Intercultural Music Engagement over Electronic Bridges: Online Ethnography and Action Research during the COVID-19 Lockdown

Trisnasari Fraser, Jane W. Davidson, Alexander Hew Dale Crooke

Abstract *This contribution details methodological adaptations of face-to-face ethnographic and participatory research approaches for the digital realm and examines emergent ethical concerns. It developed while a research team in Melbourne considered the implications of COVID-19 lockdown for their research on social connection through intercultural music engagement. Pursuing the proliferation of online music activity aimed at maintaining social bonds during the physical distancing of the first months of the pandemic, the team turned to digital platforms as the field of research. Projects included observation of audience engagement with YouTube music broadcasts during COVID-19 lockdown and a participatory action research project exploring asynchronous multitracking performance. The pandemic underlined the world's increasing interconnectedness, where social ties can span the local to the global. Through an appraisal of the research and consideration of existing discourse about online research approaches and decolonizing methodology, the article also examines the implications of global interconnectedness for interdisciplinary inquiry and the study of different cultural identities and their music and dance practice.*

Introduction

The COVID-19 novel coronavirus brought about abrupt changes to daily living, with the effects of the pandemic and lockdown experienced in a multitude of ways. The beginning of the pandemic at the end of 2019 and start of 2020 coincided with the commencement of a research project in Australia conceived to investigate social cohesion and community resilience through intercultural music engagement. The research was conducted by an interdisciplinary Melbourne-based research team whose expertise spanned mu-

sic psychology, community psychology, sociology, and critical theory perspectives. Although the experience of lockdown was shared globally, particularly early in the pandemic, Melbourne was amongst the cities locked down longest (Schurer et al. 2022). Despite obvious constraints to a research project originally intended to apply ethnographic and action research approaches in multicultural settings in Melbourne, the unfolding events were fascinating in the context of the original research aims. Social cohesion, community resilience, and intercultural understanding came to the fore as social connection and resilience were tested, and intercultural empathy was sadly lacking both locally (Fang et al. 2020) and globally (Devakumar et al. 2020). As the team observed individual and community efforts to maintain social bonds during physical distancing through music activity, their research adjusted to understand the unfolding event. While some music activity took place in person but at a distance, with people singing and playing music across balconies (Thorpe 2020), much of it was mediated by digital platforms (Daffern et al. 2021; Fraser et al. 2021; MacDonald et al. 2021). Drawing on online ethnographic and action research approaches, the team turned to investigate digital platforms as a source of musical engagement. Projects included an online ethnographic study of audience engagement with YouTube music broadcasts during the COVID-19 lockdown and a participatory action research (PAR) project exploring asynchronous multitracking performance.

This article develops work presented at a workshop hosted by Sound-Knowledge that explored the methodological and ethical implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for field research in music and sound scholarship. In order to expand on this discussion, the article has a methodological focus. The theoretical frameworks and methods of the online ethnographic and PAR projects are outlined in detail alongside a consideration of existing literature exploring the theoretical, methodological, and ethical issues associated with these approaches. Two discussion points that emerged during the workshop will also be expanded upon – the first concerned the ethics of using content from online social media as research data, particularly when examined through the lens of *extractivist* practices and epistemologies and their link to colonialism, where substances, labor, creative practice, and knowledge "are extracted, exchanged, and monetized" (Clarke 2021:7). The second con-

cerned the nature of online research, especially regarding studies of music practice, when the only contact with participants is digitally mediated.

Spanning the observation of a largely anonymous online audience via YouTube to a PAR project involving digitally mediated collaboration among a small group of practitioners with existing social ties, the research is well-placed to consider issues relating to the nature of knowledge production and contact with participants. While the research was conducted locally, connection with the global was very much a part of both the online experience and the pandemic. Thus, the research is also appropriately positioned to consider issues of increased global connection and what that entails for the study of different cultural identities and their music and dance practice. Indeed, our research deals directly with the connections between music and dance of different cultures. We define intercultural music engagement broadly as any form of musical activity (e.g., individual or collective listening, performing, composing, improvising) that involves interaction or exchange between different cultural identities and/or musical forms, and we consider its practice in more detail elsewhere (Crooke et al. 2023). As Seeger observes, "Today, most musics and dance are also parts of a huge, nearly global communications and entertainment industry" (2019:19), going on to note that "Ethnomusicologists today live in a transnational and interdisciplinary world" (ibid.:21). A similar discussion has ensued from researchers engaged in cross-cultural work in music cognition, with Jacoby et al. noting that "cultures, the product of broadening circles of sociality, are rarely if ever clearly bounded, discrete, or closed" (2022:189). Similar to Seeger, Jacoby and colleagues stress the importance of interdisciplinary work, but acknowledge the barriers to engagement between different disciplines, noting that "Researchers are integrated into disciplinary substructures with different assumptions and goals" (ibid.:186). As a project conducted by an interdisciplinary team, bridging these different assumptions and goals will also be discussed, beginning with a consideration of our respective positionalities and the types of tensions that emerge through our work together.

Author reflexivity and interdisciplinarity

Trisnasari is a researcher, a community-engaged arts practitioner in music and dance of a diversity of cultures, and a practicing psychologist trained in community psychology. The research discussed here forms part of a PhD project for which she receives a research scholarship. It is part of a larger funded research project and is, therefore, influenced by a number of stakeholders. Trisnasari is cis-female of Indonesian and Australian descent. Her hybrid cultural identity influences the way she considers culture as dynamic and cultural identity as fluid. Her cultural identity also orients her to other scholars occupying liminal positions (Bhabha 2004; Anzaldúa 2012). Trisnasari codirected a performing arts agency and school for ten years, with performers and teachers engaged in a range of music and dance styles, including Egyptian, Turkish, Greek, Lebanese, West African, and Indian classical and contemporary styles. This endeavor led to connections to a broader network of musicians and performers of various cultural heritage practicing flamenco, Italian, Sephardic, and Balkan music and dance, as well as with dancers from Karen, Bhutanese, Nepali, and Chinese communities via work with Multicultural Arts Victoria, a peak body supporting diversity in arts practices, and Federation Square, a central arts and cultural venue in Melbourne. Her training as a practicing psychologist has followed a largely North Atlantic conception of human psychology, while training in community psychology has exposed her to more critical and pluriversal perspectives (Sonn et al. 2022). As a practitioner both in psychology and dance and an academic researcher, she is drawn to debate about the tension between theory and praxis. Her experience of spanning the latter two in her daily work draws her to pragmatic philosophy, and this research proceeds accordingly. Jane and Alexander supervise Trisnasari's PhD project.

Jane is a white British/Australian woman with more than 35 years of academic research experience, largely located within the fields of Eurogenic classical music and human psychology, though increasing critical enquiry has enabled a development of reflective understanding of her own cultural biases. Work with Trisnasari and Alexander and a broader group of practitioners is part of that continuing experience. She has lived in a number of different locations and cultural contexts, but has been settled in Australia for

almost two decades. She is a passionate musician in both Eurogenic classical and more diverse community music forms.

Alexander is a white man whose life in so-called Australia is a product of British ancestry and settler colonialism. He is a multidisciplinary music and health scholar, who first became engaged with critical theory during an undergraduate degree in sociology and has continued with a line of critical inquiry throughout over 15 years of his research career. This focus has been sharpened through recent work on the intersections of culture, music, health, and dominant narratives, such as colonialism. This has included a large book project which critically examines how systems of power in professional arenas – such as therapy, research, and education – impact experiences of music participation and education.

The Faculty of Fine Arts and Music at the University of Melbourne houses academics engaged in music practice, music psychology, musicology, ethnomusicology, and music therapy. Within this environment and drawing from our respective disciplinary training, our understanding of what constitutes data and analysis is broad. We engage in both qualitative and quantitative analysis and employ a range of data visualization techniques. As will be elaborated, in the current research, this has facilitated a multilevel analysis, from larger data sets to autoethnographic accounts, including YouTube and Facebook discussion and email threads, Zoom meetings, interview transcripts, and field notes as data. This interdisciplinarity proved useful for a project that was required to proceed iteratively with the pandemic's changing circumstances. Conversely, interdisciplinarity and methodological eclecticism required navigating numerous tensions ranging from issues of epistemology, ontology, and ethics to translational questions – to whom is this research of interest and how can we ensure the research serves those interested parties? Many of these tensions are interrelated and considered broadly here with reference to existing literature before discussing the specifics of the research.

One tension is the distinction between objective and subjective knowledge. The meeting of our respective disciplinary backgrounds requires that we navigate deductive versus inductive approaches and weigh the value of outsider versus insider perspectives. This tension has been explored within ethnomusicology regarding the use of computational and data visualization approaches to large data sets of archival recordings, and the place of

comparative, classificatory thinking in the field (Egan 2021). O'Reilly, writing about the ethnographic method, subscribes to holism, drawing from the work of Anthony Giddens which underscores the interdependence of social structures and individual agency, arguing that "ethnography that pays attention to wider structures and to the thoughts and feelings of agents, within the context of daily life and individual action, is an ideal approach to research the practice of social life" (2012:20). She distinguishes between simplistic and sophisticated inductive approaches, acknowledging that it is difficult to not have preconceived ideas and theories. She suggests: […] the best way to be inductive is to be open about one's preconceptions, to read the literature and consider what theories have already been formed on a given topic, and then to proceed in a manner which is informed but open to surprises (ibid.:42).

Studying the decolonization of ethnography, scholars have considered the implications of the 'objective' outsider perspective for knowledge production, and whether it can be in the service of the people being studied (Uddin 2011; Bejarano et al. 2019). An exemplar of 'outsider research' emerges from netnography – an approach to the study of online consumer culture – with Kozinets noting that "Netnographers are professional 'lurkers': the uniquely unobtrusive nature of the method is the source of much of its attractiveness and its contentiousness" (2002:8). The use of online communications as research data raises a range of ethical issues, including privacy (Markham 2012) and autonomy over data when their intended use is not for research purposes (Burles & Bally 2018). The question of autonomy is not unlike concerns within ethnomusicology about the unauthorized sampling of musical recordings (Feld 2000), raising more fundamental issues of "power and privilege to contact and know, to take away and use" (ibid.:166). The uniquely ambiguous nature of online identity, where people reveal their offline identities to varying degrees, together with the large volume of users on many digital platforms, means seeking informed consent can be very difficult. The practice of webscraping, extracting data from online sources, creates an ethical dilemma where researchers and ethics review boards are faced with making a judgement about the need for consent or justification of a waiver of a consent by considering the relative benefits and risks to participants of using such data (NHMRC 2018).

Another tension concerns different types of data and their treatment. This is particularly relevant in the context of online ethnography, where, as Pink and colleagues articulate, "we are often in mediated contact with participants rather than in direct presence [...] Listening may involve reading [...]" (2016:3). The shift from listening to reading can be significant in terms of the treatment of data, with large volumes of text lending themselves to observation of patterns, which may have a quantitative dimension. While a distinction between qualitative and quantitative enquiry often focuses on different research paradigms and functions, Biesta (2015) argues that it is more useful to think of qualitative and quantitative simply as two types of information or representation – such as text and number. Considering traditional ethnographic research, Hammersley acknowledges that ethnography "is often seen as a specific form of qualitative inquiry [...] Yet ethnographic work sometimes includes the use of quantitative data and analysis, so that it may not be purely qualitative in character" (2006:3). Considering online ethnography, Rahm-Skågeby emphasizes qualitative inquiry, noting that "Online ethnography is a qualitative approach to data collection in virtual communities. As such its aim is usually to look beyond amounts and distributions and to try to unearth the deeper reasons for behaviours or sentiments" (2011:411). Nonetheless, large data sets have been used in online ethnographic research to "combine 'distant reading' of patterns with 'close reading' of particular artifacts" (Hochman & Manovich 2013). Hochman and Manovich's (2013) research of user photos posted to Instagram uses data visualization to 1) compare 13 different cities and 2) consider people's activities in particular locations and time periods in Tel Aviv. Data visualization has also been used in ethnographic research of music communities on YouTube by Murthy and Sharma (2019) to explore the nature of racist discourse on the platform. Combining social network analysis and qualitative coding, the authors used social network data visualization to "render visible that rather obscure 'meso' space, where users comment across multiple videos" (ibid.:193).

The use of large data sets to conduct micro-, meso-, and macro-level analysis is notable in these examples. They illustrate how large data sets can be used to explore interdependencies, or converging and diverging themes, rather than attempting to infer universal laws by averaging across different contexts. The concept of pluriversality is not dissimilar; it has emerged from the decoloniality literature, where attention turns to relationality and con-

nections between diverse practices and concepts, and the universalizing nature and singular authoritativeness of Eurocentric knowledge is decentered (Tuhiwai Smith 1999; Walsh & Mignolo 2018). These shifts in thinking are relevant not only for interdisciplinary work (Alcoff 2022) but also for the study of diverse cultures, many of which are no longer discrete bounded entities elsewhere in the world but more readily accessible due to globalization and digital communication.

The necessity of engaging with the digital

Our research was concerned primarily with the way social connection and intercultural understanding through music engagement shifted with the requirements of the lockdown. Digital platforms were a key part of this shift and, hence, engaging with daily practices online formed a necessary part of the ethnographic investigation. As such, Pink and colleagues' approach of *decentering the digital* particularly appealed to us. Writing about digital ethnography the authors explain: "[...] by keeping the place of digital media in research relational to other elements and domains of the research topic, site and methods, we are able to understand the digital as *part of* something wider, rather than situating it at the centre of our work" (2016:11, emphasis in original).

Decentering the digital is among five principles of digital ethnography developed by Pink et al. to be "played with and adapted according to the contexts and aspirations of each new research project and process" (ibid.:8), including: *multiplicity* – to account for the many ways it is possible to engage with the digital; *openness* – a way of considering digital ethnography as dynamic and open to other influences and the needs of other disciplines and external stakeholders; *reflexivity* – considering, as in any other ethnographic approach, the subjective nature of research and the way knowledge is produced through encounters with other people and things; and *unorthodox* – going beyond traditional academic forms of writing and research dissemination, including websites and blogs with video footage, and records of the research process.

These guiding principles, particularly decentering the digital, allows a space for ethnography to adapt to a social environment where the digital is a part of daily practice. Other ethnographic research investigating music com-

munities whose daily practice includes electronically mediated communication have noted the coexistence of both online and offline connections and practice (Baym 2007; Cawley 2018; Murthy 2010; Waldron & Veblen 2020). Ethnographic research is necessary to study these communities, as are shifts from traditional approaches to it.

Digital technologies are becoming part of the practice of social life, and Lupton asserts that "the very idea of 'culture' or 'society' cannot now be fully understood without the recognition that computer software and hardware devices not only underpin but actively constitute selfhood, embodiment, social life, social relations and social institutions" (2015:2). Taking a holistic sociological perspective, the wider structures that influence or constrain individual action online include the way in which daily practice is translated into data and commodified (Couldry & Mejias 2020), reinforcing polarization between social groups (Pariser 2011; Chun 2021). Furthermore, the digital divide – unequal access to knowledge or technology – can serve to exclude and has been noted to influence online cultural participation (Mihelj et al. 2019). Conversely, commentators such as Benkler (2006) and Castells (2015) have noted the capacity for online environments to create connections, facilitating the mobilization of social movements and cooperation between diverse social actors.

Benkler (2006) discusses the decentralization of cultural production resulting from online networks, and the role of open-source software and open-access publications in shifting the nature of information and knowledge production. Both Pink and colleagues (2016) and Lupton (2015) argue that digital platforms are a central element of contemporary ethnography, in terms of both participants and researchers' engagement with technology. Both the digital platforms we observed to be used for music engagement, such as YouTube, and the technologies used to interface with these platforms in order to conduct research are of equal interest in a discussion of adaptations made to field work. The ease of online information dissemination had implications not only for our access to open-source software to interpret data but also for our ability to create a web presence to facilitate knowledge sharing, of which www.musicacrossthebalconies.com is an example from early in the research project. We created the site in an effort to document the proliferation of online music engagement and serve as a platform for musicians and their audiences to share resources. The website is an

example of Pink and colleague's (2016) digital ethnography principle of un-orthodoxy, representing a shift from knowledge production and dissemination for a select few to an accessible and collective form of knowledge production that served to respond to the events as they unfolded.

Following an iterative approach

We followed a number of paths of interest as the project progressed. Trisnasari monitored her social media accounts from 1 April to 30 October 2020 and watched and interacted with online music broadcasts using her insider status as a dance practitioner within an intercultural music and dance community. While the links came from people situated in Australia and known to Trisnasari, they led to participation in a large, anonymous and global online audience.

A record of 39 YouTube videos in total were collated. The videos included recordings of live and livestreamed music and dance performance, music videos about the corona virus, and asynchronous multitracking music and dance performance. Some appeared spontaneous, others choreographed, and recordings took place in a range of settings including domestic and public. This exploratory research proceeded iteratively, with experience as both an audience participant and a dance practitioner leading to two subsequent research directions:

1. A study of intercultural YouTube music broadcasts, focusing on audience engagement; and
2. A PAR study of asynchronous multitracking performance.

As a participant in the online audience, Trisnasari observed ritualistic aspects of engagement alongside an increased capacity to engage not only with other audience members but also musicians and producers through comments. This interaction had the potential to lead to information exchange and future music engagement. While many audience comments reflected on the sense of connection and unity conveyed by these online broadcasts, informal discussion between Trisnasari and musicians who had engaged in asynchronous multitracking performance revealed their feeling of isolation during the process. This piqued Trisnasari's curiosity about the

process from a practitioner perspective, not only phenomenologically but also practically.

Many examples Trisnasari observed of multitracking asynchronous performance were centrally coordinated by choir masters or conductors distributing guide videos or predefined scores to participants. Trisnasari's own experiences as a collaborative and improvisational music and dance practitioner prompted interest about whether an asynchronous approach would support these types of practice. The PAR project brought together six experienced community-based arts practitioners, who were engaged in adapting their practices to the requirements of the lockdown. As will be discussed later, this developed iteratively in two other directions, emerging from Trisnasari's reflexivity about the process. The directions of the research are summarized in fig. 1. The methods employed for each of these projects will be considered in further detail.
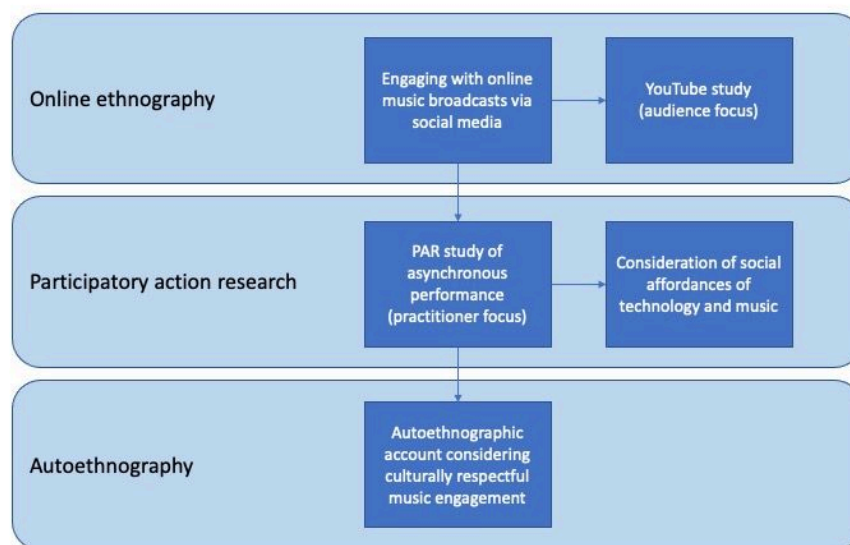

Figure 1. Directions taken by the research to explore social connections through music engagement during the lockdown

YouTube ethnographic study – case studies of intercultural music engagement

Eight case studies of the 39 videos collated, were selected for in-depth analysis. The research sought to explore:

- Ritual elements of online audience engagement, informed by a Durkheimian conceptualization of social ritual as habitual and formalized actions that structure communities and groups (Couldry 2003)
- The role online music ritual played in engendering shared identity
- Interaction between different cultural identities as part of online music engagement
- The factors that influenced dissemination of the videos
- How community resilience was enacted through online music engagement

The case studies were selected based on their relevance to the research aims and the following criteria: the broadcast featured footage of a musical performance presenting a fusion of cultural styles or culturally diverse engagement; filming and broadcast occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic; the broadcast featured content relating to the COVID-19 pandemic; and video descriptions were in English.

Ethics protocol approval for the study was granted by the University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee (Application ID#: 2057554.1). The participants were YouTube users and their videos and comments posted to the platform formed research data, along with any explanatory text for the video provided by the content producer. Ethical considerations required weighing a number of interrelated issues discussed previously. The unobtrusive nature of observing online communication eliminated any possible influence of the researcher in a naturalistic study (Kozinets 2002; Lupton 2015; Burles & Bally 2018). Equally, participants were unaware of participation, raising an ethical concern. It was impractical to identify and contact the authors of over a thousand comments, not only owing to the volume but also to varying degrees of online identification with their offline identities. Regarding those who identify their offline identities more transparently, however, the traceability of comments in online forums made ensuring anonymi-

ty difficult (Markham 2012). Ultimately, a waiver of consent was considered justified on the following basis:

- The data were collected from publicly accessible YouTube videos and comments and not from personal social media accounts
- The data were of a nonpersonal, nonsensitive nature
- Participants would not be inconvenienced in any way due to the unobtrusive nature of the data collection

Three main factors and processes supported the evaluation of data as nonpersonal and nonsensitive: 1) Trisnasari's familiarity with the nature of comments when observing these forums prior to formal research; 2) comparison with other online ethnographic research that considers topics such as eating disorders (Dyke 2013), melanoma patient experience (Lamprell & Braithwaite 2018), and mental health (Sik 2021); and 3) evaluation by the University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee. The risks to participants were considered minimal apart from the risk that participants may be identified via comments or introductory texts associated with the YouTube videos. Any identifying features that could be traceable via search engines were excluded from publication to protect the privacy of participants. The cultural origins of the music were referred to in general terms and quotations of comments were paraphrased. This approach was informed by Burles and Bally (2018) and Markham (2012), who argue that interpretative approaches in qualitative research can be used to protect the anonymity of online participants. In the absence of providing direct quotes from participants, thick description can still be achieved through paraphrasing (Burles & Bally 2018) and fabrication, where data is reconstructed to draw out an account that allows the reader to understand events, people, or interactions that typify the field (Markham 2012).

Initial exploration of the data drew on social network analysis techniques and included data visualization using the open-source software Gephi (Bastian et al. 2009) to depict multimode network diagrams (graphs depicting ties between different types of actors, including individual musicians and organizations) and multilevel network diagrams (graphs depicting ties between actors and resources). Social actors, resources, and ties were identified for the data visualization through analysis of the videos and introductory texts

to the videos (see fig. 2). Data visualization facilitated the observation of the connection between musicians of different nationalities (with many in this case study identifying transnationally), with the two larger circles depicting organizations that coordinated individual musicians across Northern and Southern Hemispheres, as illustrated in fig. 2A. The data visualization in fig. 2B demonstrated the way in which resources, such as postproduction (music and video editing), and reference material, such as click tracks, guide videos, and music scores, were shared among musicians, in addition to the use of individual resources, including instruments, personal devices (smartphones, webcams), and internet access. The establishment of social connections across geographic divides and the coordination of resources had implications for the way community resilience was enacted through online music engagement.
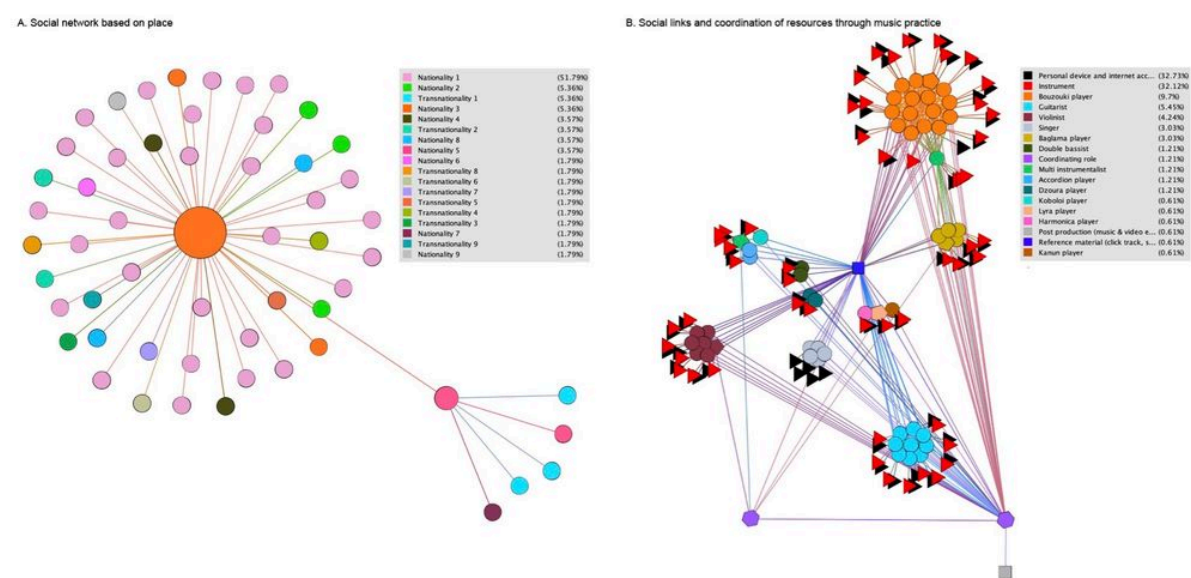

Figure 2. Data visualization of a case study using the open-source social network analysis software Gephi.

The information about social actors, ties, and resource use that could be gleaned from videos and introductory texts varied from one case study to another, precluding meaningful comparison. As such, the main focus of the analysis was the audience engagement with the broadcasts, as evidenced through comments posted in response to the videos.

Regarding the analysis of audience engagement with the broadcasts, YouTube pages were imported as PDFs into NVivo 12 for Mac (QSR International 1999) using NCapture, making all text on the YouTube page available

for coding, using the manual coding function in NVivo. Thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke, was considered appropriate for this exploratory research due to its flexible approach to "identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (2006:79). The authors characterize a theme as a pattern that captures something important about the data in relation to the research aims, arguing that prevalence is not the only consideration in determining what counts as a theme. Part of the flexibility of the approach is that it allows for coding according to themes related to the research questions stated and the identification of unanticipated patterns. Braun and Clarke (2006) outline six phases of thematic analysis: 1) familiarization with the data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes; and 6) producing the report. According to O'Reilly (2012), ethnography is an iterative-inductive research approach, where data collection, analysis, and writing are inextricably linked. Similarly, regarding thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke indicate:

> Analysis involves a constant moving back and forward between the entire data set, the coded extracts of data that you are analysing, and the analysis of the data that you are producing. Writing is an integral part of analysis, not something that takes place at the end, as it does with statistical analyses. (2006:86)

Indeed, Braun and Clarke have since written about the approach, referring to it as *reflexive thematic analysis* in order to emphasize "the importance of the researcher's subjectivity as analytic *resource*, and their reflexive engagement with theory, data and interpretation" (2021:330, emphasis in original). Trisnasari began her familiarization with the data set during the initial exploratory interaction with online music broadcasts shared with her through her social media accounts. Further familiarization took place by reading over introductory texts and comments when the eight case studies had been selected. Initial codes were generated based on the research aims, and new patterns were also discerned through the coding process. Within these initial codes, both main themes and subthemes were identified. While Jane and Alexander reviewed the coding from the beginning of the process, their main contribution was reviewing the themes and helping to define and name them through a process of investigator triangulation (Archibald 2015).

In the process of producing the report, Trisnasari worked with Jane and Alexander to create an account of each case study without identifying information, and paraphrase comments to characterize exemplars from the data. The analysis sought to identify converging and diverging themes across the eight case studies. Some of these similarities and differences were qualitative in nature and pertained to the specifics of the case studies, for example, whether professional or amateur musicians and dancers collaborated on the performance. The regularity of theme across case studies was also captured quantitatively and depicted through the use of sunburst diagrams generated in NVivo. fig. 3 demonstrates the use of sunburst diagrams to depict the difference in prevalence of comments associated with themes between two of the case studies.
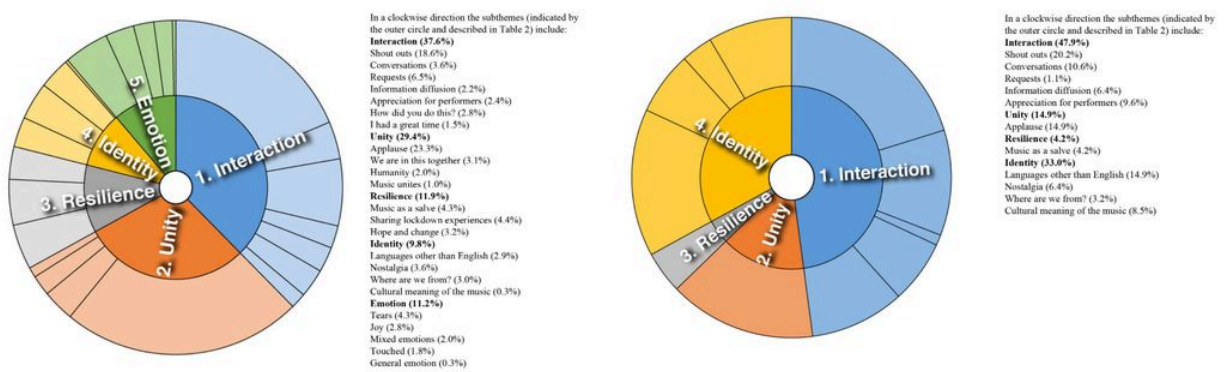

Figure 3. Comparison of case studies 1 and 8 as depicted by sunburst diagrams. These figures appear in Fraser et al. 2021:8, 11.

Five overarching themes were identified; they were, in order of prevalence, interaction, unity, resilience, identity, and emotion. The data pointed to the capacity to interact and share information on platforms such as YouTube, as well as a shared sense of identity through both experiencing the pandemic and feeling buoyed up by the music. Conversations between audience members about their experience of isolating and comments such as "We are in this together from every corner of the world" and "Music brings people together, when we're further apart" (Fraser et al. 2021:7) capture these sentiments. Conversely, conversations between audience members clarifying the dialect of certain lyrics and comments, such as "Not enough African faces" (Fraser et al. 2021:11), pointed to the importance of specific cultural knowledge and representation. Some people expressed emotion through

their comments, some hinted at quite embodied responses, despite the digitally mediated nature of the music engagement. Rosenbusch and colleagues (2019) suggest that emotional contagion – the spread of similar emotions through interactions with others – can be inferred from the analysis of audience comments in response to YouTube videos. One comment suggestive of emotional contagion emerged from the case studies, paraphrased as "Reading 'tears of joy' made me burst into tears of joy" (Fraser et al. 2021:12).

The participants of the online music broadcasts ranged from amateur musicians, dancers, and choralists, to electronic music producers remixing spontaneous lockdown jams, and professional orchestra musicians collaborating across varying geographical and cultural divides. More is written elsewhere about their performances and the comments, conversations, and emojis recorded by a global online audience in response (Fraser et al. 2021).

The online nature of the observation allows the analysis of only what is revealed by users. This created limitations to comparison across case studies depending on the information provided, and to further exploration of the experience and motivation of the users. Nonetheless, the data generated by online observation, together with qualitative approaches and other modes of analysis made possible by data analysis software, facilitated the generation of insights into the role of intercultural music engagement in social connection and intercultural dialogue during lockdown. In this sense, as observed by Pink and colleagues (2016) and Lupton (2015), digital platforms influenced both the nature of contact with participants and the subsequent analysis. Further insights were drawn through a PAR approach, considering the experience of community-based arts practitioners adapting to the unfolding situation.

From audience to performer – drawing on participatory action research

The PAR study, which took place from July to November 2020, developed from the work of six practitioners engaged in intercultural music practice, including Trisnasari as a dance practitioner. Participation followed ethics protocol approval by The University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee (Application ID#: 2021-14139-15635-3). All participants gave written consent to be identified. Joining Trisnasari were practitioners with

whom she had previously collaborated face-to-face, including her dance teacher Virginia Masri, a second-generation Australian dancer of Egyptian and Greek parentage; Phil Carroll, an Anglo-Australian accordion and ney (flute) player; Andy Busuttil, a first-generation Australian percussionist and sound engineer of Maltese parentage; Philip Griffin, a first-generation Australian bass guitar and oud (lute) player born in England; and Claudia Sangiorgi-Dalimore, a third-generation Australian filmmaker of Italian descent. The six practitioners spanned the eastern states of Australia, with Trisnasari, Virginia, Phil, and Claudia in Melbourne, Andy in the Blue Mountains (west of Sydney) and Philip in Brisbane. They developed a performance together in the style of ashra baladi – an Egyptian improvisational form of music and dance. Ashra baladi, with an underlying structure within which musicians and dancer improvise, was an interesting form for adaptation to an asynchronous multitracking approach. The structure, customary rhythms, maqams (Arabic scales), and movements created a frame for the improvisation. The improvisation would develop spontaneously within this frame in a face-to-face setting, with practitioners communicating through musical and visual cues. The approach adapted as the practitioners began to create the performance and reflect on the process through Zoom meetings (recorded and transcribed by Trisnasari), emails, phone, and Facebook group discussions. This gave rise to a range of data, supplemented by field notes of the process noted in a diary by Trisnasari. After the project, Jane conducted semi-structured interviews via Zoom with the six practitioners (recorded and outsourced for transcription), including questions such as: "Describe the experience of collaborating on the improvisation remotely"; "What facilitated the process of creating the asynchronous performance?"; and "What hindered the process of creating the asynchronous performance?"

The knowledge was created by the practitioners and served them in real time as they evolved their practice to adapt to the circumstances of lockdown. Knowledge in PAR is generated from experience, similar to the praxis-oriented approaches of both Paulo Freire's (1970/2005) emancipatory theory of education and John Dewey's (1916) democratic philosophy of education. The approach is illustrated by Chevalier and Buckles (2019) as the nexus between participation (life in society), action (experience, practice), and research (knowledge making). Pragmatism, which seeks to explore and understand how knowledge and action are connected in a social context (Re-

itz 2017), is a likely philosophical underpinning for PAR methods, rejecting a positivist epistemology and embracing the notion of knowledge being inseparable from experience. Cruz and Luke argue that moving beyond a colonial mindset in academia requires challenging the dualism between theory and practice prominent in the social sciences, characterizing *academic extractivism* as the separation of the "*knowing* subject from the world to be *known* – the object" (2020:155, emphasis in original). Similarly, Bejarano and colleagues argue that collaborative and participatory approaches to research "can dissolve some of the historical barriers that centuries of colonialism and coloniality have constructed between researchers and researched" (2019:187). Both insider and outsider perspectives were considered in our PAR project, with Trisnasari's involvement as a practitioner and Jane's interviews after the project. Alcoff, writing about extractivist epistemologies, argues that "neither outsider nor insider viewpoints have a priori privilege. Diverse positionalities can increase the interpretive frames and thus enlarge understanding" (2022:20, emphasis in original).

Drawing on Freire's (1970/2005) and Dewey's (1916) writing, and reminiscent of Benkler's (2006) observation of the decentralization of cultural production online, Glassman argues that PAR "offers the type of a highly distributed, praxis-oriented approach respectful of individual experience and the way it merges with social movement/progress that fits with new information capabilities offered by Internet technologies" (2020, emphasis in original). Embury (2015), writing about online applications of action research, acknowledges many advantages of online action research, including the capacity to expand reach and the flexibility of synchronous and asynchronous modes of communication. She also notes the limitations of asynchronous online communications: "Through digital text, a sigh is not heard, anger that spreads across a face is not registered, posturing cannot be seen – only the words that appear on the screen can share the experience, the ideas, and the message that participants attempt to communicate" (ibid.:533)

Conversely, Howlett (2022) observes regarding synchronous online communication during the pandemic via Zoom that the domestic setting encouraged more openness from online research participants compared to face-to-face. Embury's (2015) observation of asynchronous online communications is echoed in Andy's recollection of the process in the post-project interview with Jane:

When people aren't in direct connection with each other, when you're working in a way that is also deeply emotional – because anything to do with music is emotional – you can't immediately gauge the reactions the other people are having. You can't see their facial expressions when they receive a piece of music. All you do is, you get a response back, and you've then got to try to read the emotional intent in the text. As we know with any text, it's an emotion-free zone. (Interview 13 November, 2020)

Andy's reflection captures some of the isolation experienced during the process that Trisnasari had heard about from other musicians, and the other practitioners expressed similar frustrations to Jane in the follow-up interviews (Fraser & Davidson 2023). Digital data trails, such as email and Facebook discussion threads (see fig. 4), suggest a different story, with interactions between practitioners showing a combination of pragmatic and emotional content – a word of praise or encouragement, a joke, a laughing emoji. Additional observations of phone conversations formed part of field notes, where similarly Trisnasari noted both pragmatic and emotional aspects of communication (see fig. 5).
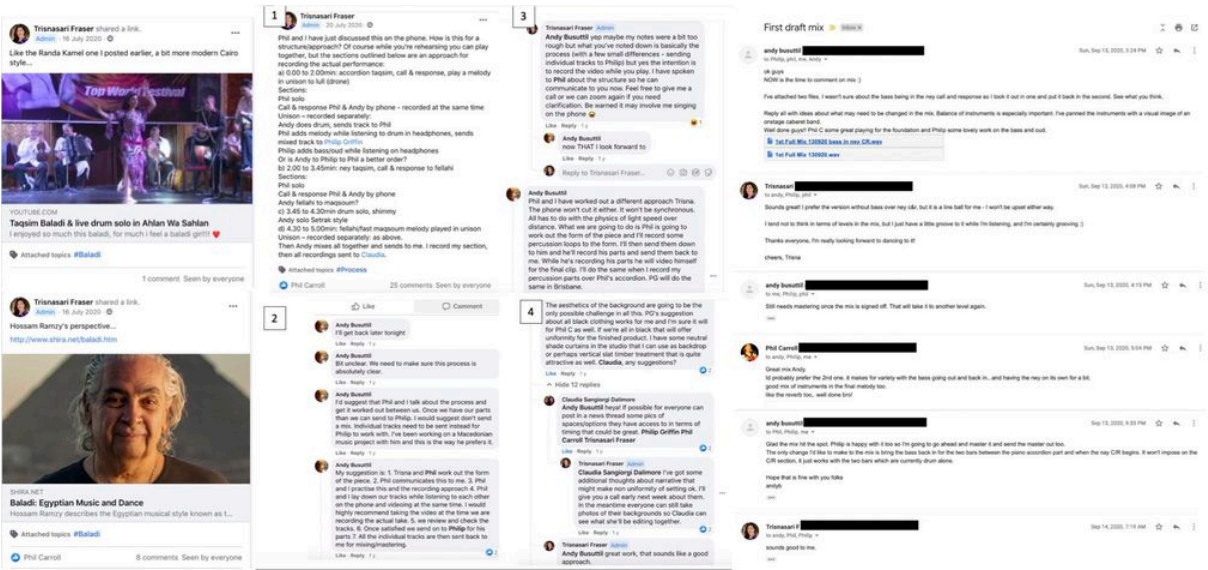

Figure 4. Digital data trails. Some of these data appear in Fraser, 2022.
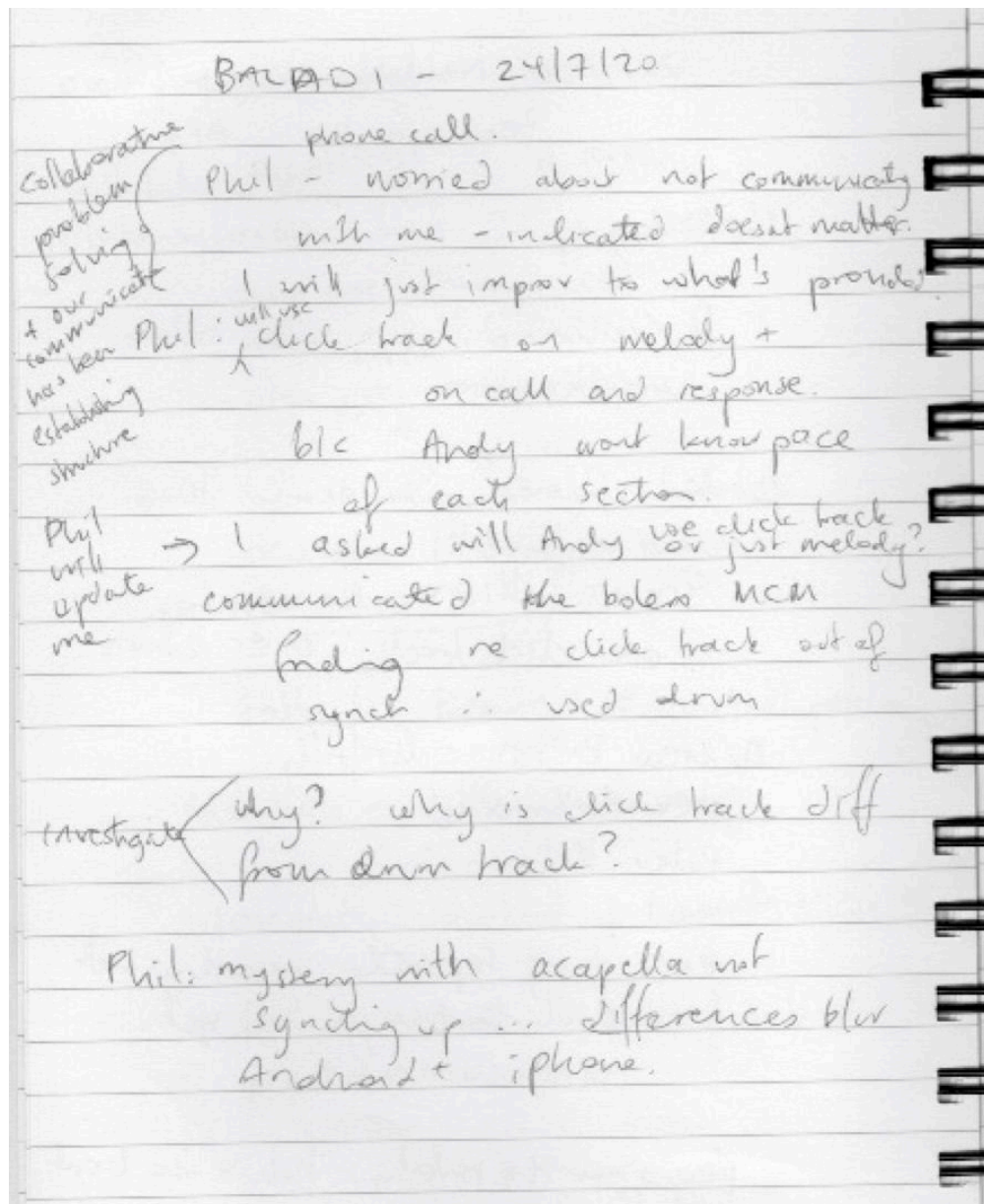
Figure 5. Field notes kept by Trisnasari.

Instrumental, social, and phenomenological aspects of creating the performance were of interest in the research. Drawing from rational-pragmatic orientations of PAR, often applied in organizational or educational contexts where groups of people are required to collectively solve a problem or achieve a common goal (Chevalier & Buckles 2019), the instrumental aspects concerned the practicalities of collaboratively creating an asynchronous multitracking performance. Interactions between practitioners via different digital platforms and reflections on the process with Jane provided social and phenomenological insights, drawing from psychosocial-transformative orientations of PAR which give consideration to interpersonal relations

(ibid.). The action research of social psychologist Kurt Lewin is often referenced in discussion of PAR (MacDonald 2012; Kemmis et al. 2014; Jacobs 2018; Chevalier & Buckles 2019), particularly for his involvement of different participants in a cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting to facilitate adjustments in successive cycles. From a critical orientation of PAR, Kemmis and colleagues argue that success is not measured by faithfully following the steps of this 'spiral of action research,' but rather whether participants "have a strong and authentic sense of development and evolution in their practices, their understandings of their practices, and the situations in which they practice" (2014:18–19). The authors argue that critical PAR is concerned with the transformation of social practices through studying, reframing, and collectively reconstructing these practices. In our project, the studying, reframing, and reconstruction concerned not only the nature of the asynchronous approach to intercultural music practice during lockdown but also the implications of practicing the music and dance of another culture. These formed two sets of analysis:

1. A consideration of affordances of technology and music and dance practice for social connection and intercultural understanding.
2. An autoethnographic account of the PAR project taking into consideration the experience of cultural identity in diverse contexts and how intercultural music engagement can be navigated in a culturally respectful way.

The first analysis drew theoretically from Gibson's (1979) ecological psychology and the concept of affordances[1] and theories of distributed creativity, including Glăveanu's (2012) affordance theory of creativity and Sawyer and De Zutter's (2009) concept of collaborative emergence. Through these theoretical lenses, we explored three questions:

- What affordances and constraints were encountered by practitioners creating an asynchronous improvised music and dance performance?
- What social processes were involved in collaborating remotely?
- How might the process be improved for application in larger, culturally diverse community settings?

Similar to the YouTube study, there was an abundance of data in the form of Zoom meeting and interview transcripts, digital data trails, and field notes. NVivo (QSR International 1999) was once again used to support the thematic analysis of these data (Braun & Clarke 2006). Trisnasari's familiarization with the data set proceeded from active participation in the development of the performance and continued through importing the various data to Nvivo. Ncapture was not able to convert all of the Facebook discussion threads to PDF, thus, screenshots were taken and these could be coded in Nvivo as image, by using the edit mode (see fig. 6). Data that responded to the research questions were allocated to nodes using the Nvivo manual coding function. Main themes and subthemes were identified, reviewed, and refined with critical feedback from Jane.

Although the research proceeded collaboratively, as Chevalier and Buckles (2019) note of other PAR research, the other practitioners did not have time or interest in coding data, analyzing themes, or writing reports. However, their input on themes and the use of verbatim quotes was invited through the process of member checking (Creswell 2012). Their feedback was also requested on research outputs prior to submission to journals and, similarly, they were kept informed about conference presentations.
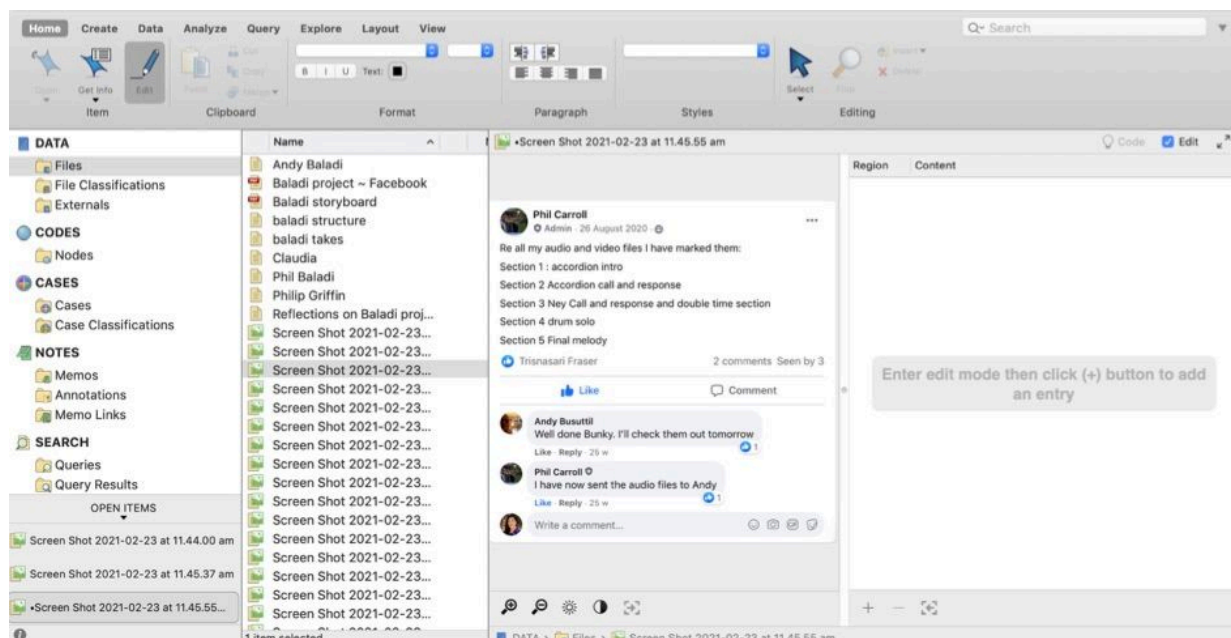

Figure 6. Materials imported to Nvivo, with screenshots of Facebook discussion threads

The analysis revealed mixed experiences on the part of the practitioners. The audio delay characteristic of Zoom did not support synchronous music practice which made improvisation challenging. However, discussions via Zoom supported the immediate exchange of ideas between practitioners in the development of the process. A layered, sequential approach was taken with each musician layering their contribution over audio and video tracks laid down previously and, thus, immediate feedback and the possibility of novel directions in the music was constrained. Despite Andy's reflection on the emotion-free nature of the asynchronous online communication, social media and email threads showed attempts to approximate closeness, affection, and emotion through the use of nicknames, humor, and emojis. Other research converges on Andy's experience, with members of virtual choirs during the COVID-19 lockdown similarly reporting experiencing a less emotional connection with fellow choristers than in face-to-face practice (Daffern et al. 2021). The emotional shortfall experienced by Andy and Daffern and colleagues' choristers may be due to comparison between the experience of face-to-face music collaboration, where emotion can be conveyed synchronously and spontaneously, versus the remote, asynchronous approach, where conveying emotion requires greater intentionality. As discussed previously, the digitally mediated nature of music engagement for YouTube audiences did not preclude emotional responses, including the suggestion of the spread of emotion between audience members (Fraser et al. 2022), which has been observed in other research about YouTube audiences (Rosenbusch et al. 2019).

The online space afforded access to audio and visual resources via YouTube and other video broadcasting platforms that brought practitioners closer to the cultural source of *ashra baladi*. Compared to face-to-face music collaboration, the prolonged process required mindful engagement – and imagination and anticipation to create a cohesive end product. Subsequent cycles of research with larger culturally diverse groups are facilitated through the practitioners' reflections on how the approach would need to be adapted in these settings. More detail of the experience of the practitioners is provided in Fraser and Davidson (2023) and the performance is available for viewing at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kiU-QygOago.

This study did not share the limitation encountered in the YouTube study of only having access to what users choose to share online. In fact, there was a huge volume of data in various forms. Further exploration of the experience and motivation of the practitioners was possible through post-project interviews. Although, as Hammersley argues of traditional ethnographic approaches, even interviews may not be entirely trustworthy as "what informants say in interview contexts is always socio-discursively constructed in a context-sensitive fashion" (2006:9), very similar to curated online social identities. More akin to the promise of unobtrusive observation in online contexts, however, are the generation of email and Facebook discussion threads, based on which, inferences about social processes could be made. With the variety of data generated by the research, inferences could be better supported through the triangulation of data.

The second analysis was an autoethnographic account of the PAR project. Through the course of the PAR project, Trisnasari became increasingly aware of the need to address another type of extractivism. Considering the issue of cultural appropriation, the autoethnographic account allowed Trisnasari to explore how intercultural music engagement can be navigated in a culturally respectful way, the paths and obstacles to intercultural understanding offered by digital platforms and music and dance engagement, and her experience of navigating cultural identity in the context of exposure to multiple influences.

The inquiry centers on Trisnasari's interpretation of events in the context of her lived experience in the tradition of Heidegger's (1926/1962) hermeneutic phenomenology. It is a layered account, focusing on "the author's experience alongside data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature" (Ellis et al. 2010:278). This was particularly suitable for a reflection of Trisnasari's experience as both researcher and practitioner, integrating various theoretical frameworks of cultural encounter, including transculturalism and interculturalism, as well as scholarship about cultural appropriation and Orientalism, alongside lived experience as a community-engaged dance practitioner. The autoethnography drew on the analysis undertaken as part of the PAR project, as well as the process of writing and reflecting that forms a key part of the autoethnographic process (Poulos 2021).

Cultural identity has never been straightforward for Trisnasari as an Indonesian-Australian living in a multicultural setting in Melbourne. The autoethnographic account reflected on the dissonance experienced exploring issues of cultural appropriation compared to the familiarity of engaging in music and dance of different cultures and the social connections made with people of diverse background in Australia through cultural celebrations. Similar to other autoethnography, Trisnasari reflected and wrote her way through this existential crisis (Pitard 2019), finding meaning in connections – dialogic concepts of intercultural musicking, echoes in the experiences of the other practitioners, and contemplation of the abiding nature of global flows which have long given rise to the meeting and melding of music and dance styles (Fraser 2022).

Conclusions

This article discussed the methodological and ethical implications of adapting our research to the COVID-19 pandemic. Consideration was given to extractivist practices and epistemologies, the shift from face-to-face to digitally mediated contact between music practitioners and researchers, and the implications of increased globalization for interdisciplinarity and the study of music and dance practice of different cultures.

Openness to a range of methods and an iterative-inductive research approach was suited to the unfolding nature of the COVID-19 pandemic event. Considering the analysis from different vantage points – audience to performer, insider and outsider – and employing a range of techniques, facilitated a consideration of micro-, meso-, and macro-level perspectives and phenomenological, social, and instrumental aspects of adaptations to music engagement during lockdown. The research revealed that technology has the capacity to influence and constrain action on both the part of the researcher and the participants, but despite this influence, human agency plays a key role in determining the direction of research and forms of participation. For researchers, this includes ethical decision-making about the use of online content for research purposes, taking into consideration the nature of the content and the relative benefits and risks of the research. Considering this in terms of extractivism and decolonizing methodology, part of this decision-making is evaluating 1) whether the knowledge production is exploita-

tive or likely to cause harm, and 2) who is served by the knowledge. The decision-making also requires thinking through how existing paradigms apply to a constantly shifting landscape.

Our research explored how people adjusted music engagement and sought to maintain social bonds during the COVID-19 lockdown. Many turned to digital platforms and our research followed. YouTube provided a site for a naturalistic study of adaptations to intercultural music engagement. The equivalent of this in a face-to-face setting might be participant-observation at a music festival, however, shifting the field to digital platforms required weighing different considerations. Interaction in the digital space exists as text – data that can be extracted, rather than a phenomenon to be observed. This required consideration of how public YouTube is as a forum, the nature of the comments, participants' privacy and autonomy over data, as well as the practicalities of contacting all participants given both the volume of comments and that people identify their offline identities to varying degrees online. Interpretative approaches – including fabrication and paraphrasing – facilitated the provision of an account of certain cases without identifying features. This global online audience was largely anonymous, but this did not preclude strangers from reaching out to offer kind words to each other, discuss music, or express the emotion experienced from engaging in the music as an audience member.

The participatory approach entailed working collaboratively, and facilitated the sharing of knowledge with immediate practical application as practitioners adjusted to the COVID-19 lockdown. Collaboration was maintained in the absence of face-to-face contact by using a range of platforms, including email, social media, Zoom, and phone, with social interaction supported differently by each platform. As a departure from the usual music practice, the research revealed how practitioners adjusted, using different platforms as required and shifting between communication of pragmatic, cultural, social, and emotional content.

The COVID-19 lockdown highlighted numerous interdependencies brought about by global flows of people, information, and resources. Another aspect of these interdependencies is an unprecedented level of global diversity – a central concern of the current research that manifests not only in the meeting of music of different cultures, but also the meeting of different forms of social engagement, the coexistence of multiple epistemologies,

increased opportunities for interdisciplinary research, and more accessible modes of knowledge sharing. This reality can entail a shift from a universalizing, rules-based, categorical mode of thought to accounting for different contexts, accommodating dialectical thinking, and considering how diverse perspectives converge and diverge. This approach, which requires ongoing reflexivity and dialogue, can be brought to bear in the process of decolonizing methodology, ethical decision-making, and maintaining bridges in online spaces, where it appears there is as much potential to divide as to unite.

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Notes

1. Gibson conceptualized an affordance as a feature of the environment that a living agent can act upon, constrained by both environment and the agent's sensorimotor capacities.

About the authors

Trisnasari Fraser is a practicing psychologist with an interest in the well-being of creative people and the therapeutic value of community music and dance. Her current PhD research investigates intercultural music engagement during COVID-19. As a community-based dance practitioner, she codirected a performing arts agency for ten years, leading ensembles encompassing a range of culturally diverse art forms. Her research areas of interest are the psychology of music, mental health in the entertainment industry, the experience of first and second generation Australian artists, and social cohesion and community resilience through intercultural music and dance engagement.

Jane W. Davidson is professor of creative and performing arts and chair of the creativity and wellbeing research initiative at the University of Melbourne. She is former deputy director of the Australian Research Council's Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions and president of the Australian Society for Music Psychology. Her research spans musical skill, music as social interaction, arts for well-being outcomes, music and emotion, and opera performance. She is current a chief investigator, along with Bill Thompson, on two ARC Discovery Projects: "Social cohesion and resilience through intercultural music engagement" and "Physical musicality."

Alexander Hew Dale Crooke is a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Melbourne. He is a transdisciplinary researcher who works across the fields of music therapy, sociology, psychology, music education, cultural studies, and social policy. His research agenda centers on the individual and social affordances of music in community and education settings, with an emphasis on musical participation as a site for social justice work, and access to culturally responsive arts experiences. Dr. Crooke publishes regularly across several fields, and works internationally as a consultant in the design, implementation, and evaluation of arts programs in school and community settings.