Belief in the Power of Music and Resilient Identities: Navigating Shared Fictions

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ABSTRACT

When group identities are collectively believed in, groups tend to behave collectively (Scheitle, Corcoran and Halligan, 2018). This means that group identity can lead to group cohesion and vice versa. Music is one social activity that has the potential to strengthen this process, creating a more resilient identity for practitioners. Ultimately, however, resilience is based on what the group believes, rather than what is empirically evident and thus, it could be considered a type of fiction. According to Harari (2015), collective belief in fictions is necessary for collective cooperation beyond small, personal social groups. This article attempts to illustrate how music can afford increased resilience of group identity through the shared belief in its own agency and how music therapy might provide an even more specifically useful approach in this context.

KEYWORDS

Power of music; resilient identities; shared fictions; music therapy

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INTRODUCTION

On 1 April 2019, the UK was still suffering from a heady mix of uncertainty and division otherwise known as Brexit, when the *Guardian* published the cruellest and most ironic of April Fools' jokes. The article in question called for the appointment of a "healing tsar" and suggested that "music is seen as vital" to "put harmony back into the national mood, to sow accord where there is discord, collaboration where there is conflict."[1] The article then quickly descended into outright farce, but the cruel and ironic aspect of this is that music has indeed been shown on many occasions to unite people through building or strengthening shared sense of belonging, unity and resilience of group identity. While this article may be intended to be humorous, it has associated any useful purpose that music might have in healing or bonding a divided people with a grand joke. This is a disservice to the potential of this approach. When group identities are collectively believed in, groups tend to behave collectively (Scheitle, Corcoran and Halligan, 2018). In other words, group identity can lead to group cohesion and vice versa. Music is one social activity that has the potential to strengthen this process, creating a more resilient identity. Ultimately, however, this is based on what the group believes, rather than what is empirically evident, and could be considered, as a result, a type of fiction. While the *Guardian* article is clearly a fiction, collective belief in fictions is actually necessary for collective cooperation beyond small personal social groups (Harari 2015). This article is an attempt to illustrate how music can afford increased resilience of group identity through the shared belief in its own agency, and how music therapy in particular might provide an even more specifically useful approach in this context.

MUSIC THERAPY, RESILIENCE AND IDENTITY

There are several schools of thought on music therapy, ranging from the neurological models of music therapy, cognitive-behavioural approaches and the socio-musical approaches such as Nordoff Robbins. The Nordoff Robbins music therapy approach, in particular, is not a method, but rather an attitude towards music that:

> recognises the potential in everyone (regardless of pathology, illness, disability, trauma or social isolation) for engagement in active, communicative, expressive music-making and the importance of this in developing skills, a sense of self and a capacity for satisfying social interaction.[2]

It seems that Nordoff Robbins and other music therapy groups believe that music is a human right, but what are human rights and why do they exist? Before I explore human rights themselves, I will first examine notions of resilience, peacebuilding and wellbeing and how music can be and has been involved.

Many inter-related fields are now calling for increased resilience of people in the face of uncertainty, political upheaval, climate dangers and global conflict. Despite this, it is often unclear just what is meant by resilience, or what exactly people are expected to be resilient against. Furthermore, some criticise the very notion of resilience as defeatist, since it might demonstrate an acceptance of the issues that

necessitates such resilience rather than attempting to address the root causes (Ecclestone and Lewis, 2013). Nevertheless, resilience is a topic that is in the zeitgeist. As such, it is discussed in terms of bringing people together and tightening their resolve through a shared understanding of who they are as demonstrated by their group identity. This has long been discussed in terms of conflict and peace research. In particular, Thomas Pettigrew's inter-group contact theory suggests that identity resilience can be defined in terms of the strengths of the borders between in- and out-groups (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2011). Discussions around this theory and related theories generally involve cultural conflicts and peacebuilding initiatives and diplomacy. On the one hand, much theoretical ground has been covered in terms of the kinds of relationships that are needed in order to reduce violent conflict between groups by altering the borders between what defines these groups. In the sociology of music and applied ethnomusicology literature, on the other hand, music has been demonstrated to influence the belief in what a social group is through musical experiences (Robertson, 2014; Micklina, et al. 2016; Dueck, 2011; Sherinian, 2007). Little has been written about how musical experiences themselves can affect cultural identity resilience in terms of inter-group contact theory and conflict, although this is beginning to change. The literature that is emerging tends to focus on specific case studies or examples, however, and it is difficult to develop a generalisable theory. Music therapy, especially community-oriented approaches such as the Nordoff Robbins approach, have also demonstrated how music can build resilience, although this tends to be on a smaller more personal scale, with some closer social ties being discussed in terms of the influence, or ripple effect, of the therapy on the wider community (Pavilicivic and Ansdell, 2004; Fouche and Stevens, 2018). This article will attempt to connect some of these dots.

Much has been written about how music relates to personal and group identities and, increasingly, there is a discourse that disputes the validity of identity as a concept. Instead, several scholars now favour such terms as subjectivities (Chagas, 2007) and inter-subjectivities (Allison and Ossman, 2014). The criticism usually refers to the scholarly usage of the term identity, since it is often used in too general a manner to be very critical and is therefore not analytically useful (Skinner, May and Rollock, 2016). The word used most often by the people being researched, however, is 'identity' rather than the other options, and this is shown in my own empirical ethnographic studies (Robertson, 2010, 2012, 2014). Even in the Allison and Ossman source mentioned above, some of their informants refer to their 'identities' (Allison and Ossman, 2014). Never have I encountered non-scholars who refer to themselves as having certain 'subjectivities.' As such, 'identity' remains a useful heuristic for understanding how people feel music, or anything for that matter, represents them in some way. Identity continues to be an oft-used term when discussing peacebuilding and conflict, as well (Kappler, 2015; Elmi, 2010). Music and peacebuilding is an emergent field that brings together theories from music sociology, peace studies and applied ethnomusicology, often through the lens of how groups identify themselves in the conflict context.

The flip side of music and peacebuilding is music and conflict itself. It is increasingly understood that these two angles are two sides of the same coin, rather than separate contexts, with music interacting with groups of people in similar ways as it engages with senses of self, emotion, belief and memory (Robertson, 2014). O'Connell and Castelo Branco published a collection called *Music and Conflict* in 2010 that appropriately deals with this very topic through the lens of ethnomusicology. In it, authors cover aspects of music in war, how music permeates borders, what music can do for displaced peoples, how music is tied to ideology,

how music can be applied for other purposes and music itself as conflict. It is an excellent collection of very thought-provoking chapters but generally speaking they do not consider the sociological aspects of how music can create meaning and therefore identity. A special issue of the *Journal of Peace Education* that was published in 2016 goes someway to addressing this gap, through a critical literature review of music in peacebuilding (Sandoval, 2016) and more sociological methodological concerns like ethnography (Robertson, 2016). Finally, starting in 2018 and ongoing, the Min-On Music Research Institute (MOMRI) has been developing keywords for music in peacebuilding, including identity (Robertson, forthcoming).

MUSIC THERAPY, PEACEBUILDING AND WELLBEING

Music therapy as a field has long been involved with both peacebuilding and wellbeing agendas, but rarely has it explicitly connected the two. Music therapy in peacebuilding has been largely ascribed to traumatic events as an intervention while music therapy in wellbeing has focused on the resilience of a client group. A music therapy centre was set up in the immediate aftermath of the Bosnian War in Mostar in 1996 with the help of the NGO War Child, for example, and music therapy has been used in a rather ad hoc fashion in various refugee camps and centres in Jordan and elsewhere. In these cases, music therapy has been used to address trauma and related pathologies. As an officially recognised healthcare profession, especially in the UK and in Canada, music therapists in these contexts have been viewed as promoting health and wellbeing but not necessarily addressing PTSD. Despite these parallels, there is no empirical evidence available that demonstrates the connection between peacebuilding and wellbeing through music therapy. Furthermore, all of these aspects are interventions which require identifying a problem first. Rarely, if at all, has the work of music therapy been considered preventatively. There are numerous publications that link music therapy to identity, such as the those that deal with the 'existing' identity of particular client groups (Shipley and Odell-Miller, 2012) and the formation of 'new' shared identities (Pisanti, 2016; Amir, 2012) as well as the 'individual identities' of the music therapists themselves (Edwards, 2015).

Peacebuilding scholarship often refers to the resilience of group identity, on the one hand, as a prerequisite to enabling sustainable peace (for example, Lidén, Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2009). Reducing conflict within any given group is seen to require a sense of belonging within said group. Wellbeing, on the other hand, is a concept that is increasingly used in peacebuilding scholarship as well, having already been used in arts and health scholarship. This includes connecting peace and wellbeing in Syrian refugee camps (Al-Rousan et al. 2018); connecting education to sustainable peace and wellbeing (Higgins and Cardozo, 2019); trans-national health and wellbeing and peace in Africa (Karbo and Mirithi, 2018); social justice and wellbeing in Rwanda (de Dieu Basabose, 2019); and psycho-social interventions in Kashmir (Sonpar and Kanwar, 2019).

Throughout the above sits the musical experience itself, where notions of identity and wellbeing are identified within human interactions in what are deemed to be healthy societies. Historian Yuval Harari (2015) has noted that, throughout human history all of these relations can be viewed as types of fiction. While this may at first seem contentious, the fact that the meaning of 'identity', 'a healthy society' and 'music' are ever-changing mutable concepts and not biological or scientific imperatives and constants means that they can be seen as collective agreements, beliefs or fictions. This is not to denigrate the importance of fictions, since it is how

humans have thrived through mass cooperation with millions of people around the world based on shared beliefs. The belief in religion and the value of money are but two common examples. This article will examine the relationship between music, music therapy, peacebuilding and shared fictions. First, I will discuss how collective identity has been reviewed in peacebuilding and conflict literature. Following that, I will explore how music has been utilised in this context for both promoting and resisting conflict. Next, I will examine how music, conflict and peacebuilding relate to the literature on music and social change. I will demonstrate some of these effects through examples of music therapy practice with respect to resilience and identity. Finally, I will connect this discussion to wider collective fictions, in particular human rights and suggest a possible pathway for how music and music therapy might help to promote peacebuilding and resist global conflict to build resilient collective identities that possess shared values and fictions about how the world is imagined. This is not to negate the cultural and political agency that such beliefs afford, rather it is intended to highlight how concepts such as 'rights' are social constructs that are collectively agreed upon and not biological imperatives.

GROUP IDENTITY AND PEACEBUILDING

The primary goal of much current conflict and peacebuilding research is to attempt to understand the causes and possible outcomes of intractable and violent conflicts in order better to influence these outcomes towards less violence and misery. Ramsbotham, Miall and Woodhouse, for example, follow the basic model for possible conflict outcomes as being win-win, lose-lose or win-lose with the added proviso that no conflict can be satisfactorily resolved unless all basic needs are met (Ramsbotham, Miall and Woodhouse, 2011). Often in intractable conflicts at least one side is always aiming for the win-lose outcome, since that would ensure a larger slice of the conflict cake, which is why so many third-party interventions occur. The purpose of these interventions can be coercive or non-coercive, which is often referred to as hard or soft power or, in diplomatic circles, Track I or Track II diplomacy (Ramsbotham, Miall and Woodhouse, 2011).

Azar (1990) developed a theory of protracted social conflict that changed the field dramatically by suggesting that the conflict prevention methods devised and employed since World War II have been largely ineffectual in most modern conflicts, due to their focus on inter-state war, when most world conflicts today are no longer inter-state. This is verified by an analysis of protracted conflicts active during the period 1995-97, which showed of the forty-eight active protracted conflicts, none were inter-state, the clear majority being about identity or secession, with the remainder dealing with revolution and ideology or inter-factional wars. In all cases, group identity resilience was the focus: whether it was to strengthen it, expand it, weaken it or replace it.

Top-down peace accords are the generally officially sanctioned methods of peacebuilding employed by state actors, although these at times have little to do with the concerns and needs of people on the front lines of these conflicts on any side. Some have argued that physical separation of conflict participants is the only solution for peacebuilding after an accord ends the violence in an intractable conflict (Kaufmann, 1996), yet this is rarely possible due to geographical considerations and the alternative is to attempt to reconstruct identities so that they are inclusive rather than us-them in nature (Northrup 1989, p. 80). If it is impossible or unlikely to separate conflicting groups into their own geographical regions where they could theoretically flourish in their own ways, peacebuilders needed to

discover methods to bring these groups together, relatively peacefully, in the same space. As has been already noted, belief in a collective identity is a major motivation for group action. During and immediately after protracted conflict, these group identities remain very separate and the borders very solid. This is natural, since group identity fosters togetherness within the in-group at the expense of creating a border separating them from the out-group. Otherwise, any group member would not be able correctly to identify fellow in-group members and this could lead to potential threat and danger from out-group members. Even if an accord successfully ends violent conflict, these borders can become the source of future conflict, especially when resources are scarce. New more inclusive group identities could, in theory, permeate these borders and, if resilient, help to prevent future conflicts even in the face of resource scarcity. Top-down approaches to peacebuilding such as accords can force the ending of violence to a degree, but they cannot create new shared identities. Since, as previously noted, conflicts are increasingly non-state and developed around identity politics, it is increasingly thought that a more bottom-up approach to peacebuilding would be more effective. Culture, arts and music have been employed in some circumstances that have embraced this approach.

MUSIC, RESILIENCE AND CONFLICT

Music itself has no intrinsic meaning. The meaning is attached to the phenomenon through lived experience. This mutable meaning-making capacity is possibly the greatest potential of music in peacebuilding. One excellent example of how music has changed its meaning drastically over time and circumstance without the musical phenomenon itself changing much is the song *Bilady Bilady Bilady* (My Country, My Country, My Country) written by Sayed Darwish, an Egyptian poet-songwriter in the early 20th century. Originally, this song was written as an ode of love to the nation of Egypt and its people. The generally accepted interpretation of this song and its lyrics during colonial rule was to say that Egypt was for the Egyptians, and not the British, who then controlled the region. The song represented a growing nationalistic Egyptian identity and simultaneously represented resistance to British colonial rule at this time.

Anwar Sadat was the President of Egypt from 1970 to his assassination in 1981. In an attempt to demonstrate that Egypt was less militaristic, especially when developing peaceful relations with Israel, the Egyptian national anthem was changed in 1979 to *Bilady, Bilady, Bilady*. This was an attempt to use already existing music with an already existing strong attachment of group identity for the purposes of national attitudinal change. Hosni Mubarek, who succeeded Sadat, became ever more dictatorial in his reign. By the time of the so-called Arab Spring in 2011, Mubarek had increasingly been using the national anthem to associate his rule with the will and identity of the country. This was turned on its head once again during the mass protests in Tahrir Square in early 2012 where the amassed crowds would sing *Bilady, Bilady, Bilady*. This time, the generally agreed interpretation was that this love of Egypt belonged to the will of the people, not the will of Mubarek. One song, three contexts, three different meanings, and all establishing or re-establishing the social rules for in-group membership. First, the meaning of the song enabled a rallying of Egyptians against foreign British rule. Second, the song was used to rally Egyptians by co-opting an earlier strong feeling attached to the song in order to maintain national control. Third, the song was used to rally Egyptians against their own ruler. In all cases, it was rallying some people against other people.

SOCIAL CHANGE AND STATUS QUO

As mentioned before, in-group membership is largely identified by its borders. It is these borders that define the characteristics of group membership. Music is often used as a representation of group membership. This refers to any music that galvanises one group as a unified whole and rejects other groups as being separate from the group. Music can, therefore, strengthen borders of group identity and can even plant the seeds of future conflict if the needs and wants of these groups begin to clash. In other words, music can help to bring one group together at the expense of widening the gulf between groups.

However, changes to these belief systems are possible during musical moments, if expectations are challenged through an extraordinary turning point event. Turning point events in the peace and conflict literature refer to events that disrupt the status quo and demonstrate alternative possibilities (Lederach, 2005). It is unlikely that individual events can change deeply held beliefs on their own, but they do illustrate other pathways that may have been hidden prior to the new experience. Repetition of these events, or similar ones, over time do appear to affect belief change as new memories are formed and old ones re-imagined. Emotions evolve through growing familiarity of these events and they afford the possibility of even extending or merging in-out group borders. This process can result in positive change, but equally negative change is possible. The fact that there is currently more research on the negative aspects of music usage for social change should not be discouraging, however, since I will show that precisely the same process is involved.

Another way to examine the turning point concept is through the lens of intergroup contact theory, which stipulates that under certain conditions contact between prejudiced groups can improve relations and reduce prejudices and potential conflict (Allport, 1954). Since this approach is relevant to the discussion, I will delve into intergroup contact theory in more detail. Broadly speaking, these conditions are:

- Equal status
- Common goals
- Intergroup cooperation
- Support of authorities, law and/or custom
- Potential for developing friendship (Allport, 1954, pp. 264-267).

In addition to these necessary conditions, Pettigrew suggests that there are four inter-related processes at work during inter-group contact:

- Learning about the out-group
- Changing behaviour
- Generating affective ties
- In-group reappraisal (Pettigrew, 1998, pp. 70-73).

Furthermore, Pettigrew has suggested that the move from particular intergroup contact and attitude change towards generalisation must proceed through three linear strategies:

- De-categorisation (intergroup contact is most effective when group saliency is low)

- Salient group categorisation (stereotype change generalises best to the intergroup level when the individuals involved are typical group members)

- Re-categorisation (After extended intergroup contact, individuals may begin to think of themselves as part of a larger group) (Pettigrew, 1998 pp. 74-75).

It is relatively simple to apply this model to conflict situations. Groups feel connected when they feel equal, share goals, cooperate, are supported by institutions and have friends within that group. Furthermore, if they encounter challenges that require interventions where they can learn about others, change their behaviour, create links between groups and, ideally, reassess just what the definition of in-group is, then attitudinal change becomes possible.

This process can work not only to create change in the group membership, but also to maintain the status quo. To illustrate, I will now discuss an example from research I was involved with in Morocco. The data spans times of social upheaval and change throughout North Africa and the wider Arab world since the beginning of this decade.

HEGEMONIC RESISTANCE AND MOROCCAN HIP-HOP

The Alaouite dynasty has been the ruling royal family in Morocco since the 17th century, making them the third longest continuously ruling royal family in the world (after Brunei and Lichtenstein). The family maintained direct rule of Morocco for this entire period with the exception of the early 20th century when most of Morocco was under the protectorate of France and there was a small Spanish protectorate in the north of the country. The monarchy regained full control in 1956. Aside from that, the monarchy encountered several challenges to the status quo, first by the various tribes in more remote and difficult to control areas, like the Berber revolts in 1930, and more recently, the rising Arab consciousness in the 2010s took root amongst the urban disenfranchised youth. Youth culture in Morocco, like most urban areas in the world, was often represented in music. Particular favourite styles in this case were hip-hop and heavy metal, as both were deemed to push against traditional Moroccan moralistic codes and socially acceptable behaviour. The government, which was controlled and supported by the monarchy, at first repressed and even banned this music through removing access to media and banning performances. Gradually, this music began to be associated with more political dissent, such as the February 20 Movement. Such a lengthy reign enabled the monarchy to learn how to deal with this sort of dissent that other younger regimes in North Africa did not. Instead of continuing to ban and prevent this music, they began to support and encourage some of the performances, if they removed their political associations. This had, for some, the effect of satisfying the need for a sense of belonging and the expression of this belonging through music, at the same time as preventing these same groups from bonding together with a shared sense of grievance or political expression. In my research in the region in 2012, this was often referred to as the "safety valve" approach: letting off steam and reducing pressure on the status quo (Barakat, Alias, Gandolfo and Robertson, 2013).

Even so, changes in the cultural sphere in Morocco responded to and were influenced by wider political and social change in the region. Political dissent was reduced by separating their cultural and musical expression from the core political movement, but some artists continued to directly challenge the hegemony. L7aked, a hip-hop artist, was one such person.

L7aked and other hip-hop artists became very involved in pro-democracy movements such as the February 20 Movement. These were huge popular protests and hip-hop was the soundtrack. What led to Arab Spring regime changes elsewhere did not happen here. The Moroccan monarchy has a history of sidestepping resistance by allowing symbolic dissent on occasion, all the while promoting their own leniency. In this case, the monarchy lifted the ban on protest-driven hip-hop, permitted hip-hop cultural festivals and generously funded them. The result was the hip-hop movement became legitimised and distanced itself from the pro-democratic movement and the resistance lost its momentum.

This raises the question about the nature of resilience of cultural identity itself. While music therapy can begin to address personal trauma through building resilience, musical experiences seem to build a wider, cultural resilience to social group trauma. Who needs to be resilient and who makes decisions about who should be resilient? Is resilience for everybody? Would those groups in power believe that those not in power need more cultural resilience? Finally, what role does music play in this resilience?

RESILIENCE

Resilience is a concept that is often discussed in both music therapy and peace and conflict literature, and, therefore, provides a useful common point of discussion. Resilience can be seen to be the ability to cope with stress and adversity, especially regarding the human adaptation process (Folkman and Nathan, 2011). Music therapy can function as an asset-building, mediating or risk-activated intervention, thus establishing a theoretical basis justifying music's therapeutic role in these human adaptation processes. In development literature, resilience research has focused on identifying how individuals who are exposed to risks are able to follow an adaptive developmental trajectory, what specific stress-resistance or coping mechanisms they employ, and how they are able to self-regulate and recover following exposure to adversity (Masten, 2007). It follows, therefore, that music therapy should be able to play a role in post-conflict development or peacebuilding efforts through a resilience capacity-building trajectory. Pasiali (2012), for example, investigated music therapy and resilience when nurturing children and young families. She suggests that music therapy can infiltrate a child's environment and increase stimulation by providing opportunities for interacting with peers, adults or both. Music therapy as a playful and creative medium for children becomes a powerful avenue to minimize the impact of stressful life circumstances by fostering affective and cognitive adaptation. Other scholars have noted how learning through play decreases inhibitions and stereotypes and increases the chances of social bonds forming across group barriers (Dewey, 1997; Vygotsky, 1997).

In peacebuilding interventions, resilience work is often considered a part of the mediation process. Mediating interventions aim to alter levels of particular assets or risks, thus alleviating negative effects on adaptation. Music therapy with young children can function as a play-based intervention in order specifically to target adaptation systems, thus becoming an effective intervention in prevention. Music therapists who specifically foster development of protective resources within the context of families and communities ensure that when life is challenged, the likelihood of maladaptive outcomes in psychosocial domains is reduced or prevented (Pasiali, 2012). Risk activated strategies focus on increasing competence and enhancing adaptive systems (e.g., learning, attachment, mastery motivation,

stress response and self-regulation) of individuals who are in the process of coping with a stressor or an adverse event.

Another way to look at this is through the lens of identity. What is resilience in these cases? What is being changed in the adaptation process? Returning to the previous discussion about group identity and in/out-group boundaries, it is plausible to suggest that resilience can be seen as a relative strength of these boundaries and that adaptation is a softening of these barriers. This process of strengthening and softening is embodied in the act of 'musicking', a term that is now commonly used in music sociology and community music therapy. Musicking was first defined by Christopher Small in the following way:

> To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing. We might at times even extend its meaning to what the person is doing who takes the tickets at the door or the hefty men who shift the piano and the drums or the roadies who set up the instruments and carry out the sound checks or the cleaners who clean up after everyone else has gone. They, too, are all contributing to the nature of the event that is a musical performance (Small, 1998, p. 9).

Music therapy can aid those who cannot access the therapeutic value of music on their own. This stems from ancient beliefs in the therapeutic value of music that is accessible to all people and verified by more recent neuroscience that demonstrates specific musical brain functions (de l'Etoile and LaGasse, 2013). Some people, however, due to certain pathologies or circumstances, have difficulty engaging with music therapeutically without some guidance. While this process of strengthening identity resilience through musical experiences can be theoretically discussed here[3], it is also clear that the efficacy is only as strong as the belief in its efficacy: a shared fiction. In this case, if another collective belief demanded that musical experiences were part of everyday life, such as a human right, then there is more likelihood of this approach being effectively utilised.

According to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, there is a human right to participate in cultural life and creative expression[4]. If this is the case, then music and music therapy are also human rights since they enable this participation and expression of group identity and facilitate its maintenance and adaptation.

MUSIC AND HUMAN RIGHTS

According to much of the literature on the subject, the implications of music and human rights are generally socio-cultural in nature, as opposed to being biological or psychological. In other words, the meanings attached to musical experiences and the very definition and shared understanding of human rights and identities are culturally and socially situated. Within this space, music therapy is often seen as a method that can improve access and participation in this shared meaning-making space through improving both resilience and affording adaptation of group identity. As mentioned earlier, Harari (2014) has suggested that this shared meaning-making is actually a process of creating shared fictions, and that this ability to believe in

[3] One example is how punk music strengthened youth identity in the UK during the 1970s, (see Adams, 2008).
[4] Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Available at: https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/ [Accessed 11 December 2019].

shared fictions and cooperate in huge numbers based on this belief is why *Homo sapiens* has thrived as a species. What follows is a discussion about how music therapists often engage with people through the shared fictions of the power of music and human rights.

HUMAN RIGHTS

After the horrors of World War II and the founding of the United Nations, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was pronounced in 1948, setting out a set of shared beliefs about what inalienable human rights entail. These rights have since been ratified by nations and groups of nations. In Europe, this was first ratified by the *European Convention on Human Rights* in Rome in 1950 and has undergone revision and updates periodically, most recently in 2010. This in turn has informed the *Human Rights Act* in the UK which came into force in 2000. In the original declaration, there are many articles that refer to rights regarding life, work and religion, and Article 27 specifically refers to "Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefit." Interestingly, this clause is not explicitly stated as such in either the *European Convention on Human Rights* or the *UK Human Rights Act*[5]. This clearly demonstrates how human rights have become a fiction shared by some but not everyone. If this need for cultural life was a biological imperative backed by scientific data, this ability to choose what is included as a human right or not would not be possible, it would be a fact as immutable as the theory of gravity.

If human rights are to be considered a form of collectively believed fiction, it follows that the belief in the power of music is a fiction as well, since it is the belief in what music means and does that affords agency in human beings. It has been demonstrated above that music can influence the resilience, or strength of a group identity by coming to represent it within a particular context, but simultaneously, that it can challenge or increase adaptability. While this might sound negative, it is actually at the very core of what makes us human. Humans have evolved to survive and thrive through this collective ability to believe in fictions that are beyond our capabilities to experience directly or have knowledge about.

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

Music therapy intersects with at least two common collective fictions: the power of music and the belief that musical cultural expression is a human right. Hard evidence to support the claims of the 'power of music' narrative remains elusive due to how beliefs about music are culturally and socially situated. But the shared belief that music has the power to transform people's lives is where music therapy is situated. Musical experience is inherently social in nature, even when we listen to music on our own we engage over time with the creators of the music as well as imagined other audiences. All social interactions by their very nature involve a collective belief in the meanings of the interactions. So, while music and human rights might both have fictional meanings, the shared beliefs in their power structures our lives and enables us to cooperate towards building resilience in a particular manner, and music therapy plays a role in enabling people to engage with these fictions more effectively.

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[5] UK Human Rights Act. Available at: https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/human-rights/human-rights-act [Accessed 11 December 2019].

Essentially, music can afford cultural group identity resilience through the collective belief of the meanings attached to certain musical experiences. These meanings are developed and redeveloped on an ongoing basis through a matrix of inter-relationships of the musical experience, collective memories, emotions and beliefs. When social groups share commonalities in musical experiences that embody collective memories, emotions and beliefs, their group identity can temporarily appear as coherent and resilient. The more frequent this connective experience occurs, the more resilient the belief in the collective identity. This, of course, is prone to change depending on changes to the matrix at any future moment. It is in this manner that social groups navigate their shared fictions and maintain their overall sense of self, and music not only represents this process it also forms and reforms it in constant motion.

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