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Occupying new sound worlds

Debordering sonic imaginaries in StoryMaps¹

Fiona Magowan and Jim Donaghey, with Annette McNelis

Introduction

The sight and sound of free-flowing vehicles crossing the border into Northern Ireland conjure a feeling of peacefulness, harmony and freedom. This is how people want to live.

Annette McNelis

This quote harnesses the sonic imagination in a semi-autobiographical narrative by musician Annette McNelis as she takes us on a journey across the border in the north-west of the Irish landscape. After passing through a few villages on her journey from Buncrana in County Donegal to the city of Derry/Londonderry,² she pauses at the invisible crossing, where her narrative conveys a sense of elation and freedom, revelling in the absence of lines and checkpoints in the landscape and in the sights and sounds of these debordered mobilities. Through her StoryMap³ narrative, Annette invites the viewer-listener to relate to this previously ‘occupied’ space of conflict in new ways.

In this chapter, we explore how concepts such as occupation and debordering resonate in post-conflict Northern Ireland, particularly as reflected in the lived experience of people in post-conflict border areas. We focus on the StoryMap contribution of our co-researcher Annette, who lived through days of razor wire and surveillance tower checkpoints and now deeply appreciates the significance of free movement. This analysis grows out of some of the key questions that this volume asks: What does occupation sound like? How are sound and music implicated in the disciplining of colonized subjects and aural spaces? And what can studies of occupation contribute to developing new research methodologies

and approaches to studying sound? This chapter seeks to respond in particular to the last of these questions, with particular reference to StoryMap and its ‘decolonizing’ research potential. However, in view of the locally contentious implications of the terms ‘occupation’ and ‘colonization’, we consider it necessary to adjust our vocabulary. However, this is more than a semantic sleight as we shall see, as a shift towards engagement with ‘debordering’ shapes the methodological framing in important ways and enriches our engagement with the concept of decolonization itself.

In particular, we take into account questions of how we listen to occupation and, more importantly, why we *must* listen to occupation (as per the Introduction to this volume). Our chapter illustrates that people listen to soundscapes post-occupation both as memories of previous sonic and physical conflicts, and for the release of sonic liberation in post-conflict environments. As we shall see, our co-researchers are involved in an environmental listening that reorients their ‘sonic histories’ to facilitate new modalities of storytelling. The sonic vibrations that our StoryMap participants experience and narrate are visceral reminders of the political conflict at borders that previously harnessed and restricted not just sound but also movement, as well as the subsequent transformation of human interconnectedness that facilitated a new cosmopolitics of belonging (Stengers 2011; Josephides and Hall 2014) across borders when they were reopened. Such a transformative process can be revelatory as it enhances alternative ways of moving across sonic landscapes, in turn forcing us to rethink what ‘occupation’ actually refers to. In this volume, occupation is used as a pluralizing concept. And in this chapter, we examine the multiplicity of opportunities that opening up once closed physical and sonic spaces affords for those in post-conflict settings. Through the analysis of the StoryMap, we argue that listening to sonorous environments is a dynamic and multimodal decolonizing process that can refashion the interpretation of routes and intersections criss-crossing the environment at the same time that such sounds intertwine with the more entrenched politics of materiality of rural–urban landscapes.

Decolonizing research practices

The decolonizing of research lies primarily in new forms of researcher–collaborator engagements, particularly around community-based participatory research (CBPR) processes which centre participants’ experiences, memories and actions at the core of the research. These exchanges offer both unlimited

potential and significant challenges in navigating the demands and expectations of the academy. On the one hand, the particular ‘epistemological orientation’ (Jacobson and Rugeley 2007: 24) of CBPR can promote unorthodox outputs which simultaneously confound and transcend normative academic expectations. On the other, they ‘hold the potential to honour multiple communities while advancing the tenets of decolonization within educational research’ (Rogers Stanton 2014: 573). In either case, engagement entails taking risks that push the boundaries of methodological inquiry. Thus, the question as to *who* produces knowledge on sound is key to our chapter, as Story Mapping is taken up through the participants’ experiences and memories of their journeys across landscapes that were once conflict zones. The remaking of the landscape is most pertinently revealed by those who have been the victims of its occupation, for they understand the constraints placed on bodily practices and daily interactions within it.

The local context of Northern Ireland throws up particular complications for CBPR since the ubiquitous ‘two-traditions’ model necessitates a constant sensitivity to contentious issues and terminology that might be perceived as being sectarianly partisan. As a legacy of the (near-)civil war of ‘the Troubles’ (1969–98), the ongoing conflict is manifested especially at a cultural and *community* level, so *community*-based research comes up against this deeply divided community rubric in a very immediate and visceral sense. Even the ‘decolonizing’ tenets of CBPR itself come under interrogation here. The concepts (and experiences) of conquest have had clear resonances across the island of Ireland throughout the last millennium. Occupation and colonization have a history extending back to the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland in the twelfth century but are perhaps most poignantly exemplified by the English ‘plantations’ of Ireland from the 1550s onwards. In our own research context in the North, the Plantation of Ulster from the early 1600s onwards continues to have profound reverberations, not least in the city of Derry/Londonderry. As a result, the concepts of ‘conquest’, ‘occupation’ and ‘colonization’ are highly contentious in the contemporary political landscape; their application is usually associated with Irish Nationalist/Republican discourses, which can draw parallels with anti-colonial struggles elsewhere in the world (such as in the United States, Ghana, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Cyprus – even to the extent of having a shared foe in the form of the British imperial project). These discourses are countered by British Unionist/Loyalist perspectives which view Northern Ireland (and, previous to partition in 1921, all of Ireland) as an integral part of the UK, rather than as an English or British colony.

Such opposing discourses are at the root of the national-ethno-sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland, which in turn was the underlying pretext of the murderous violence of 'the Troubles'.⁴ Even in the post-conflict context, this oppositional discourse has been 'baked in' to the power-sharing institutions of the Stormont Assembly established in the Good Friday Peace Agreement of 1998. Various measures ensuring representation from both 'sides' of the ethno-national-religious divide result in sectarian identities being foregrounded, in both the legislative body and the executive itself. Some political parties, such as the People Before Profit Alliance (Trotskyist), Alliance Party (Liberal) and Green Party (environmentalist), and one independent member (ex-Alliance Party) are designated as 'other' (eleven members in total), but the vast majority of assembly members designate themselves as either 'Unionist' or 'Nationalist' (with seventy-nine members in this category, including those from the Democratic Unionist Party, Sinn Féin, the Social Democratic and Labour Party, the Ulster Unionist Party and the Traditional Unionist Voice, as well as two independent Unionists). This has significance in legislation on sensitive or contentious issues, which must receive majority support from both 'sides'. This hardening of sectarian divisions has been felt in wider society too, with polarized voting patterns, especially after 2003, and a series of 'culture war' disputes (around symbols and language) dominating the post-conflict political landscape.

In the contemporary context of persisting sectarian 'conflict' in Northern Ireland, therefore, the concepts of 'occupation' and 'decolonization' are not easy to deploy in conflict-transformation analysis, as the terminology is simply perceived as being too partisan. This presents a problem for CBPR into contemporary perspectives of the conflict in Northern Ireland that seeks to embrace the liberatory aspects of 'decolonization'.

Potential controversies around the term 'decolonization' are further evident in the scholarship. Naylor comments that a 'decolonial approach is one that recognizes the differences created by *the conquest* and perpetuated in contemporary unequal relations *between people and states*' (Naylor et al. 2018: 200, emphasis added), while Grosfoguel argues that a decolonizing approach 'forces us to look at the world from angles and points of view *critical of hegemonic perspectives*' (2002: 209, in Naylor et al. 2018: 200, emphasis added). However, in the Northern Ireland context, the 'conquest' that Naylor points to in her description of a 'decolonial approach' is fundamentally contested due to the fact that the multifaceted conflict in Northern Ireland is conceived of as being between competing hegemonies, between competing states (i.e., Ireland and the UK – and one could add Northern Ireland as a 'statelet' in its own right) *and* between competing ethno-religious groupings or 'peoples' (Catholic/Irish vs.

Protestant/British). Such 'decolonial' analysis is particularly complicated in this context and is rejected outright by one of those two polarized and competing hegemonies. So, while the core critiques of decolonization, and especially its methodological implications, resonate with our own research approaches, this unavoidable contentiousness invites exploration of other critical perspectives and methodological framings which can be utilized without the potential for alienation of one 'side' or the 'other'.

Consequently, rather than address decolonization directly, we have sought to employ innovative research methods that invite our participants to re-engage with the past by analysing the contemporary impact of their landscapes upon sense and memory in sight, sound and movement. This deep immersion in sound memories arises from 'the relationship between a specific listener and the music [or sound and their] . . . emotional reactions relating to familiarity, to texts, to previous musical associations, to previous situational associations' (Becker cited in Titon 2009: 504). In turn, this process of audition creates its own link with past experiences in the auditory imagination, bringing an earlier materiality of landscape to articulate with its altered parameters. Emotional responses to occupation and decolonization are thus deeply engrained in relationships with changing sonic memories over time. As Becker notes, '[e]motions relating to music [or sound] are culturally embedded and socially constructed and can usefully be viewed as being about an individual within a community, rather than being exclusively about internal states (1991: 151).' We will demonstrate how StoryMap provides a new methodology for articulating sonic memories and listening to new social imaginaries, enabling the narrator to enter into their own work of debordering. As we shall show in our analysis of Annette's story of border crossing, the cartographical basis of the StoryMap platform lends itself to geographically derived sensorial analyses, especially the critical strands emerging from human geography, anthropology and border studies. Thus, to unpack the complexities of these concepts, we begin first by outlining our own theoretical shift from decolonization to debordering before going on to analyse Annette's sonic border narrative.

From decolonization to debordering

Bordering (and debordering), especially in its 'action-centred' participant form, echoes much of the power relation critique of decolonization. As Werlen states, 'Bordering processes are . . . highly differentiated in respect to the economical,

political and symbolic power at one's disposal in processes of world-binding as the practices of *everyday geography-making*' (2005: 57). Also of use in our analysis are feminist and intersectional geographical approaches, which 'impl[y] a fresh gaze on borders and processes of bordering, understood as the continual social construction of borders by heterogeneous agents' (Bürkner 2018: 190; see also Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002; Newman 2006; van Houtum and van Naerssen 2002). As Cassidy et al. argue, 'If we are to understand borderings as constructed within everyday life, we must pay attention not only to these social divisions, but also their constitution within *hierarchies of power*' (2018a: 140, emphasis added). These 'action-centred' and feminist engagements with bordering echo the critiques that emerge from decolonization while pointing to a distinct focus on the embodied and affective practices of *everyday* life. Indeed, as we shall see, the StoryMap format responds particularly effectively to the methodological implications that arise from this critique.

A key tension in feminist and action-centred border studies is between the 'intimate' and the 'global' (or between the 'everyday' and the 'geopolitical'), wherein Pratt and Rosner argue that 'the intimate is *not the opposite* of the global but its supplement or even its undoing' (2006, in Cassidy et al. 2018a: 139, emphasis added). This productive tension is also expressed in Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'deterritorialization', which recognizes that borders are 'parts of "everything" that are both signs *and* lines' (Woodward and Jones 2005: 236, emphasis in original). So, for Deleuze and Guattari, the tension is between borders as 'signs' (i.e. subjectively interpreted/conceived) and 'lines' (cartographical/national boundaries), which could, in feminist terms, be expressed as the tension between the 'intimate' (subjective) and 'geopolitical' (material borders). Almost as if to invoke StoryMap specifically, Deleuze and Guattari write: 'What are your lines? *What map are you in the process of making or rearranging?* What abstract line will you draw, and at what price, for yourself and for others?' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 203, emphasis added). The productive tension between the subjective processes of bordering/debordering and the lived material experience of the national boundary or 'cartographical border' generates critical liminality and transformative potential, and the StoryMap format is an excellent medium through which to explore this tension. Like the concept of deterritorialization, this format enables 'ways of thinking about socio-spatial demarcations [that are] sufficiently capable of addressing the violence of everyday life on the border' (Woodward and Jones 2005: 237). Yet, deterritorialization also places explicit emphasis on *transformative potential* which

can be understood as an event of becoming. . . . Bordering describes a vast array of *affective* and *transformative* material processes in which social and spatial orders and disorders are constantly reworked. (Woodward and Jones 2005: 239, emphasis added)

As ‘deterritorialization facilitates new, inventive forms of bordering’ (Woodward and Jones 2005: 240), this process in turn entails ‘*transformation*’ (Best 2003: 181, emphasis added) in the everyday practices and experiences that shape new border imaginaries. Indeed, we have chosen to develop StoryMap as a research tool because, although it re-inscribes national borders in its default maps (sourced from OpenStreetMap),⁵ it nevertheless holds great potential to move away from (or beyond) ‘methodological nationalism’ (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003: 599) and to take the view of participants literally from street level, thereby realigning the formality of political borders with personalized practices. Wimmer and Glick Schiller also make the case that ‘[g]oing beyond methodological nationalism requires *analytical tools* and concepts not colored by the self-evidence of a world ordered into nation-states’ (2003: 599, emphasis added). Instead, as Werlen notes, ‘[a] modern geographical representation of the world has to take the subject into account by studying how subjects live and realize the world, particularly *their* world, and not just live *in* a world’ (2005: 57, emphasis in original).

It is commonly acknowledged in the scholarship that the critical insights of debordering must be accompanied by, and indeed arise from, methodological innovation. For example, Cassidy et al. contend that ‘we must attempt to explore [borders] through the situated gazes of differentially positioned social actors . . . embedded *in everyday life*’ (2018a: 139, emphasis added). The feminist emphasis on putting the ‘everyday’ at the heart of methodology is entangled with recognition of embodiment. As Cassidy et al. put it: ‘Feminists have highlighted the ways in which bodies are not inactive agents in this process’ (2018a: 140). The queer-feminist emphasis on performativity (Butler 2009: 44) also resonates in the view that bordering(s) ‘[a]s a performative process . . . invoke not only official but also personal memories and understandings of places’ (Cassidy et al. 2018b: 175; see also Green 2010).

This performativity is extended by particular kinds of sound-image engagements with the environment made possible by StoryMap. These digital audio-visual processes of sonic debordering go beyond textual representations in literary criticism that have previously recognized the importance of sound in narratives of conflict and violence. In this regard, Chute has argued that graphic narratives ‘require a rethinking of the dominant tropes of unspeakability,

invisibility and inaudibility' (2008: 93). This approach is also taken up by Brister (2014) in her discussion of audibility as it pertains to Sacco's interpretation of the sounds of occupation represented in comics relating to the Intifada in Palestine. Just as Palestine has been the subject of oppressive physical occupation that has led to 'discursive erasure and silencing in order to gain access to and control territory' (Wolfe 2006: 388), so 'Sacco's mapping of Israeli-Palestinian spaces and recording of the sonic regime of the territories are attempts to disrupt the logic of elimination and to construct an anti-colonial narrative that records occupation' (Brister 2014: 113). His graphic depictions of pain, beatings, screams and grimaces in these comics are a means of documenting 'acoustic occupation' (Titlestad 2004: 584) and are often enlivened with onomatopoeic 'acoustigrams' (Warner 2008), such as the 'Rat-tat-tat-tat' of gunfire (Brister 2014: 114).

Eeva-Kaisa Prokkola's work examines such embodied and performative engagements through a narrative lens, though she appeals for other '*methodological tools* that are sensitive to the particular everyday situations and sites where discourses are negotiated' (2014: 442, emphasis added) and for 'methodological sensitivity in the collection and analysis of individual's stories' (2014: 446). Echoing Prokkola, Varró writes there is a 'need to attend to how narratives . . . are performed and become materialised' (2016: 186), and like Deleuze and Guattari, Prokkola might almost be calling specifically for the StoryMap format when she points to the 'challenge for researchers . . . [in] finding the ways to collect and interpret interview materials in an ethically respectable manner, so that the interview stories are not (pre-)conceptualized by the interviewers and thereby subordinated' (Prokkola 2014: 443).

Debordering sounds

Our StoryMap methodology grew out of our research engagement with participants who had been enrolled on a music facilitation training programme with an international NGO, Musicians Without Borders (MWB). In the Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security Research (PaCCS)-funded project, 'Sounding Conflict: From Resistance to Reconciliation (2017–21)', we have worked with theatre and arts practitioners, as well as musicians, to explore the effects of sound and storytelling in various protracted-conflict or post-conflict settings. One element of this research has been conducted in Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland, in partnership with MWB, which uses music for social change and peacebuilding and which employs a variety of approaches to creativity to

assist in healing from the effects of conflict, violence or trauma.⁶ Integrating a range of innovative research methodologies (Donaghey and Magowan 2021), we worked with participants on the MWB programmes to understand their emotional responses to immersive sounding and listening exercises. Following the organization's theory of change, we explored creative research methodologies that would help elicit the participants' experiences of the programme.⁷ At the end of the programme, we then invited participants to contribute to our analysis by reflecting upon how their perspectives of local conflict have impacted upon and transformed their musicking practices. We invited all participants to send us audio-visual cameos of environmental and historical sonic perceptions of their localities, focusing on familiar neighbourhoods or journeys, with sound commentaries which were then arranged on the StoryMap platform.⁸ This tool, developed by the Northwestern University Knight Lab, enables the co-location of audio and visual materials anchored to specific places on a cartographical map. The images of specific sites are embedded with audio recordings of sounds or videos of those places, and the viewer-listener can zoom into a particular site or move between sites across a town or region. The effect is to take the viewer-listener on a journey with the attendant sounds and movements surrounding that area, and the 'slides' of audio-visual and textual content are arranged in a linear narrative, mapped to a linear cartographical 'journey'. This design tool has enabled us 'to map out the logical sequence of [our research] initiative from inputs to outcomes' (Vogel 2012: 3), revealing a range of responses to conflict that were absent from participants' interview responses to their uses of music for peacebuilding during the facilitation programme.

As we shall show in this chapter, recalling previous conflict histories through audio-visual engagements with the materiality of sound can invite new narratives of peace. In this process, the narrator establishes a relational authorship over silences that have marked collective histories of violence locally and their resonances more widely. In sound, image and text, the viewer-listener is thus vicariously invited to reinterpret these sonic memories of past events as part of a contemporary, everyday soundscape of recorded sound bites. This process invites reflection upon the nature of temporalities past and present in the act of remapping. While it might be argued that there is a form of circularity inherent in the practice as the debordering of soundscapes are re-emplaced in digital form, the remapping tool also facilitates new kinds of temporalities to emerge as certain sounds are highlighted over others and the lines of the journey taken on the map (see Figure 4.1) become enlivened by sonic presences. In taking the reader through this journey, we use screenshots of each of the images in the

Figure 4.1 'Crossing the Border, Crossing the Foyle', StoryMap by Annette McNelis, 15 May 2018, slide 1.

StoryMap, together with Annette's textual reflections, and describe the sounds that the viewer-listener can hear in situ. Each location is its own microcosm of sound and related images, and the viewer-listener can linger as long as desired in one locale before moving to the next.

StoryMap allows for the retelling of occupation as a productive and emergent presence rather than simply rewriting history in two-dimensional terms as text. It thus overcomes some of the problems of graphic representations of sound discussed earlier relating to comic forms and instead raises wider questions about the nature of integrated textual-visual-sonic imaginaries in the processes of remembering, and how their interpretation can facilitate new kinds of place-making. In generating contemporary soundscapes that open up reflections upon past conflicts, we would contend that StoryMap invites its own form of debordering histories rather than invoking occupation which 'is a matter of seizing, delimiting and asserting control over a physical, geographical area – of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations' (Mbembe 2003: 25–6). It does so, as we shall argue, by expanding the sonic imagination as a dialogical re-engagement with past violence, destruction and decay as generative of spaces that have the capacity to facilitate alternative and hopeful ways of listening to historical sites of injury. In doing so, the format of the StoryMap enables the creative construction of new kinds of sonic-visual patterns to develop and provides a medium for their analysis. Furthermore, the audio-visual semi-autobiographic excerpts that result facilitate comparative analysis of how 'textual sound', more often considered in the context of graphic narratives, is received as a sense of place by its viewer-listeners.

Close attention to sound brings places into play through the intersubjectivity of being-in-the-world as a being-with-others (Heidegger [1927] 1962), enabling the occupation of places through the social imaginary. As Lems notes in her work on migration, '[p]lace . . . is not just where we are. It is something surrounding, yet not immovable, it is something imagined, yet material, and it [is] something that gathers, yet also disseminates' (2018: 213). Kathleen Stewart further posits that '[t]he sense of place grows dense with a social imaginary – a fabulation of place contingent on precise modes of sociality and on tense, shifting social deployments of local discourses that give place a tactile, sensate force' (2006: 137). We shall see how these dynamics of the social imaginary are reshaped through the interplay of sound bites, image and text in Annette's journey.

Sonic border imaginaries from Buncrana to Derry/Londonderry

In this StoryMap, Annette McNelis invites the reader/listener to travel with her from her home in Buncrana, County Donegal, in the Republic of Ireland across the border to Derry/Londonderry in Northern Ireland (see Figure 4.1). Her first photograph is one of a peaceful, rural country setting on a rather wet and grey-looking day, as she reveals latent memories of the Troubles that are awakened by recalling her childhood in Donegal close to the border. In this first photograph, she invites us into 'deep listening' of the landscape to the sound of 'heavy rain in garden,' thereby setting up the conditions for an interplay between the auditory imagination, image and recorded soundscapes (see Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2 'Crossing the Border, Crossing the Foyle', StoryMap by Annette McNelis, 15 May 2018, slide 2.

In her text, she recounts the false sense of security to which she had become accustomed as a young child, believing that the Troubles were much more distant than on her doorstep. However, she vividly recalls the effects of conflict through her father's concern and empathy as a town councillor for those who had been displaced by the violence in Derry/Londonderry as he sought to assist and aid them in providing mattresses for them to sleep on:

Heavy rain in the garden.

As many of my fellow trainees had grown up in Northern Ireland during the height of the troubles, I had grave doubts about my right to participate on the MwB training course. Having grown up in Buncrana, close to the Border with Derry, I didn't feel my life had been affected that much by the conflict situation.

When we were invited to contribute to this Soundbite Storymap my doubts re-surfaced, but on reflection I realised that the effects of this war had impacted on me much more than I had realised. I suppose it was the normality of it all that had me believing otherwise.

I remember my Father, a town Councillor at the time, coming in to my Granny's house with news that more mattresses had been found for people who had fled Derry. Even as a 9-year-old I sensed that something very serious was happening. This was 1969.

Jackson argues that being-in-the-world is both 'relational' and 'continually at risk' (2005: xiv). This risk is evident as Annette's memories of conflict unfold in realizing her ongoing fear of particular border places, where she recalls violent acts such as brutal murders while, less than 20 miles away across the border, sounds of exploding bombs pervade her auditory imagination and memories of being a student in college in the 1970s (see Figure 4.3).

Karen Blu has discussed the ambiguities of border imaginaries in Native American contexts that felt the effects of the Civil War and which eventually led to the decimation of Native American hunting grounds through encroachment from farming and railroads. She posits that 'names of places, provide openings to multiple interpretations, entries into a variety of imaginings' (Blu 1996: 201–2). In such 'variety of imaginings' and emergent memories, we find 'the space of appearances', which may be alternative re-readings of place – 'where that which is *in potentia* becomes *in presentia* – disclosed, drawn out, brought forth, given presence or embodied' (Jackson 2005: xiv). For Annette, the realization of fear of these sounds of the past means that the border takes on an ominous presence for her in dreams at night-time, pervading the psyche and rendering the anticipation of violence an ever-present potentiality. Indeed, in their research along another

Figure 4.3 ‘Crossing the Border, Crossing the Foyle’, StoryMap by Annette McNelis, 15 May 2018, slide 3.

border county in south Armagh, Hastings Donnan and Kirk Simpson (2007) note that in the 1970s and 1980s, the fear of speaking out about violence in border areas was deeply embedded in the fear of intimidation from neighbours. They analyse how ‘speaking with a “softer voice” reflects the reality of the context in which south Armagh Protestants live, a minority who must regulate their behaviours and modify their attitudes so as not to give offence or reveal their fears’ (Donnan and Simpson 2007: 9).

Heavy rain in the garden [sound bite]

The brutal murder of a young local couple in the early ‘70s, just outside Muff, left me with a dread of travelling to this village, for years afterwards.

As a student at the North West Regional College during the ‘70s I heard bombs explode close by and trips to Dublin via Aughnacloy occasionally triggered bad dreams because of a fear of the unfamiliar Border crossing.

The impact of the Omagh Bomb on the Buncrana community has been well documented. I organized the music for the town’s memorial service to mark the first Anniversary. The experience affected me deeply.

Listening to the sound of heavy rain recently made me think of the ripple effect of war. Rain can fall, flow then trickle and seep everywhere. Reflecting on my personal experience has made me wonder how far-reaching have been the toxic effects of this war.

Despite getting too many damp days in Donegal there are times when I love the fresh, clear sound of falling rain. The beauty of where I live can still shine through a heavy downpour, just as the warmth and goodness of ordinary people can brighten communities during difficult times.

Border traffic [bus sound bite]

I would be a rich woman if I had pound for every journey I have made into Derry. I used to dread the checkpoints at the Border, especially at the height of the troubles.

As a young teenager I found it particularly worrying when travelling by bus. I found it nerve wracking whenever the bus was boarded by armed soldiers. It was particularly tense if a soldier walked down the aisle of the bus checking between seats and studying the passengers.

When travelling by car there was always the worry that car might be searched, with some random, innocent item in the boot being considered suspicious, resulting in your being taken in for questioning – a scary possibility! Fortunately it never happened to me.

As we continue our journey with Annette from Buncrana towards and across the border to Derry/Londonderry, her memories return to the sense of dread associated with border checkpoints and the fear of armed soldiers boarding the bus when travelling to school to check for suspicious objects or passengers. However, just as places can be ambiguously and multifariously reconstituted, so, too, do sounds allow the re-imagination of places to be otherwise (see Figures 4.4 and 4.5).

As we listen to the sound bite of heavy rain associated with the former journey, the immersive sounds of flowing water ‘trickle’ and ‘seep everywhere’ (Figure 4.3). Annette’s sensitive reflections upon the inescapable sounds of conflict have the potential to drench the auditory imagination of the listener in multifarious ways, according to local knowledge and experiences of this border area.

Figure 4.4 ‘Crossing the Border, Crossing the Foyle’, StoryMap by Annette McNelis, 15 May 2018, slide 4.

Figure 4.5 ‘Crossing the Border, Crossing the Foyle’, StoryMap by Annette McNelis, 15 May 2018, slide 5.

Border traffic [free-flowing vehicles sound bite]

The ability to drive freely through the open Border is delightful, by comparison. There are no delays, no fears and it is a true sign of peace and progress.

There are numerous vehicles currently being stored in a holding compound on the approach road to the Border at Bridgend, very close to where the checkpoint had been. This could never have been a possibility during the troubles. I like how the image of the stationary cars contrasts with the movement of the free-flowing traffic, which is now the norm of this stretch of road today.

The result of the Brexit referendum came as a huge shock to me. The uncertainty of this situation currently had people on both sides of the Border holding their breath. I have not encountered one person who wants a hard-border situation.

The sight and sound of free-flowing vehicles crossing the Border into Northern Ireland conjure a feeling of peacefulness, harmony and freedom. This is how people want to live.

These reminiscences further prompted memories for Annette. She was a member of the committee that organized Buncrana’s 1999 first anniversary of the Omagh bomb. The Omagh bomb of 15 August 1998 was the largest single atrocity causing loss of life in Northern Ireland in which thirty-one people were killed, among whom were unborn twins. More than 250 people were injured. Buncrana lost five young people that day, Oran Doherty (8 years old), Sean McLaughlin (12 years old), James Barker (12 years old), Fernando Blasco Baselga (12 years old) and Rocio Abad Ramous (23 years old). Fernando and Rocio, from Madrid, had been part of a Spanish exchange group who had been staying in Buncrana and who had visited Omagh with the group that day. The full horror of this ‘Real IRA’

bomb rippled across the political divide and musical spectrum, generating fear among Republican musicians about singing rebel music. As one musician noted, 'I found republican music dropped off *big time* after the Omagh bomb in 1998 – especially up round the North. You were afraid to sing it. None of the pubs wanted it' (interview with Michael, 17 July 2015, quoted in Miller 2018: 356, italics in original). Yet, when taken onto a global stage, the song has provided a platform for protests for justice that are imagined well beyond local borders of fear. In the 2001 Slane Castle concert in Ireland, U2's Bono 'listed out all the names of those who lost their lives in the Omagh bombing [from memory], and shouted "No More" about many acts of violence that occurred during the sectarian violence and warfare' (Respondent in Morley and Somdhal-Sands 2011: 67).

At the Buncrana funeral for the three local victims, thousands of mourners lined the streets, along with leading figures of the time from across the political divide, including Irish president Mary McAleese, Northern Ireland's first minister David Trimble and Sinn Féin's Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness. The heaviness of loss was palpable as the funeral cortège filed quietly past the lines of bystanders. As noted in relation to archival footage of the funeral, 'The silence was broken only by the cries of despair, sadness and anger as [civilians] followed the final journey of the three young innocent victims' (AP Archive YouTube 2015).

At the twentieth anniversary in 2018, this senseless atrocity brought families, churches, support groups and self-help groups together to remember those who were victims not just of this act but also of similar acts of violence worldwide. A bell, designed to mark the tenth anniversary of the Good Friday Peace Agreement, rang thirty-two times in memory of the victims, with an extra single peal for victims around the globe. In this service, as in the first anniversary event, music has provided a medium of catharsis for those grieving deeply. In this event, the Omagh Community Youth Choir, set up in 1998 by Darryl Simpson, performed his original composition which speaks of hope, love and unity. The chorus invites listeners to

Come and join us at the water, where the two rivers flow into one
Where peace and hope come together and our hearts are filled with love for
everyone.

Darryl explained how he had established the choir:

I decided I wanted to do something positive that would bring our community together and in some ways, that was the first time that, I think, the darkness and the sadness that had prevailed over Omagh at that time had released a little bit when all these voices came in together in harmony. (Page 2018)

One of the choir members further remarked that ‘It shows that both sides of the community can come together and create something really beautiful from something so tragic’ (Philip Hutchinson, interviewed in Page 2018).

Just as Annette recaptures fragments of her own poignant musical memories of this time, we are then invited to listen to the flow of water which, on the one hand, she likens to the ‘ripple effect of war’. On the other hand, she tells us that this ‘fresh, clear sound of falling rain’ can equally evoke the potential for new beginnings and empathetic relations to flourish in her community (Figure 4.2). This reimagining of community returns the viewer–listener to a sense that while the echoes of the past may be presenced by resounding place memories, they are ‘haunting[s] that do not [have to] govern lived events’ (Jackson 2005: xv). This is evident in Annette’s contrasting evaluation of the sounds of free-flowing traffic near to the site of a former border checkpoint. The roar and decrescendo of passing cars embody wider political concerns about pending decisions on Brexit that create another level of anxiety for residents along the border area (Figures 4.5 and 4.6).

Peace Bridge

I always remark to family and friends that if I were a tourist visiting Derry I would think it a beautiful City.

All the regeneration that has taken place along the River Foyle has been so beneficial to the City and the jewel in the crown has to be the new Peace Bridge. There is something very bright and beautiful about the design and the way it winds across the river gives it a familiar, friendly and fun appearance. I always feel it is inviting me on board with open arms and I have crossed it many times. It is such a wonderful thing to see the hordes of people crossing it daily, from both sides of the river.

Figure 4.6 ‘Crossing the Border, Crossing the Foyle’, StoryMap by Annette McNelis, 15 May 2018, slide 6.

The views from the Peace Bridge are amazing and the fact that it is a pedestrian bridge keeps the crossing carefree and safe, which must be contributing, in a profound and positive way, to the wellbeing of the people of the City.

As we arrive in Derry/Londonderry, in the final slides of her StoryMap, Annette's journey culminates at the Peace Bridge across the River Foyle (completed in 2011), with the soft hum of engines in the background and the slap-slap of footsteps as a jogger passes by. Here, the flow of sound, image and design coalesce in the gently curving structure of the Peace Bridge with supports like 'sails' on either side, affirmed by the ripple of the river beneath (see Figure 4.7). This flow is both historical and political with the 'sails' symbolizing hope for unity between the Unionist Waterside and Nationalist Cityside. As Annette notes, 'there is something very bright and beautiful about the design and the way it winds across the river gives it a familiar, friendly and fun appearance. I always feel it is inviting me on board with open arms.' In redefining the historical divisions of Derry/Londonderry, she says, the Peace Bridge 'seems to unite both sides of the city in a more personal way, making it beat like one heart'.

Peace Bridge

To me the Waterside and the City have always felt like two separate hearts of the city. Sitting proudly between Craigavon Bridge and the Foyle Bridge, the Peace Bridge seems to unite both sides of the city in a more personal way, making it beat like one heart. I consider the Peace Bridge to be a powerful symbol of peace and harmony – a bridge between the dark past and a bright future.

Figure 4.7 'Crossing the Border, Crossing the Foyle', StoryMap by Annette McNelis, 15 May 2018, slide 7.

I feel that everything about this magnificent structure perfectly reflects the Trojan efforts that have been initiated to help bring people together. All people really want is to be able to go about their lives in peace.

The value of StoryMaps in community-based participatory research

This example demonstrates the potential for StoryMap to reshape our perceptions of the landscape in varieties of sonic forms and, in doing so, it has the potential to respond to the methodological needs of our research in five key ways, as follows:

- (1) Visceral layering: StoryMap allows a layering of reflections on top of the 'material' base of the cartographical map, with scope for various multimedia to be employed. It brings a creative tension between subjective bordering processes, sonic imaginaries, memories and the physical border into play simultaneously;
- (2) Affective simultaneity: As listener-viewers responding to Annette's journey, we are invited to become recipients of her experience, immersed in a particular space-time moment of the sights, sounds and movements of her travel and border crossings. These come to stand as a means of drawing us into alternative memories of prior conflict zones as 'space[s] of practiced place' (de Certeau 1988: 117) in sounded actions;
- (3) Sound narratives: These everyday embodiments of sound, image and movement in turn become non-verbal means of narrativizing place. Although Annette includes short explanatory texts with each map, image and soundclip, it would be possible for those who know the area to narrativize their own journey and the border through complementary and contrasting sound-images of personalized experience. Thus, the experience of the SoundMap is at one level atemporal both for those who have different experiences of the areas and for those with no prior knowledge or experience of the landscape and its history. Yet it creates a sonic template from which viewer-listeners can draw their own comparisons of comparable locales;
- (4) Grounded perspectives: In these personalized processes, the platform facilitates bottom-up and participant-led creativity, which is key to effective CBPR;
- (5) Mutual transformations: As a method of CBPR the activities and materials generated by participants are the focus not only of analysis but

also of the transformation of engagement between academic facilitators and research participants. Thus, the borderings implicit with ‘academic/public *hierarchies of power*’ (Cassidy et al. 2018a: 140), which we outlined at the start of this chapter, must also be subject to careful scrutiny and repositioning in order to ensure a mutually transformative give-and-take in the research engagement.

These facilitation research processes are not new but have long comprised the basis of research with Indigenous communities. For example, in her CBPR with Northern Plains Native peoples, Christine Rogers Stanton (2014) provides a set of criteria that highlight key differences between Indigenous and academic modes of learning and engagement. Some of these include the recognition that storytelling is evocative rather than linear; the validation of storytelling is from the teller rather than the academic reviewer; emotional, intersubjective, sensorial and collaborative experiences are given central weight; and the sharing of experiences depends upon levels of perceived safety and well-being (Rogers Stanton 2014: 575, Table 1).⁹

Debordering with Musicians Without Borders?

As well as having important implications for our methodology, an engagement with bordering also fits with our ethical commitment to do ‘research *with* and research *for* our research partners’, MWB (in addition to ‘the “traditional” ethnographic sense of doing research *about*’ MWB) (Donaghey and Magowan 2021). Perhaps this engagement with bordering is in some sense nominatively determined – the name *Musicians Without Borders* compels us in this direction – but we do well to take this ‘borderlessness’ seriously (for a parallel discussion of this concept as it applies to *Médecins sans Frontières/Doctors without Borders*, see Debrix 1998). As we have seen in StoryMap, the analytical frameworks of bordering are commensurate with the approaches of MWB themselves, enabling our research to complement their practice. Creativity, performativity and artistic expression are at the core of this complementarity, and the subjective processes of bordering are reflected in embodied performance. Ernste writes that ‘the bordered body is not just an interface but also a face, an instrument of human *expressivity*’ (Ernst 2005: 164, emphasis added; see also Plessner 2003), and Németh asserts that bordering is ‘in itself an (inter)active process involving actorship . . . focusing on the representations of borders through *performative*

acts' (2017: 52, emphasis added). This recognition of borders as being performed contains transformative potential by emphasizing that 'bordering is not a given condition but an action' (Németh 2017: 52). This is at the core of MWB's peacebuilding ethos and theory of change. More than this, it conceives of the performance of borders as *the* essential aspect of their reproduction and, with a view to peacebuilding activity, recognizes that these 'perceptual borders can often be "stickier"; this is more difficult to eliminate than physical borders' (Németh 2017: 51, see also van Houtum 1999).

Performativity is the key to achieving meaningful social transformation, and art and creativity are the tools to effect that change. As Barrow states: '[a]rt has the ability to provide us with new possibilities for thinking about identity and continuity as changing concepts . . . retaining cultural/spatial traditions while engaging with the diversification of contemporary society' (2013: 1). This 'spatial' artistic emphasis encompasses the materiality of the border (in addition to, and in creative tension with, its subjective reproduction as addressed in performativity). However, the retention of 'cultural . . . traditions' pointed to by Barrow is problematic in the particularly contentious context of Derry/Londonderry where most musics, and especially traditional musics, are bifurcated along the sectarian 'two traditions' social divide. Particular tunes, rhythms and instruments are perceived in this context as belonging to one 'side' or the 'other' (obscuring the historical intermingling – and co-related geneses of particular characteristics of both musical traditions). By misrecognizing prior histories of shared musical transmission and exchange, distinct music cultures have become part of the subjective processes of bordering in Derry/Londonderry. Németh argues that such borders must be recognized, even confronted, to create opportunities for transformation:

Defining and explaining difference is . . . an important step in avoiding misconceptions and faulty perceptions that may lead to fear and hostility. Consequently, clear demonstrations of difference can help to better define barriers/borders for both audiences and artists, and thus enable borders to be more easily crossed, or indeed disassembled. (2017: 67)

Likewise, Viktorova emphasizes the 'mediating' capacity of boundaries which function to 'establish connections between the spheres they separate'; boundaries and borders are transgressed in the 'unifying mechanism' of 'communication' (2003: 152). For Viktorova the 'setting of boundaries signals the possibility of their transgression' and this exposes 'their artificiality or conventionality', and this is a 'meaningful act' or 'event' (2003: 156). However, MWB explicitly do

not take this ‘confrontational’ and transgressive approach to bordering into the musical context of Derry/Londonderry and avoid incorporating any reference to specific musical forms from each part of the community. In contrast, some of MWB’s peacebuilding activities in their locations around the rest of the world do incorporate elements of local music practices and instruments into their creative activities, offering participants a sense of ownership over the process. As we can see in Northern Ireland, sectarian contention still infects local politics *and* expressive culture. Indeed, it was this pervasive contentiousness that invited our initial engagement with bordering for this research project, especially as we sought to understand how MWB are able to negotiate musical and creative practices without bringing this ‘culture war’ into creative spaces, a process which would be detrimental to MWB’s peacebuilding aims in Derry/Londonderry. Nevertheless, MWB’s peacebuilding mission is reflected in the imaginaries that underlie and emerge from bordering concepts, which brings our argument back to issues of decolonization outlined at the start of this chapter.

Conclusion

(De)bordering and decolonization share an emphasis on imaginaries as reservoirs of transformative potential. Through non-verbal creativity, the imagination, freed from the strictures of the cartographic and ethnic borders and boundaries of identity, is integral to MWB practices, and as evidenced in Annette’s StoryMap it facilitates new musical and artistic engagements with self-expression. As Harsha Walia puts it, decolonization is ‘the imagining and generating of alternative institutions and relations’ (2013: 249), and Bürkner, similarly, argues that ‘imaginaries . . . induce alternative practices and emancipation’ (2018: 191). Bürkner offers a further parallel with MWB’s practice, arguing that ‘most imaginaries remain vague or even opaque because for their proponents this generally implies a strategic advantage’ (2018: 191). In the Derry/Londonderry context, this ambiguity around borders, especially as expressed musically, is exactly the ‘strategic advantage’ that leads MWB to use improvisation and instruments from other cultural traditions in the Northern Ireland context, rather than drawing directly upon the rich seam of local musics.

In this chapter, we have sought to address how implicit tensions surrounding the use of the terms ‘decolonization’ and ‘debordering’ in relation to the Northern Irish political landscape can be refashioned through alternative sensory and creative engagements with place. Through the use of StoryMap, we

have argued that the ambiguity of sound is particularly potent for enabling sonic memories from the past to be connected with, yet simultaneously displaced by and/or resonant with, the sonic present. Annette's story has offered glimpses of how recollections of sound have shaped moments of her life-journey back and forth across the border from times of conflict to peace. In turn, we are invited to listen in to these affective processes of debordering that her journeys have entailed. As a participant in the Music Bridge Programme, Annette has also been trained in non-verbal improvisatory practices that invite expansive creative musical imaginaries and unite participants in deeply shared sonic responses. This debordering of identity and practice in MWB creative activities in Derry/Londonderry is generative of emotional flow, positivity and hope, each of which is clearly evoked in Annette's projection of the sounds of rain that flow like the River Foyle under the Peace Bridge.

As we have tried to demonstrate, the technological advances of digital media, such as the debordering potentialities of StoryMap, provide new opportunities to reflect critically upon transformations of conflict narratives and corresponding sonic imaginaries over time. By incorporating these innovations into wider scholarship and practice, there is potential to engage directly with the immediacy of aural and emotional dynamics through the lived experiences of sonic memories of the past. In turn, former landscapes of harm and injury can be retuned through everyday sounds of peace, 'occupying space' at the individual level, inviting those in positions of power and influence in policy-making to listen more closely to how sound, music and the arts can offer radical critiques of the past that can lead incrementally to interconnected visions of enhanced global futures.

Notes

- 1 We are very grateful to PaCCS (the Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security Research) for funding the five-year 'Sounding Conflict' Project (2017–21, reference AH/P005381/1), which has enabled us to undertake this study. We would also like to thank our partner organization, Musicians Without Borders, particularly the director, Laura Hassler, and the project and training coordinator, Meagan Hughes, as well as Peter O'Doherty and Eibhlín Ní Dhochartaigh of Cultúrlann Uí Chanáin who host the Music Bridge Programme, together with participants, for enabling our collaboration. Finally, we are especially indebted to Annette McNelis for her willingness to share her evocative insights in the StoryMap on the website and as part of this chapter.

- 2 The city of Derry/Londonderry, the second largest city in Northern Ireland, lies just 2 kilometres from the border with County Donegal and the Republic of Ireland. The city has been a key site in the history of Ireland and was a focal point for conflict during the Troubles.
- 3 StoryMap is an online digital tool that enables users to employ sound, image and mapping to narrate a series of activities within and between places anywhere in the globe.
- 4 The death toll was almost 3,600 between 1969 and 1998 (McKittrick et al. 2001: 1552) with a further 158 conflict-related deaths between April 1998 and April 2018 (Nolan 2018).
- 5 An interesting shortcoming of OpenStreetMap in the context of the StoryMap platform is the naming of Derry/Londonderry as 'Londonderry County Borough' (in the Stamen Design map tiles). This may have been an attempt to take an 'official' line in the face of the contested naming of the city. The default map tiles on OpenStreetMap's main home page do slightly better but still manage to misstep by opting for 'Londonderry/Derry', the particular ordering of which is not used in vernacular or official discourse. See <https://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=11/54.9900/-7.3626> (accessed 21 January 2019).
- 6 The year 2019 marks the twentieth anniversary of Musicians Without Borders who have established music programmes from rock schools in Macedonia and Kosovo to community music training programmes in Palestine, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda, as well as in El Salvador and Northern Ireland (see <https://www.musicianwithoutborders.org/2018/12/20-years-of-peacebuilding-through-music/>) (accessed 20 January 2019).
- 7 For discussion of the Music Bridge Evaluation Programme, see Magowan and Donaghey 2018.
- 8 To follow the StoryMap on our website, go to Research Findings, Research Outcomes, Derry/Londonderry project under soundingconflict.org.
- 9 It should also be noted that there are many other linguistic, political, economic and cultural issues of decolonization that also concern Indigenous communities themselves (see, for example, Roche et al. 2018).

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