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SPEAKERS

Nicole Smede, Helenna Barone-Peters, Alison Whittaker, Sara Saleh



Helenna Barone-Peters 00:06

You're listening to All The Best (On FBI Radio 94.5). I'm Helenna Barone-Peters. This week we're excited to be bringing you a collection of stories, poems and songs performed live at Boundless Festival of Indigenous and Culturally Diverse writers. First up, we hear from Gomerioi poet, essayist and law academic, Alison Whittaker.



Alison Whittaker 00:35

It's the dull hum of a helicopter overhead that wakes me up. A few pocketed families scatter from their games, soccer, volleyball, running really fast together in a straight line being timed. It's hard to find a way to justify falling asleep in the park. Book splayed on my abdomen, as exercise, even within 10 kilometres of my apartment. But the sun was just so warm on my thighs. It straddled heavy on me. The book was boring. No one was around. I felt safe. flushed into the sound of that helicopter. I think a bit about my bad heart, and whether it can be useful when I needed it to be, instead of the liability it's been so far in a pandemic, but who want to go to a right now? I said also pretending to do crunches. We get followed by cops even when the activity exemption is obvious. I learned early on from what you could call euphemistically, comparable experiences. Those small indicators shouldn't matter but do, because race and class do, exercise exemption exemptions were good leggings and a matching top. Go to the nice walking tracks near the Drummoyne McMansions where police stay in their cars and they just do laps. When you're there, walk with your chest up and out a little smile. Shopping exemptions. Always buy a loaf of bread and UHT milk. And at least one canned good. Never cough, don't linger, get carded anyway. I'm in Sydney's in a West, an enclave of relative wealth. I have light skin that affords me a pass from and offers me complicity in most public and carceral racism. I have plenty of bread now. Doing okay. I am not hungry, criminalised, unsupported or surveilled. I don't have an army at my door. The vending machines at Central and Redfern stations are slow. But with creaseless cash and quick fingers you can get a bottle of sparkling water from them while the trains pulled out for passengers. Sparkling water I'm told gets irritants like OC spray out of your eyes a little quicker. If you want anyone around you is scared of going to the hospital because you can't breathe. And because you matter. And because you've chanted as much for the last eight hours. She said her name was but I took to calling her. She was maybe early 40s two kids. We met through the open window of my car with it's long and loud first gear. I blushed a little when the engine strain towards her testing table. Working in the city meant dancing this little odd line with a few times

each month. They're working you hard today. Yeah beats the hospital. Could you check your address for me? Yeah, it sent Yeah. Enter addresses .edu.au? You work in education this whole time? Yeah, at a uni. But I don't teach so just don't tick that. What do you do at uni if you don't teach? Well, it's ticked. Okay, head back. Almost done. Don't cry. She saw my exaggerated wet blinks. She offered me a quiet, good girl. And every time I saw her for a test, which was until Laverty took the contract and the former eight way site privatised. My hips fluttered, driving up to her testing table. Every piece of lockdown writing is a chore. There's no friction in the action. were condemned to the dull hum a crisis takes on when it's gone on too long. I remember few notable events. There's no purchase in memory anymore. There's no way to hang the weight of a story. Every poem in lockdown, at least mine succumbs to its own exaggerations, even here, my grotty and tearing already I am impotent, wordless again. Too many op eds have scared me off simile or metaphor. This is not like this. This is hardly like that. It's embarrassing. The public urge to distinguish your suffering from everybody else's, to try to find in a unique unnamed place in the whole, mostly inside and mostly alone. But becoming right and righteous is not the same as coming home. The quiet I'm cultivating, not because I'm above this public urge, just because I'm right now too stupid to find words for it, has its own accidental wisdom. A lockdown is not despite what you may have been told, like a prison. There are several young black men on the roof of Parklea. A place that's like a prison because it is one. Prison should crumble. But especially in pandemics that predict on breath and air and space. They already effectively use those tools to incubate death, disease and suffering. No, I haven't digressed. In the footage online, I watched two competing plumes of debris rise into a sunset. One is black smoke. The other is a spiralling green white mist, tear gas. The young people get into formation and hold their fists and the golden hour to the drones coming by. Their silhouettes are for a second gilded. They've arranged their shirts on the roof at their feet to spell BLM. Like others did hit Long Bay Prison about a year ago now. That bit doesn't make the nightly news but mob see it elsewhere. Briefly, these men step into their power and we bask in the responsibility that that confers upon us. Lots of been said and written about how familiar this dull hum of crisis is to mob. I don't want to repeat it. I only want to follow my family's little precedent, a path of hedonistic spite that we push as wide as a narrowing catastrophe allows. I know this containment is at that girl's home. I know this containment isn't to Tiparina in spite of everything, my life's path is relatively wide and the hedonism permitted me is nice. I get to watch it awe as a Black Cockatoo comes close to somewhere it should be but can't dangling like a fruit over the profane. A D grade McDonald's falling apart apartments WestConnex tunnels. The leggings are dumb, I'm buying leotards. My five year sobriety is dead. I get to watch the novel Coronavirus. See it creep up towards Gomerioi country and for the first time I allow myself to catastrophize. It is after all, where I promised my weakened thought I'd die not the place for wholesale death to go again.

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Helenna Barone-Peters 08:19

That essay was written and performed by Allison Whittaker. Next we hear from poet, writer and human rights activist Sara Saleh. Sara is the daughter of migrants from Palestine, Egypt and Lebanon and currently lives on Gadigal land

S

Sara Saleh 08:38

Some of the questions two young soldiers asked me at the King Hussein border crossing checkpoint— Were you born on a Thursday in Cleopatra Hospital? Did you come out silently, as day- break smudged the night sky? And why was your father absent? What is the name of your father and his father and his father? Do your neighbours Mohamed and Faduma water the orphaned houseplant whenever you are away? Are you aware your parents first arrived in Australia with their life savings wrapped in brown paper, their only English the lyrics to We are the Champions? Did your mother bring two dresses, red polka dot and turquoise taffeta, in her peeling 60s suitcase? Did you correct her thanks God? Did she put up a fight when

you said you were leaving? When he left? And how was your first Ramadan alone? Did you miss the walnut maamoul and Allahu Akbars tossed at you Eid mornings? Have you told any- one about the Enid Blyton books you stole from Stanmore library, because your mother worked three jobs? If you flatten your gutturals is it still Arabic? Why did your childhood best friend run away? What man siphoned her dry? Why does your grief stick to everything? Did inhaling an onion help with the tear gas they threw during the protests of 2003? What remedies did you inherit from your ancestors? What skeletons? Who taught you to roll wara2 Benab like that? Does Zam still grab you by the throat? Amongst the Gitanes and sewage and Roman ruins, can Beirut forgive its people? How many times have you phoned your mother since? Does your grandmother always boil her water twice? And why are you still shocked at how things (don't) work there? What other city turns its war bunkers into clubs? Its prayers into curses? And why do the wretched always sell roses on Bliss street? And how do you revive the dead? Why did they take your brother? Could you make out his face amongst the thousands flickering in the waters of the Mediterranean? Did he return months after the funeral to ask you, what wrongs did I commit? What village do you carry on your lips, balance on your breath? Have you been to Jerusalem during olive harvest season? Did you pick and press, before the settlers gathered like acid in your chest and poisoned the ancient trees? Have you tired yet of the may Allah have mercys? Have they tired of you? Were you afraid of the men with guns those nights the power cut? Did you splutter your amens and sweat out your tasabeeh? Do you remember the countries you've lost? Do their crooked rivers still cling to you? Did you hear the aunties, rusted arms, coarse hairs on chins, call you lonely? Call you nobody's mama anymore? Did you tell your mama you named him Omar Al Farouk, after the revered warrior? Why did it end with your Great Love Who Changes Everything? Did he make your wide hips tremble with jazz and derbake? Did he linger long enough on each letter of ya leil, ya ein and the evening news headlines? Did your hurts trail behind him like tangled fishing lines, too much for the life he lived? And does weight like that settle or lift? And what of the days you feel the earth greying? And will you stop writing about borders and bloodshed and war and death and home? And home? And home? Thank you

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Helenna Barone-Peters 13:34

that piece was written and performed by Sara Saleh You're listening to All The Best (On FBI Radio 94.5). In Helenna Barone-Peters. At All The Best, you can learn how to make audio documentaries, essays and fiction. If you have a story to tell, get in touch. Visit All The Best radio dot com and send us your pitch. We'll pair you with one of our supervising producers to help make your story. To close this week's collaboration with Boundless Festival we have a piece from Worimi artist Nicole Smede. Nicole is a multidisciplinary artist who connects to her audience through language, song and poetry.

N

Nicole Smede 14:32

(In language) Hello all, welcome. (In Language). I pay my deep respects to the land and ancestors of which I come from are a part of I pay my deep respects to the land and ancestors of which I beam across the waves to you from today to the ancestors of the lands you were present on and extend that deep respect to all of your homelands and ancestries. (In language) translates to let us all go Happy Together. Georgia, (In language) an ancient womb enfolds, a rumbling energy calls within entering an infinite time behind and forward past singing in future, future seeded in past (In language) crawling further, (In language) and silent (In language) in silence (In language), closer (In language) deep learnings here. See the future, singing past trust. Embrace (In language) unfold, wonder (In language) where light, (In language) encourages, and (In language) Keep going. Keep going. Keep. (In language) entering no trepidation. All times tremble in mother's womb. (In language) become brave in silence and silence. Kiss the dark here (In language) Listen, were listening calls, invites and carries. To connect and find connection is brave. The desire and need for connection comes from within and in finding connection we must go within and share

our vulnerabilities. This story of connection is born not from isolation, but from an unknowing a journey seeking knowledge that continues today. It was seated in past is sung in the present and will ripple outward in all times. And so let us join this journey here with (In language) sun rising the birth of a new day. (Clapsticks) Meeting quiet mist. (In language) silently gathered by dying (In language) leaving (In language) chests filled with the breath of (In language) for the unweaned and the weary (In language) returning to (In language) rising. In cool quiet mist we rise silently gathered by dying embers leaving sleeping babes mouths open, warm chests filled with the breath of dreams. Wood bowls in hand, allies star guided through thick bush seeking dew for the unweaned and the weary red Waratah, Bloodwood tree returning to camp mother, grandmother, child Kookaburra calls door knees (In language), spoken in heart, head bowed, spirits silent, waiting for permission listening to wind to water cascading delicately down, smooth rust coloured skin. (In language) skin it pulls in her belly her womb, and is cradled there in offering like words spilt from lips spoken from heart, they are cradled in held breath hidden in stone, in trunk, behind leaf and exhaled (In language) (Clapsticks) I hear the voices of ancestors crossing this country spirit awake with an anxious energy I tread carefully amongst old law (In language) old grandmother trees usher me to ancient summits, where songs ebb and flow with the wind passing through open palms, they travel the songlines of my body stirring the spirit within. In meeting (In language) we become cross deep waters, (In language), divided range and valley (In language) we wave muscle bone (In language) journey. Preparing (In language) to dance a song Memorial hand offered in (In language) hand a balanced union wipes (In language) tears in gesture he held to (In language) ear breaking silence (In language) tune, the resonant call, placing waited step in entrusted motion. Heart beating with (In language) heart. We move in desire, no longer divided. Now in a graceful, (In language) dance Memorial. (Clapsticks and singing) We rise by dying embers, we rise allies, we rise star guided, we rise wood bowls in hand searching for dew, we rise allies, sleeping babes with dreams returning. We are mother, grandmother and child. Kookaburra calls. Dawn nears. Thank you

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Helenna Barone-Peters 28:32

That piece was written and performed by Nicole Smede. All The Best would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which we make these stories, and pay our respects to elders past and present. All The Best is made at FBI Radio on Gadigal Land, in association with SYN and 3RRR, on Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Boon Wurrung Lands and 8CCC on Arrernte and w-o-ra-mun-gu (Warumungu) Lands. Our Editorial Manager is Mell Chun, and our Production Manager is Danni Stewart. Emma Pham is our Social Media Producer, our Community and Events Coordinator is Lidiya Josifova. And Wing Kuang is the All The Best mentee producer. Shining Bird composed our theme music and Annie Hamilton designed the artwork. Weâ€™re heard across Australia on the Community Radio Network. And weâ€™re made possible by the Community Broadcasting Foundation. You can find out more at C B F dot org dot AU. You can find more episodes by searching for All The Best wherever you get your podcasts. Iâ€™m Helenna Barone-Peters. Thanks for listening.