Sounding Conflict:

From Resistance to Reconciliation

BRIEFING REPORT 1

PaCCS Partner meeting held on 2 November 2017 in the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice, Queen's University Belfast

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'Due to its ineffable quality, sound has the power to prompt action and response as it acts upon mind, body and senses across the gamut of emotions'

This briefing paper outlines key insights from the Sounding Conflict PaCCS (Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security) research project meeting held in Queen's University, Belfast on 2 November 2017. Six team members and eleven project partners met to discuss questions of how language, discourse and memories of sound practices from protracted to post-conflict inform expressions of resistance and reconciliation. This roundtable aims to extend these discussions in other directions while reflecting upon the findings of the PaCCS team for 2018.

Sound Effects of Conflict

Addressing the Fear of Sound

In examining the processes of creative sound practices from protracted to post-conflict settings, the group discussed how sounds can generate conscious or subconscious memories and associated emotions that may range from 'episodic' to 'flashback' memories (Whitehouse 2004). Sounds are all pervasive being variously encompassing, filtered out, forms of distraction, incorporation, exclusion and integration. Due to its ineffable quality, sound has the power to prompt action and response as it acts upon people across the gamut of emotions. It thus, invites a particular kind of attention as 'sound triggers memory' as Paula McFetridge, director of Kabosh noted. She explained how the play, 'Green and Blue'[1] narrates the story of three sound effects, including the sound of a gunshot from the perspective of the person who is shot rather than those who fire the gun. In this context, sound mediates pain, shock and coming to terms with the aftermath of conflict.

Director of Derry/Londonderry's Culturlann, Eibhlín Ní Dhochartaigh was reminded of the memories that the Troubles' generation have about sounds of helicopters and the hammering of binlids in Derry during the 'Bloody Sunday' events in Northern Ireland.[2] These sounds also allude to understanding territorial borders of identity. Comparing 'sound triggers' in Northern Ireland, Eibhlín concluded that 'sounds make the archive and the archaeological process', in other words they provide the basis for creativity.

Our research has highlighted the importance of learning about and understanding the fear of sound. For example, through interviewing sound installation participants in Brazil, our research found that narratives of

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[1]'Green & Blue'. Written by Laurence McKeown, directed by Paula McFetridge. Produced by Kabosh in association with Diversity Challenges, 2016. (For more information, see: http://www.green-and-blue.org/2016/09/green-and-blue-play/)

[2] Women banging binlids on the ground for communication and protest were common in Derry/Londonderry during the troubles to warn families and locals when the army was arriving in their area as part of 'Operation Banner from 1969-1997.

'While sound can dissolve boundaries, sound creates borders'.

militarization, pacification and intervention were at the forefront of the reanalysis of a sound installation held in Rio De Janeiro in 2014. Pedro Rebelo explained how 'pacification' actions by special forces in the Mare favela up to 2014 involved 're-appropriated carioca funk being played from the *caveirão* (military tank) to the 16 communities and 114,000 inhabitants'. A follow-up survey with participants in 2017, (Rebelo and Magowan) further enabled the assessment and analysis of sounds of the favela, illustrating that reconfigurations of fearful expressions have taken place, as participants identified musical practices, such as samba, which are being employed as modes of resistance in other contexts.

Sound Borders

'Sound allows artists to move from visibility to invisibility but it can also put them at risk if they are in situations of conflict'. Paula McFetridge

While sound can dissolve boundaries, sound also creates borders. Landlocked or embodied through memories of water, sounds carry the thoughts, feelings and histories of their interlocutors. Just as participants of the Som da Maré project in Rio de Janeiro's favela strolled over a gallery fitted with boardwalks and loudspeaker objects, the sounds of rain prompted an 'auditory imagination' of the history of the *palafitas* (houses on stilts characteristic of Maré in the 1950's). These same sonic memories were superimposed on a soundwalk on the park area of the city, interrogating the power of sound to situate memory and place. In producing artistic interventions there is a question of how the sounds of hard borders of territoriality that mark the favela contrast with the sounds of non-borders, i.e. those public, communal and open spaces of sonic mobility such as civic parks that do not discriminate among its transient passers-by.

Slowing down sounds and using three-dimensional surround sound can highlight border crossings and points of territoriality. As Paula McFetridge noted, the play 'Convictions' produced by Tinderbox in 2000 used physical environments that were designed to slow actors down and enable audiences to reflect on key items and aspects such as the court map and the sound of the rooms to highlight perceptions and outcomes of conflict.

'It is important to focus on materials from the past – that generate a track record of engagement for analyzing sound from different perspectives.'
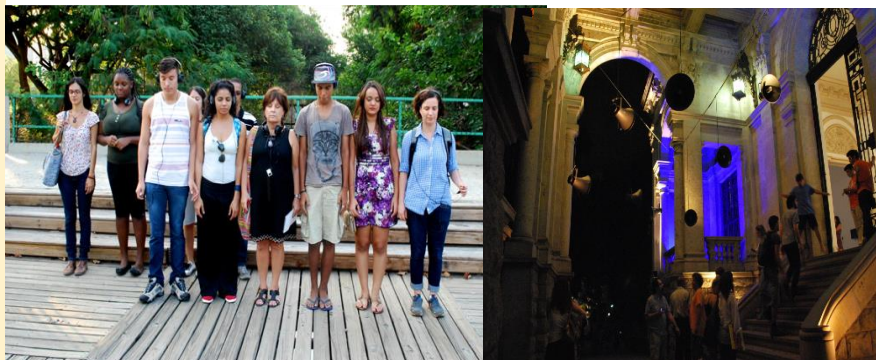
Som da Mare participants listen to the sounds of the *favela* in a civic

Exhibition "Call for Work" in Parque Lage, Rio de Janeiro

Sound 'Revivals'

Sound memories and stories may be a source of material for 'revival' in both the generation and evaluation of creative impacts for conflict transformation. David Grant brought out the issue that as theatre and sound art creators, we need to be conscious of how sound generates subliminal messages and to have an awareness and understanding of what others hear, since such expectations shape the creative use of sound for conflict transformation. Thus, we need to reflect upon the ways in which working through sound may be restrictive or distorting. For example, on the one hand, sounds may predefine meaning-making through their associations with certain contexts while, on the other hand, when sounds become abstracted in the articulation of memory, their significance may become lost or muted in the process.

This awareness of critical differences in the artistic endeavour is key to appreciating how the arts can open up new spaces of sonic engagement. As artists do not directly address social issues in the way that politicians or researchers deal with conflict, the arts have the potential 'to raise difficult questions for the right time and context'. By making social commentary on what people are doing in situations of conflict, 'it gives them the tools to empower themselves,' even though resistance to social justice manifests in various ways.

Sound Impacts

In discussion about the extent of what constitutes impact, Julie Norman led a session that elicited various characteristics of impact that are circumscribed by the extent of change; the depth of transformation that occurs; the 'wow' moment; raised consciousness among participants, audiences and public more widely, positive outcomes for participants and others; the prompting of critical reflection through intervention and the ability to measure the kinds of impacts that arise.

Effective Connectedness

The issue of how the language of impact is communicated to others was raised as key in being able to explain the importance of the arts and creativity to the lay person. The value of impact is also best developed through networks and relationships that have immediate and direct benefits and outputs which takes time to develop.

Measuring Policy Impacts across the Arts

The group discussed the varieties of impacts and the dynamics required to generate them. A number of approaches were highlighted which included understanding the role of artists in the creation of the work for community building in which the arts become a mirror of this process. In building networks and relationships through the arts, different practitioners can have the opportunity to agree on this struggle and how it articulates what is happening in society. This agreement marks a beginning need to recognise the power of the arts collectively as a group of academics, artists and policy makers who together can celebrate the uniqueness of the arts by going outside its context into policy arenas. This involves risk taking, asking difficult questions and redefining strands as a collective of activists.

However, it was also noted that these efforts are often invisible insofar as peace in policies is not really seen in the language used, such as arts and wellbeing. Instead it was posited that expressions of quantification and measurement are more readily acknowledged and, thus, the language used needs to match the expectations of what policy makers want. However, it was also argued that there is a need to balance both. In influencing policy, Laura Hassler noted how Musicians without Borders is one of 15 organisations in Europe putting together a platform for the arts for social inclusion on refugees in Europe (http://www.Art27.art)

'While reconciliation is directed towards the past, there is a need to look to the future and employ terms relevant to hope.'

Reconsidering Sounding 'Reconciliation'

All the partners agreed that reconciliation is a much debated and contested term especially in Northern Ireland, which David Grant argued, might be replaced with 'resonance'.

Participants tackled the difficult questions of the arts in dealing with the past and noted that 'the language of conflict is an instant calling card' and it further begs questions about how sound intensifies emotion. The group considered the moral dilemmas of having the right to work with the past and to be self-critical of one's approach to sound. Laura Hassler questioned, 'Are we looking at our conflict through their conflict', noting that 'we are about sharing tools and not claiming space'. However, participants stressed that the term reconciliation is too problematic to employ in these contexts, as it requires problematizing and that the terms 'resonance' or 'revival' should replace it.

It was also noted that resolution can exist with reconciliation though the two are incommensurable. Reconciliation does not entail giving up one's beliefs or truths but they can exist side by side. Terms like reconciliation are open categories meaning different things to different people, thereby expanding horizons of understanding, generating a 'bigger picture' perspective.

The reason why reconciliation has become such a contested term in Northern Ireland includes assertions that the peace process and consociational agreements have perpetuated the marginalization of issues and groups. Reconciliation reduces those involved to a particular aspect of their identity and potentially constrains creativity. Problematizing reconciliation in Northern Ireland, requires imagination by starting in the present and moving forward. As Paula McFetridge noted, 'artists are about the facilitation of provocation - that makes up 95% of the work'.

It was considered that holding a workshop on reconciliation would be met with a distinct lack of interest for young people. Rather, it was argued that 'it is necessary to create a place of trust to be imaginative with their stories'. Laura Hassler explained that 'we should talk about "allyship" – a society that sees itself not as rescuers but as part of industry' since 'the point of the arts is empowering local people to tell their own stories as that is their art practice'. In this regard, Musicians without Borders are working towards a global movement of social justice through the arts by being an ally'.

It was agreed that alternative discourses for reconciliation should engage the concepts of **collaboration** and **empowerment**. Other terms can open up the potential for change by referring to a wider humanizing vision which, in turn, suggests the possibility of revival.

'Collaboration over time creates a different understanding of a subject' (Michael Michalko)

PaCCs team and advisory board partners

L to R: David Grant, Pedro Rebelo, Meagan Hughes, Christina Captieux, Pauline Ross, Eibhlín Ní Dhochartaigh, Olivier Urbain, Laura Hassler, Julie Norman, Jim Donaghey, Paula McFetridge, Stefanie Lehner, Amanda Koser-Gillespie and Fiona Magowan

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