the 2018 Global Peace Index. Of the eight measures that are used to analyse its effects, two of the declining four relate specifically to "the acceptance of the rights of others" and "good relations with neighbours". These two elements are fundamental to understanding the challenges that refugees face in their struggle for belonging through music making.

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