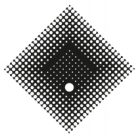
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Protest Songs from Indonesia and Australia: A Musicological Comparison

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ABSTRACT

Protest music is both commercially viable and an important tool for shaping community awareness of socio-political issues. Indonesian and Australian artists have produced protest music which has stimulated significant effect upon community attitudes and behaviours. Socio-political issues can be described and examined in songs using various lyrical methods, including strategic use of characters and narrative. Iwan Fals is a Javanese singer-songwriter who frequently employs satire and parody in relation to weighty political issues. Cold Chisel, Midnight Oil and Paul Kelly are Australian rock artists who have used real-life events as the inspiration for protest songs, many of which are delivered with a confrontational mode of lyric and performance. Compared to Australian acts, Indonesian artists have faced greater risk to personal freedom by engaging in protest music; this may explain why Indonesian protest songs are often presented with more subtle characteristics. from the abstract or from the body of the text, or from the thesaurus of the discipline.

Keywords: comparative cultural studies; protest music; Indonesian popular music; Australian popular music

ABSTRAK

Lagu Protes dari Indonesia dan Australia: Perbandingan Musikologi. Musik protes layak secara komersial dan peranti penting untuk membentuk kesadaran masyarakat tentang masalah sosial-politik. Seniman Indonesia dan Australia telah menghasilkan musik protes yang memberikan pengaruh signifikan terhadap sikap dan perilaku masyarakat. Isu sosial-politik dapat dideskripsikan dan dikaji dalam lagu dengan menggunakan berbagai metode lirik, termasuk penggunaan karakter dan narasi yang strategis. Iwan Fals adalah penyanyi-penulis lagu Jawa yang sering menggunakan sindiran dan parodi terkait dengan isu-isu politik yang berat. Cold Chisel, Midnight Oil, dan Paul Kelly adalah artis rock Australia yang telah menggunakan peristiwa kehidupan nyata sebagai inspirasi untuk lagu-lagu protes, banyak di antaranya dibawakan dengan gaya lirik dan penampilan yang konfrontatif. Dibandingkan dengan artis Australia, artis Indonesia menghadapi risiko yang lebih besar terhadap kebebasan pribadi dengan terlibat dalam musik protes; ini mungkin menjelaskan mengapa lagu-lagu protes Indonesia seringkali disajikan dengan ciri-ciri yang lebih halus. dari abstrak atau dari tubuh teks, atau dari tesaurus disiplin.

Kata kunci: kajian budaya komparatif; musik protes; musik populer Indonesia; musik populer Australia

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Introduction

Protest songs have a unique function, as they reflect viewpoints regarding the operation of society, including issues such as social justice, inequality, environmentalism, and rights of indigenous peoples; they frequently explore an imbalance of power between social groups. Importantly, they often express minority viewpoints, those in apposition to prevailing mainstream opinion or government policy. Further, songs have proven to be an effective tool for increasing community awareness, and stimulating community action in relation to the issues they confront (Aronson & Box, 2021, p1). Ever since Billie Holiday's jaw-dropping version of *Strange Fruit* (1939), a brutally picturesque song about the lynching of black Americans, was rejected by major label Columbia Records (and subsequently released on independent label Commodore to phenomenal acclaim and success), the music industry and protest music have shared a complicated relationship. The former seeks to maintain the status quo, the latter seeks to disrupt it. Despite this inherent conflict, there is also a synergy: protest benefits from the accessibility of pop song form, composition and production, while the music industry occasionally recognises the efficacy and relevance-value of rebellion and controversy when marketing music to young people. In 1968, John Lennon embodied the conundrum of the rock protest singer, an amalgam of entertainer and revolutionary: *You say you want a revolution/But if you talk about destruction don't you know that you can count me out,* he sang on the track *Revolution*, straddling the tightrope between the peaceful optimism of the flower children and the incendiary anger of the Civil Rights movement. In recent times protest music has been accepted into elements of the political mainstream. Barack Obama quoted Sam Cooke's 1964 Civil Rights anthem *A Change Is Gonna' Come* at his 2008 presidential election victory speech, and 1960s activist Pete Seeger performed at the subsequent inauguration (Miller, 2020, p47).

Indonesia and Australia enjoy and endure a complicated relationship, in which common geographical and regional interests are frequently counterbalanced by cultural differences, either nuanced or explicit. Popular music is an influential socio-political medium in both cultures, and artists from both Indonesia and Australia have been influenced by the tradition of protest rock music. Diving deep into the art and cultures of different regions allows for valuable opportunities to 'feel with others' (Guntersdorfer & Golubeva, 2018, p. 56). This is an essential part of establishing empathy with all human beings, from all cultures, not just those with whom we are immediately familiar. The process can then assist in developing more complex and nuanced personal identities; identities who are more adept in evolving cultural sensitivity and awareness (Zhao, Meyers & Meyers, 2009). In this manner, we believe that cultural empathy between Australia and Indonesia can be improved by a greater shared understanding of the respective societies, and as such it is beneficial to analyse and compare the operation and impact of popular culture in these neighbouring countries. We also believe that protest music is capable of illuminating socio-political characteristics within those cultures. This article considers select examples of protest music from Indonesia and Australia, looking for similarities and variances in style. From the analysis of a sample of songs in a qualitative manner, focusing on the use of character, language, imagery, geographical and factual basis, we have attempted to identify some distinctive aspects and trends. The definition of 'protest music' is open to broad interpretation. Kizer describes it as a "cultural message" which "becomes a voice for and about many people" (Kizer, 1983, p3); for our purposes it encompasses any composition, irrespective of musical style, which can be reasonably associated with a movement for broad socio-political change.

Discussion

Sen & Hill discuss the prevalence of social comment in Indonesian pop music and trace this to the assimilation of western influences. They surmise that foreign music in Indonesia, especially western, signifies opposition to rulers (Sen & Hill, 2004, p87). Arguably, the effect of this process is double-edged: by its emulation of western pop, Indonesian

music exhibits elements of co-operative neo-colonialism, although "new dimensions of radical opposition" can also be found in Indonesian pop, via the indigenisation of more counter-cultural influences such as the Beatles, Mick Jagger and Metallica and social criticism (Sen & Hill, 2004, p160). Whilst most Indonesian pop music (and indeed most western pop music) can be described as lyrically innocuous, Yampolsky identifies *Hati Yang Luka* (A Wounded Heart) by Bethria Sonatha as a rare example of an Indonesian song that is both commercially successful and lyrically controversial, a pop hit with explicit lyrics of domestic abuse (Yampolsky, 1989): (See the red mark on my cheek the imprint of your hand)

In most case, pointed socio-political lyrics will emerge from artists who specialise in protest music. In the late 1990s, when students who took to the streets of Indonesian cities to demonstrate against the corruption and military brutality of President Suharto's regime, they chanted the lyrics to *Bongkar* (Tear It Down), written by the country's biggest protest singer Iwan Fals. Some of the protesters also used another of Fals' songs titled *Wakil Rakyat* [sic] (Parliamentarians) to lambast members of the New Order era House of Representatives who acted only as a rubber stamp for the corrupt policies of Suharto's regime (Taufiqurrahman, 2019). Fals' concerts have often been associated with civil disturbance. In February 1989, a huge stadium concert in Jakarta led to a post-show demonstration march in busy city streets; this led to a ban on Fals touring Sumatra and a temporary ban on all rock performances in Jakarta (Sen & Hill, 2004, p82). Another Jakarta concert by Fals in January 1993 again culminated with street rioting, despite the presence of soldiers and police at the event; a 1996 Bandung concert attracted similar disturbance (Sen & Hill, 2004, p83). The artist has been personally subjected to police action; in April 1984, Fals was arrested and questioned for two weeks after performing the songs *Demokrasi Nasi* and *Mbak Tini* (Fals 1997). He was not the first Indonesian popular music artist to attract police attention, and at times merely playing Western-style rock music has been a dangerous pursuit for Indonesians. President Sukarno banned western rock 'n roll (*ngak-ngik-ngok)* from radio. The Koes Brothers, emerging in the early 1960s from East Java, mixed Everly Brothers and Beatles-inspired music; despite containing apolitical lyrics, their songs were interpreted as a symbol of political radicalism, leading to their arrest and 3-month detention arrested in 1965 (Sen & Hill, 2004, p76).

Despite his inflammatory messaging, many of Fals' protest songs are couched in music which is comfortable and inoffensive. The aforementioned *Bongkar* catches the ear with a propulsive country rock sound. Recently we were listening to community radio station 3RRR in Melbourne, and heard a song called *Jakarta Kasmaran* by Denny Malik, from a compilation called *Tanamur City - City Pop and Boogie 1979-1991*. We keenly searched for, and located, the album on Spotify (a CD import was frighteningly expensive); the tracks were principally Indonesian versions of soft-rock, light disco and diluted funk, occasionally laced with gamelan-inspired sounds. To our surprise, the last song on the album was *Phk* by Iwan Fals (1987). Why was Indonesia's great protest singer included on an easy listening record? The song's lyric conveys the bleak story of a retrenched middle-aged labourer contemplating an uncertain future. The music however is a bouncy slice of 80s synth-pop, save for an incongruous, loud piercing sound like a circular saw cutting through steel which occurs in the second verse at mention of a sharp knife and fist (*Tajam pisau kepalan tangan*). Fals inveigles by subtle methods, mixing the cosy and the unpleasant; pernicious and stealthy, he slips lyrical hand-grenades under the guard of the toe-tapping listener.

Many of Fals' songs exhibit this dichotomy. *Guru Oemar Bakri* springs from a hokey sounding hillbilly two-step, complete with novelty-sounding Jews harp. Lyrically, there are subtle layers as well; Fals creates a portrait and scene which is almost farcical. The eponymous character is a farting, fumbling schoolteacher, who rides his bicycle to work dodging potholes left by Japanese bombs in World War 2. He is bemused, but acquiescent, when armed police and belligerent students assume control of his school. There is a surreal and Kafka-esque quality to the narrative:

Terkejut dia waktu mau masuk pintu gerbang
Banyak polisi bawa senjata berwajah garang
Bapak Oemar Bakrie kaget apa gerangan?
"Berkelahi pak!" jawab murid seperti jagoan

(Entering the school gate he is surprised
To see many police, bearing weapons and fierce expressions. Oemar Bakrie is shocked, "What the hell?" "We're just fighting sir!" answers a student with a hero's confidence)

Lurking behind Fals' comical text and delivery however, is a simmering critique of an Indonesian class system in which a poorly paid and disrespected teacher is responsible for educating those who will emerge as affluent and powerful. The image of castration, a teacher neutered both financially and socio-politically, is jolting:

Banyak ciptakan Menteri Oemar Bakrie
Profesor dokter insinyurpun jadi
Tapi mengapa gaji guru Oemar Bakrie seperti dikebiri

(Oemar Bakri creates government ministers
Professors, doctors, engineers
But why is a teacher's salary so castrated?)

In *Bento* (1989), Fals again paints a lurid caricature, in this case a ruthless and unscrupulous businessman who relishes in his own baseness. This fictional character (perhaps he is one of those big-shots educated by Guru Oemar Bakrie?) is used to critique inequality and exploitation in Indonesian society. Sanjaya describes *Bento* as a veiled and implied attack on the New Order regime of President Suharto, indirectly critiquing a chronic pattern of self-enrichment by authority figures (Sanjaya, 2013). In his novel *Senja Di Jakarta* (Sunset in Jakarta), Indonesian political writer Mochtar Lubis uses many different characters to portray and analyse divisions of social class, ranging from corrupt businessmen and politicians to impoverished labourers (Lubis, 1963). If Guru Oemar Bakrie is a symbol of the hapless victim, then Fals is equally adept at contextualising his political views from the perspective of Bento, the savage oppressor:

Bisnisku menjagal, jagal apa saja
Yang penting aku senang, aku menang
Persetan orang susah karena aku
Asyik!

(My business is to slaughter whatever
Just as long as I'm happy and winning
To hell with the trouble I cause people
Oh yeah!)

Fals uses minutiae of daily life to illustrate broader socio-political issues. Guru Oemar Bakrie drinks coffee and supervises students in the playground, while the narrator laments the fact that a professional with the unique responsibility of educating the nation's future leaders is badly underpaid and undervalued. In *Galang Rambu Anarki*, the narrator's celebration at the birth of his first son is subtly undermined by the worry that he will not be able to afford essential items for raising his child. Sometimes the minutiae spill over into analogy - the corporate marauder Bento boasts that he eats moral sermons for breakfast! Oktavia and Priatna discuss the presence of metaphors in Iwan Fals' songs, and that he will often use animal motifs as an important part of his social critique method (Oktavia & Priatna, 2019). As with his human caricatures, the animals can be engaged to reflect the situation of either the powerful and the vulnerable, with hostile (tigers, dogs, crocodiles) and cunning (rats, snakes, parrots) animals representing the oppressors, while timid animals (goats, ducks) play the role of the oppressed. Snakes, elephants, cats, prawns, dinosaurs, lizards also appear in Fals' catalogue, all offering analogous human characteristics (Oktavia & Priatna, 2019, p20). This is reminiscent of George Orwell's fable-based political writing in *Animal Farm*, or Pink Floyd's Orwellian concept album *Animals* (1977), and arguably the use of animals is appropriate with Fals' satirical parable style. Other Fals characters are less facetious and more earnest. The protagonist of *Sarjana Muda* (Young Graduate) is a despondent young university graduate, wandering the streets unable to find employment. In the song's final devastating line he cries out *I'm sorry mother* ("Maaf Ibu"); musically the songs presents a sparse, melancholy, almost melodramatic ballad. The retrenched labourer in *Phk* also finds himself on the street, with 'a jungle of wounds in his soul' (*serimba luka di dalam jiwa)* and a 'black mind filling his days' (*hitam benak isi hari-harimu*).

Fals' unique style of protest makes for interesting comparison with high-profile Australian

protest music from a similar era. Noesjirwan compares the behavioural patterns of Indonesians and Australians; she argues that Indonesians, in contrast to Australians, believe that the community is more important than the individual and that the individual should subordinate himself to the group leader, and that Indonesians are more inclined to avoid dissent than their Australian neighbours (Noesjirwan, 1978, p114). Australian popular music underwent a slow journey to maturity and cultural independence. In the 1950s Australian rock 'n roll largely mimicked songs and styles from the blues-based rock scene of the American south, then in the 1960s from the leading groups of the British Invasion like the Beatles and Rolling Stones. When the Easybeats enjoyed commercial international success in 1966 with *Friday On My Mind*, their larrikin working-class anthem and nascent brand of Australian beat rock was gilded with distinctively English pop production and the latest Carnaby Street fashions. In the fertile period of Australian rock during the late 1970s and early 1980s, two of the most popular bands were Cold Chisel and Midnight Oil. These acts had achieved great prominence without much overt support from Australian radio or television; rather through relentless national touring, criss-crossing the continent to sate the appetite of huge audiences who flocked to suburban hotels to drink alcohol and listen to loud music. Both bands also introduced a more ostensible level of socio-political comment to Australian music, and many of their works could be labelled protest songs.

Stratton asserts that Australian rock bands tend to express their politics within a traditional ballad-style populism, and that this inspires songs about specific situations, often with first-person narrators (Stratton, 2006). Cold Chisel formed in Adelaide in the early 1970s, two members being recent UK immigrants as part of the exodus of 'ten-pound poms' (ten pounds being the cost of a ship fare from England). They wrote many socio-political songs and Stratton's description can be aptly applied to several of them. In 1979, the Star Hotel in Newcastle, New South Wales was closed down by its owners. The venue had been a popular drinking and entertainment venue for the working-class people in the community. Thousands of patrons gathered at the hotel to celebrate and commemorate its closure. A day of drinking and live music turned nasty as police attempted to enforce closure at the scheduled time; patrons resisted the closure and violence ensued. The fracas spilled out of the hotel and into the street, where a riot ensued. Patrons and police clashed aggressively; police officers were attacked with projectiles and police vehicles were set on fire. Several injuries occurred to civilians and police (Fairfax Media Australia, 2004). The reason for the Star Hotel's closure was principally a commercial decision by the licensee; it was however interpreted by the patrons as a symbolic affront, by authority figures, to less privileged Australians. Don Walker, writer of the Australian rock band Cold Chisel, used the event and its accompanying symbolism of political struggle as the basis of the song *Star Hotel* (1980). Walker roots the lyric squarely at this specific time and place, using the Star Hotel in the title and refrain. The demonstration and riot itself is only alluded to (*Somewhere bridges were burning as the walls came down at the Star / Squad cars fanned the insanity*) but the locative refrain clearly draws the listener's attention to this famous social disturbance.

Walker wrote many songs for Cold Chisel with socio-political motivations. Several of these name-check specific incidents or places; *Four Walls* (1980) is the lament of a prison inmate contemplating the aftermath of the Bathurst Gaol Riots of 1970 and 1974. *Khe Sanh* (1978) traces the post-war experiences of a Vietnam War veteran, although Walker admits he chose the battle site of Khe Sanh at random, and in fact no Australian ground troops fought in that battle (Walker 2019). With earthy country music inflections, and its highly narrative strophic form, the song has become an anthemic Australian song, and frequently appears in lists of great protest and political songs (Apter, 2019), although it is likely that the song is sung more commonly at male-centric sporting events and backyard barbecues rather than at political events. Somewhat bizarrely, *Khe Sanh* has been sung by the far-right nationalist collective Reclaim Australia at anti-Islam rallies. It is not uncommon for protest songs to be misinterpreted. Bruce Springsteen's *Born*

In The USA, has strong similarities to *Khe Sanh*, also being a Vietnam War song which critiques the blurred fate of soldiers returning to mainstream society; President Ronald Reagan invoked the song as a celebration of American hopes and dreams (Dolan, 2014); it has also been played at rallies for Donald Trump in concomitance with his trite slogan of "Make America great again" (Terry, 2020).

Star Hotel, *Four Walls* and *Khe Sanh* all use first person narration, and each narrative is temporally place after the riots or the war in question; Walker seems to specialise in 'aftermath' songs. On occasion Walker mounts a polemic whilst avoiding specific or literal circumstances, applying abstractions which are voiced by almost spectral narrators. In *Wild Colonial Boy* (1981) the lyrics strongly imply a class struggle:

I fill my hand with a union card
And aim between their eyes

but the anger of a protagonist '*young*' and ''*wild*' towards antagonists who are '*old...gothic, religious and tame*' is relayed without firm narrative or outcome. The narrator of *Star Hotel* labels himself "*an uncontrolled youth in Asia*", positioning himself spatially and presenting a geopolitical insight rarely found in white Australian rock music; the eponymous *Wild Colonial Boy* meanwhile inhabits an amorphous territory where isolation prevails:

I live and breathe the silences
The dust where no man reigns
I've got blazing light
Ten thousand miles of ocean
I'm alone and there's more like me

Walker also avoids specifically naming the opponents of the justice he seeks. He resists direct attack, instead imparting a sense of an unseen, faceless enemy:

My land is ruled by Anglophiles and forces foreign to me
I do not curse your referees in boardrooms far away
I breathe the silence that destroys
All their desperate harmony

This device is deployed in *Star Hotel* also, referring obliquely and disparagingly to authority figures as "*Those in charge getting crazier ... Gonna' make those fools understand"*. A relentless, pounding Bo Diddley clave beat and scorching guitars underscore the anger in *Wild Colonial Boy*, contrasting with the neat, clipped boogie and tentative harmonica of Fals' *Bento*. Australian rock bands honed their fierce sound on the fruitful pub circuit in the 1970s-80s, playing loud and fast to alcohol-fuelled audiences. Musically, *Star Hotel* is unusual hard rock melange, with elements of reggae and heavy metal.

The lyrics of Cold Chisel's *Wild Colonial Boy*, with its hazy depictions of an almost mythical struggle between good and evil, might be identified as similar to the song writing of another seminal 1980s Australian rock band. Formed in the suburbs of Sydney, Midnight Oil created an experimental melange of punk, new-wave and surf rock music, overlaid with some of the most strident and impassioned political messaging ever seen in Australian music. Stratton argues that Midnight Oil lyrics, in contrast to Cold Chisel, are more likely to describe situations in a general, abstracted way and affirm what should be done (Stratton, 2006). There are several examples of this style, in which broad generalisations and abstractions are used to attack and condemn certain socio-political attitudes and behaviours. *Armistice Day* (1981) uses broad brush-strokes to illustrate several verb-based character groups (*fixers, watchers, reporters*), and more universal references to *'people fighting'* and *'people losing'*, as the song takes aim against deceptive media propaganda in times of war:

The fixers do the fixing
The locals do the lynching
The papers deny
Watchers do the wincing
Reporters so convincing
The TV never lies

Read About It (1982) also divides society into camps (this time using adjectives as well as verbs), attacking both social inequity and American militarism:

The rich get richer
The poor get the picture
The bombs never hit you
When you're down so low
The bosses want decisions

The workers need ambitions
There won't be no collisions when they move so slow

Again, the media is portrayed as a shadowy, omniscient force which is complicit in obfuscating the reality of the socio-political imbalance. The *Power and the Passion* (1982) presents a similar view, media and advertising creating a distraction from injustices and an increasing American presence in Australian culture and politics:

What do you believe, what do you believe
What do you believe is true?
Nothing they say makes a difference this way
Nothing they say will do

Beds Are Burning (1987) prosecutes for the land rights of indigenous Australians, dispossessed of their territories by British settlers in the late 18th century. This most famous of protest songs uses highly oblique language. The dispossession is expressed exclusively via the analogy of "paying the rent", and indigenous Australians are only ever referred to with the third person pronoun 'them':

The time has come to say fair's fair
To pay the rent, to pay our share
The time has come, a fact's a fact
It belongs to them, let's give it back

The core issue of European guilt and indebtedness is expressed with analogous rhetorical questions:

How can we dance when our earth is turning?
How do we sleep while our beds are burning?

In 1984, while lead singer Peter Garrett was concurrently campaigning for a seat in the Australian senate as a member of the Nuclear Disarmament Party (the band clearly practised what it preached), Midnight Oil released their most musically eclectic album, *Red Sails In The Sunset*, the centrepiece being the eight minute protest song *Jimmy Sharman's Boxers*. This song gives us an example of a Midnight Oil lyric which does derive from a specific, factually inspired dramatic situation and is delivered in a first-person narrative. The lyric tells the story of the famous itinerant boxing troupe who travelled across Australia under the stewardship of white entrepreneur Jimmy Sharman in the early decades of the twentieth century. Aboriginal boxers were offered in combat against hopeful white locals in gladiatorial style. Midnight Oil focus on the exploitative treatment of boxers in the troupe (*Eyes turned blacker than their skin*), the aimlessness of their activities (*Their days are darker than your nights… The days are wasted drinking at the first and last hotel*) and the bloodthirsty crowds who flock to watch the boxers fight members of the public. The narrative is augmented by a series of rhetorical questions (*Why are we fighting for this?*/ *Why are you paying for this?*), abstractions (*Children broken from their dreams* / *But they won't be the first to fall*) and similes (*You pay to see me fall like shrapnel to the floor*). The pulse of a thunderous bass drum reminds of *Bongkar*, although the shimmering reflections of non-diatonic major triads steer the music into a cryptic terrain far removed from Fals' gliding blues-pop grooves. The lyric material is contested, with indigenous troupe members saying that the Sharman family did not exploit the boxers, and that it was actually a rare chance for an aboriginal man to earn a good income (Morelli, 2017). Perhaps it could be argued that Midnight Oil have extrapolated and exaggerated this particular story in order to reflect a more generalised perspective upon European mistreatment of indigenous Australians, thus placing this song somewhat within the purview of Stratton's 'abstraction' theory. In 1990 Midnight Oil made an impromptu performance outside the Exxon Building in New York, disrupting traffic and workplaces as they protested against environmental vandalism; police arrived, although they allowed the performance to continue.

Arguably the protest song which has left the biggest imprint on the Australian consciousness is *From Little Things Big Things Grow* by Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody (1991), recounting the struggle for Aboriginal land rights and the strike action taken by Aboriginal workers on a rural cattle station between 1966-1973. Unlike the heavy abstraction and rage applied to the same issue in *Beds Are Burning*, the narrative is delivered here calmly and objectively; the facts are explained dispassionately without the inclusion of inflammatory or aggressive language and syntax. The song begins with the line "Gather round people I'll tell you a story", reminiscent of the opening of Bob Dylan's archetypal 1963 protest song *The Times They Are A Changin'* (as well as borrowing

melodically from *The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll*, recorded by Dylan in the same year), and creates a subtle invocation of community, communication and conciliation. This style of protest reflects the strategy of the song's protagonist Vincent Lingari:

And daily he went round softly speaking his story
To all kinds of men from all walks of life

This song, both lyrically subtle and musically gentle, diverges from the thunderous rancour of many other Australian socio-political songs of the era, and, in the context of this discussion, contains factors that may be more commonly identified in Indonesian protests songs rather than Australian. Conversely, Iwan Fals is capable of introducing harsher and more abstract elements into his songs, more reminiscent of the Australian songs by Cold Chisel and Midnight Oil discussed earlier. In both *Guru Oemar Bakri* and *Bento*, Fals throws a spotlight on an eponymous fictional third person character as a means of personifying the social issues he wishes to address. In *Bongkar* however, he uses abstraction and impressionism in a manner more comparable to *Wild Colonial Boy*, *Armistice Day* or *Read About It*. Fals avoids using specific names, places and incidents. The oppressor of *Bongkar* is a figurative enemy, a demon lurching over the populace (*setan yang berdiri mengangkang*) accused broadly of oppression and despotism (*penindasan serta kesewenang*). He uses many abstract nouns to represent the negative forces in Indonesia: *kesedihan* (sadness), *keadilan* (justice, or lack thereof), *penindasan* (oppression), *ketidakpastian* (uncertainty), and *keserakahan* (greed). Fals expresses impatient anger and resentment throughout the lyric (*kami muak* - we're sick of it) and also provokes the listener with imperative commands for the oppressors to cease and desist (*hentikan jangan diteruskan* - stop doing it) and for the oppressed to 'tear down' (*bongkar*) the structures which facilitate tyranny. Fals keeps the music accessible. A catchy monophonic acoustic guitar riff in the style of a 5-note African clave and an ostinato woodblock rhythm pattern provide the core elements of a simple, uncluttered arrangement; sporadic synthesised keyboards add an eerie texture and a fierce, isolated drum strike on the first beat of every bar gives the song an urgent pulse.

Whilst the Australian songs considered here may seem anchored in factual situations, there are in fact significant chunks of imagination and fiction involved. *Jimmy Sharman's Boxers* could almost be described as historical fiction, invented characters and narrative imposed on the story of the well-known boxing troupe. *Star Hotel* and *Khe Sanh* both involve a fictitious narrator contemplating the events and consequences of the Newcastle riots and Vietnam War respectively. From *Little Things Big Things Grow*, partly by the device of the narrator being a 'storyteller' who relates known events about named persons in the third person with minimal introspection, is arguably the most fact-based of these songs. *Wild Colonial Boy* is an almost entirely abstracted polemic of class warfare. In Australia the tide of recent protest music has moved significantly towards specific issues of injustice such as indigenous people's rights (A.B. Original, aboriginal hip-hop crew, *January 26*, 2016), gender equality (Camp Cope, all-female alternative rock band, *The Opener*, 2017), and restrictive immigration policy (Missy Higgins, *Oh Canada*, 2018). In the 1980s protest music was more often the purview of white male rock artists with mainly white male fans drawn from Australia's burgeoning pub-rock live music scene, now the pool of artists and followers is of significantly broader cultural heritage.

In 2019, when Indonesian students held street protests in Yogyakarta against amendments to laws which threatened to curtail civil liberty and democratic rights, they chose an obscure, old indie rock song as a musical theme (Taufiqurrahman, 2019). *Mosi Tidak Percaya* (Vote of No Confidence, 2008) by Efek Rumah Kaca uses impressionistic language, phrased as a struggle between and unnamed authority referred to only as 'you: (*kamu tak berubah, selalu mencari celah* - you don't change, always looking for loopholes; *kamu cideraí janji* - you broke your promises: *janjimu pelan pelan akan menelanmu* - your promises will slowly swallow you) and the collectively infringed society referred to as 'we' (*pantas kalau kami marah* - it's no wonder we're angry; *kami tak bisa dibeli* - we cannot be bought; *kami tak mau lagi diperdaya* - we don't

want to be fooled again, reminiscent of English band The Who's classic 1971 song of protest and disillusionment, *Won't Get Fooled Again*). The resultant tension between both parties is also expressed (*kalau kami tak percaya, lantas kau mau apa?* - if we don't believe in you, what are you going to do then?; *jelas kalau kami resah, sebab argumenmu payah* - it's clear that we're restless, because your arguments are lousy). The use of *kami* for 'we' is effective as it is a collective pronoun which excludes the addressee, unlike *kita* which also means 'we' but includes those being spoken to - in English 'we' makes no such distinction. These themes of dissent can be applied to almost any cause or situation involving a distrust or contempt for authority. Similar to Midnight Oil in *Jimmy Sharman's Boxers* and Cold Chisel in *Star Hotel*, *Efek Rumah Kaca* use non-diatonic major chords to create a musical sense of unease and tension.

There are, unsurprisingly, examples which contradict these trends. Indonesian protest acts are certainly capable of abrasive, forceful sonic textures and lyrics. Marjinal is a heavy rock band comprised of street kids from Jakarta; their sound is intense and confrontational, both in musical arrangement and vocal delivery; their song Negri Ngeri (*Shocking Land*) is filled with searing, angry lyrics:

Sampai kapankah derita ini?
Yang kaya darah dan air mata
Yang senantiasa mewarnai bumi pertiwi
How long will this suffering last?
A wealth of blood and tears
Forever colouring our land

Karina Utomo is born to Indonesian parents, lived her early childhood in Jakarta and emigrated to Canberra at the age of seven; subsequently she has divided time between Indonesia and Australia. As a musical artist her work embodies lyrical protest towards institutional injustice and violence in Indonesia. Immersed in the heavy metal of Canberra underground hardcore music scene, her vocals are delivered in concert with forceful and aggressive musical backing. Her band High Tension engage a more typically Australian musical hardness. In *Sewu*, a song by Australian-Javanese musical collaboration Rinuwat (featuring Utomo's vocals), a Balinese gamelan is used in a simplified, metronomic fashion, along with dissonant and arrhythmic guitar distortion to underpin an angry message (Woods, 2021).

Conclusion

From the protest songs considered, it might seem that Iwan Fals cushions his rebellious message with lighter moments of character parody, while the Australian rock bands issue their views with a more earnest and purposeful demeanour. The consequences for dissent must be considered. The Australian groups were never going to endure any institutional penalty or subjugation more serious than losing favour with mainstream radio and television. Indonesian protest artists need to be careful if they value their health and freedom. Compared to Australian acts, Indonesian artists have faced greater risk to personal freedom by engaging in protest music; this may explain why Indonesian protest songs are often presented with more subtle characteristics. It is likely that even the tinge of western rock music in Iwan Fals' work has augmented the level of dissidence which it represents. There are obviously cultural factors at play whereby the Indonesian works considered in this article tend more towards the subtle, the Australian works more confrontational. It is clearly a spectrum however; effective protest music will almost always be infused with both light and shade, its tools both the sledgehammer and the skeleton key.

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