

Collective Hope for Transformational Change

*“We must rediscover our shared belief in the value, rather than the harm,
of connectedness.”*

Jacinda Adern, 2018 UN Speech¹

I like these words spoken by our prime minister because they are hopeful. She is saying that by connecting as humans we can achieve transformational change.

One of the major problems facing my generation is the refugee crisis. Current United Nations figures say there are **68.5 million** people around the world who have been forced to leave their homes. 85% are people from developing countries. 25 million of these displaced people are refugees and over half of these refugees are children under the age of 18². This is a horrendous number and overwhelming to think about. The New Zealand government has recently increased the number of refugees they will accept to 1500 per annum by the year 2020³. This is well below a quarter of one per cent of current world refugees. This is a very small amount of help when you know the big picture.

Who are these refugees? Some refugees are babies. Some refugees are toddlers who are just learning how to walk. Some are 11-year olds like me who love maths but can't go to school. Some refugees are knowledgeable and wise grandparents.

The main difference between a refugee and me and my family, here in New Zealand, is that I had the luck to be born in a first world country. These refugees have had no choice but to flee from their home, their country and all their personal belongings. It is unsafe for these people to return to their homes and they will quite possibly never see their home/country/friends or families again. They need help to just survive.

This isn't a problem one country alone can fix. The world needs to unite. We need to work together as a global community and take collective responsibility to help protect children like me, and their families, to reach a safe new place to live. A place where they don't have to live in fear and uncertainty.

We need more people in New Zealand to want to help more. We need to be hopeful about the many beautiful ways humans can connect and help each other.

I went to see Joy Cowley speak last month. She said "we are a story-making species". She went on to say that by sharing stories:

"we form our identities as families, as communities, as nations. It is how we shape what we do and it determines how we react to people with different stories" ⁴

I believe we can share our stories in many ways and that this can lead to transformational change. I've discovered that music is a good example of a powerful shared language for cross-cultural storytelling.

The Silk Road Project⁵ was the idea of the cellist Yo Yo Ma. In this project musicians from many different cultures, who speak many different languages, come together to share the language of music. Many of the artists in this project are either refugees or have experienced being displaced because of war. Through sharing their music and instruments the musicians experience happiness. The music connects them as human beings and the music they make together is beautiful and joyful.

The message of this project is that we should value our differences and respond to the refugee crisis by collaborating and focussing on beauty, joyfulness, and hope.

'No Man's Land' is a composition by Wellington composer John Psathas⁶. The music was written as a combination of film and live performance. It was performed by musicians from all over the world whose ancestors took part fighting against each other in World War One. Some musicians were filmed performing on the old World War One battle sites.

The message of this piece is that even though our great grandparents' generation fought one another one hundred years ago, today we can be friends and share the language of music. Even though all these people speak different languages they managed to perform this amazing piece of music. My family watched this performance together and at the end my 7-year-old brother said "what kills war but is happy?" and his answer was "music".

There are so many ways to be hopeful about the beautiful ways humans can connect and help each other. If more of us do these kind of things maybe, we can make a difference together.

In conclusion I will share a whakataukī that my Māori teacher, whaea Lou, suggested for my essay:

He aha te mea nui o te ao?

He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata

What is the most important thing in the world?

It is the people, it is the people, it is the people

Word Count (without references): 788 words

Endnotes: References

¹ Jacinda Ardern Speech at the United Nations General Assembly 27th of September 2018: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmBILRUSVN4>

² UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency: <http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>

³ <https://www.radionz.co.nz/news/political/366801/refugee-quota-to-rise-from-1000-to-1500>

⁴ Joy Cowley NZ Book Council Lecture at Te Papa 4th of October 2018. Transcript can be seen at: <https://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/advocacy/nzbc-lecture/>

⁵ 'The Music of Strangers: Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble' seen at New Zealand Film Festival Wellington July 2016. More information on the Silk Road Project can be found at: <https://www.silkroad.org/>

⁶ Watched at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e2p6v6-m3I0> More information can be found at: <http://www.nomanslandproject.org/>