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Dance as a register of war: following unruly bodies, affects, and sounds in conflict

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ABSTRACT

What do people do in the face of violence, war, and tragedy? How do those touched by violence survive, live on, keep on going and feeling? What if 'dance first, think later' IS the natural order? In this paper, I propose dancing as an everyday, embodied, and multi-sensorial register of war. Combining new trajectories in war and military studies with ongoing feminist scholarship on war, embodiment, and emotions and interdisciplinary research on dance and electronic music, this paper explores entanglements between sites of political violence, militarism, and electronic dance music and culture. Drawing upon my research in Northern Ireland and Bosnia and Herzegovina, I argue that attending to these unseen entanglements activates distinctive ways of knowing the politics of war: they reveal alternative narratives of armed conflict mediated through and in between DJ performances, dancing bodies, and electronic sounds. These experiences offer important insights that unsettle taken for granted locations and affective economies of war while also reproducing conflict logics and divisions. I propose dance as a heuristic device that can recalibrate our understanding of the sensuous, affective, and embodied politics of/in war, enabling us to explore fragile possibilities for resistance and escape from its grip.

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Introduction

Belfast, the song

Those familiar with dance and electronic music would immediately recognize the dreamy opening sounds of Orbital's acclaimed track that shares its name with Northern Ireland's *troubled* city, Belfast. With its loop of electronic squiggle, the deep piano chords, and a spiritual chorus, the now iconic track is deeply evocative and soulful, a sound we rarely tend to associate with heavy histories of conflict and violence. The story of its inception takes us to Belfast in the years preceding the first IRA ceasefire. In 1990, the electronic duo travelled across the Irish Sea for a gig at the then popular Art College, where local DJ David Holmes hosted a regular night of dance and electronic music. The duo were met with a friendly environment and an incredible crowd, eager to dance the night away in what they have described as one of their best gig of that time (Bailie 2018; 'Interview :

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Orbital' 2013). Upon heading back to England, they left a demo behind which, they later learned, made a huge impression, and was played over and over again. Orbital decided to name the soft and beautiful track Belfast as a homage. They wanted to *tell* their alternative experience of the city, scripted in Britain's media and minds as a place of trouble and strife and portrayed as a constant problem of national security. The Art College was one of the spaces where in those tense years, young people gathered to dance to electronic music, temporarily outliving the militarized everyday politics and crossing, albeit momentarily, controversial borders. There were also other sites for dance culture in Belfast. In the summer of the late 80s and early 90s, outdoor raves were held in the Black Mountain overlooking Belfast and in other secluded places like forests, barns, and beaches. BBC's John Campbell reports that as early as 1987 clubs in Belfast City Centre such as the Delta and the Plaza had played the new house music. These clubs, the DJs, and promoters involved paved the way for the rapid expansion of dance culture in the early 1990s just as the violence of the conflict entered a new, intense phase before the peace talks ('The Roots of Rave, Stories in Sound – BBC Radio Ulster' n.d.). The echoes of such violence resonate in a documentary that explored the role of dance music culture for a group of working-class youth in Belfast, titled, *Dancing on Narrow Ground*.

Rave against the machine

1994, New Year's Eve. After travelling throughout Croatia with a convoy of humanitarian aid organized by British trade unionists and anarchists, the DJ collective Desert Storm arrived in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Together with humanitarian supplies, their mission was to bring music as a sign of solidarity and togetherness, just as they did with their signature street parties in protest against the government in the UK. The football field where the party was to be held had been destroyed in an attack just before their arrival. Since then, an armistice had been signed. Unfettered by adverse conditions, the collective decided to drive around the town and play some music. As the sound of early techno reverberated across the town, soldiers approached the truck and, to their surprise, encouraged Desert Storm to keep playing but switch off their lights. In a rather surreal scene, a crowd of kids and other local people started following the truck and its music around. Meanwhile, in besieged Sarajevo, the security situation remained critical. Desert Storm managed to get there only the following year, just after the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement. On their arrival, they learned that the musical life of the city had lived on; Radio Zid had kept broadcasting music, while young Sarajevans had continued to gather for concerts and 'parties' throughout the siege. Desert Storm managed to return to Bosnia again and to record a video diary of their trips.¹ In the early 2000s, a group of British filmmakers also travelled to Sarajevo to work on a feature about *MixMag*, the popular dance music and club culture magazine, promoting a series of club nights that were marketed as the first tour of British DJs in post-war Bosnia. On catching up with the small dance and club culture that had flourished since the war and befriending local DJs, musicians, and clubbers, they realized that there was a much more interesting story to tell about the role of music and local young people's creativity during the siege and in the aftermath of the war.² These stories are now collected in the short documentary *Rave against the machine*.

Building on these vignettes to set the scene and drawing upon my research in Northern Ireland (NI) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), this paper explores entanglements between sites of political violence, militarism, and electronic dance music and culture. I start from the premise that these unseen entanglements matter for a deeper interrogation of the quotidian effects of war that is attuned to the excesses, creative subversions, and fragile resistances that the encounter with militarism and political violence solicits. While testimonies about dance and club culture are sporadically documented in interviews and documentaries, as well as through some written work and photography, these have remained largely invisible in existing research on the respective conflicts, at least in the field of IR. In the context of Sarajevo, stories about the role of music and dancing can be inscribed within narratives about culture and arts as sites of survival and resistance during the conflict (Redzič *n.d.*; Maček 2009; Shapiro 2012; Kurtović 2012). In the context of Northern Ireland, stories about the 1990s music scene are often mobilized in a similar vein to counteract stark narratives that exclusively pin down Belfast as a site of sectarian division and conflict.³ The peace-process has also seen significant efforts to re-brand Belfast as a ‘normal city’, tourist destination, and crucially a location now associated with several prominent DJs, producers, clubs, and festivals (O’Reilly *n.d.*). It is in this context that narratives about the 1990s cross-community spirit of dance music are mobilized as part of Belfast’s rich political and cultural history. As in the context of Sarajevo, however, the political significance of these narratives and experiences in the later years of the conflict has largely been overlooked in academic research, with the exception of a few sociological studies (Hollywood 1997; McLaughlin 2004; see also Anders 2020).

This project is my attempt to begin addressing this erasure through the analysis of the two films, documenting, respectively, a snapshot of dance culture in NI in the years preceding the peace talks, and the encounter between the music scene in BiH and British dance culture. I interweave the analysis with a reading of other relevant sources and personal reflections on my connections with both contexts ‘post-conflict’. Foregrounding these narratives as discarded knowledges that are often disqualified in dominant research on these contexts, I propose dance as a heuristic device that can recalibrate our understanding of the everyday, affective, and embodied politics of/in armed conflict, enabling us to explore fragile possibilities for resistance in its midst. Doing so, I make a contribution to the emerging literature in feminist IR and dance research that explores dancing as a creative entry point to better sense the quotidian experiences of war, and possibly resist its logics (Head 2013; Åhäll 2016; Hast 2018). Furthermore, this piece contributes to feminist and interdisciplinary interventions in critical war and military studies that expand conventional archives and histories of war to explore its operations beyond the military, tracking its complex traces, experiential knowledges, and ambivalent affective palettes in lesser known spaces (Sylvester 2013; Choi 2013; Parashar 2015; Jauhola 2015; Welland 2018; Chisholm and Ketola 2020; Åhäll and Gregory 2015; Kinsella 2020; McSorley 2020; Whitmore and Harrison 2021). The paper proceeds as follows. In the next session, I discuss the research methodology, reflecting on my positionality and the intimate ways of knowing that have informed the ideas threaded in these pages. In conversation with feminist and other critical interventions in dance research, I then outline dance’s heuristic potential to explore the quotidian operations of

war beyond conventional paths. In the final analytical sections, I propose a reading of the documentary films, and other relevant sources, as gateways to multisensorial and affective assemblages of the respective conflicts that off-centre martial politics through ‘the body in rave’ (Pini 2017).

The kids want techno: Notes on researching the entanglements of dance music, raving, and war

I initially came across stories about the emergence of dance music scenes in Belfast and Sarajevo through informal conversations, random encounters while hanging out and dancing in clubs in both cities. At the time, I did not immediately associate these (hi) stories and my own experiences of dancing with the *serious* research on conflict I was conducting. A deeper engagement with feminist IR scholarship pushed me to connect the dots, enabling me to ‘work with and paying attention to the flows and ripples of ordinary life’ (Zalewski 2013, prelude). Informed by my positionality in feminist IR, the methodology underpinning this paper revolves around a commitment to centring non-conventional sources and quotidian experiences that are commonly excluded from dominant accounts of armed conflict (Whitmore and Harrison 2021, 2). Crucially, this entails foregrounding how my own interests and lived experience in proximity to the dance music scenes I analyse in this paper, and the intimate and intuitive ways of knowing such proximity enables, have fundamentally shaped this research.

To do so, I draw on the notion of patchwork ethnography developed by anthropologists as a methodology that acknowledges how our lives in their full complexity shape knowledge production (Günel, Varma, and Watanabe 2020). It also conveys the ‘bricolage’ methods of merging materials from different sources and literatures I have used to compose this piece. Since moving to Belfast to further my studies in the early 2000s, the ripples and flows of my everyday life have included weekly dancing to ‘repetitive beats’ in venues such as Kelly’s in Portrush and Shine in Belfast, which are now part of the history of dance music in Northern Ireland. This continued when I temporarily moved to Sarajevo in 2010 to conduct research for my PhD: going out with local and international friends to DJ sets and parties in different venues, such as Abrašević in Mostar, and So.Ba, Dom Mladih, and Balkan Café in Sarajevo, became part of everyday life. Through dancing and attending these events across the years, I have met friends and acquaintances, discovered local DJs, music tracks, and interesting documentaries. These connections, curiosities, and lived experiences formed the seeds of this project. In a sense, the dance music ‘archive’ I compose in this paper reflects the ethos and practices of electronic dance music scenes: it started from information, sources, and stories I discovered through word of mouth, friendship circles, attending big nights, (not so) secret parties, and music festivals, as well as listening to compelling stories about outliving conflict while hanging out at afterparties or dancing in someone’s kitchen till the early hours. The methodology underpinning this project thus disrupts traditional, linear (and limiting) understanding of fieldwork as made of distinct trips involving data collection and analysis (Poopuu and Van den Berg 2021). Rather, my research is informed by a long-standing interest in and attachment to electronic dance music, its entanglement with my everyday life in my younger years and the memory work, reading, listening, and rabbit-

hole research that have allowed me, over nearly two decades, to keep the idea for this project alive and begin to piece all the fragments of this largely untold story together.

Beside my attachment to the social and cultural components of dance culture as experienced in NI and BiH, dancing to electronic music in darkened rooms also activated an intimate and fleshy knowledge that has informed this research, or as Ann Cooper Albright puts it, ‘reading is one way of researching. Moving with bodies is another’ (Albright 2018, 7). As a young woman, dancing enabled me to move with a greater sense of embodied awareness and power, momentarily escaping the grip of gendered expectations and the overrepresented patriarchal gaze that, to different extents, police our ways of being in the world. This knowledge remains imprinted in my body. Indeed, I know that dancing, alone yet together with others, as part of a throbbing crowd as the bass rattles your ribcage and moves through your body, is an energizing and powerful experience that concomitantly allows self-expression, anonymity, a fleeting sense of belonging, escape, and, perhaps counterintuitively, peace. I have experienced the sense of conviviality and joy of moving with others, the tingling sensations and the energy of the crowd when a DJ drops a favourite track, the smiling nods and sweaty hugs, the atmosphere of excitement and comradeship that infuses the dancing crowd.

At the same time, I know intimately and academically that dance floors and dancing crowds can also generate experiences of vulnerability and exclusion, mediated by the intersections of gender, sexuality, race, class, and ability. On occasions, I have experienced dancing as intimidating – in the case of male-dominated dance floors – and/or overwhelming/unsafe – for example, when I felt surrounded in a really crowded space. While now that I am in my forties, dancing and clubbing are much more sporadic activities in my everyday life; this embodied knowledge, exposure, and intuitive understanding that I was able to gain while immersed in the ‘field’ has helped me develop attunement to the multi-layered significance of dancing (Garcia 2013; see also Wagner 2022). A significance that as an academic I see and interrogate as political even though this might not resonate with others in the contexts discussed here. For many, as I show in the analysis, dancing offered an escape precisely from the politics of conflict. Furthermore, as someone who has not been directly impacted by conflict, sectarianism, and militarized violence, my experiences of dancing in Belfast and Sarajevo ‘post-conflict’ are markedly different from the narratives I analyse here. If my intimate, fleshy knowledge of dancing enables a certain proximity to the narratives I foreground throughout this paper, my distance from the complex histories of violence also clearly sets me apart.

As scholars working on these themes have noted, writing academically about dancing and dance culture presents us with the challenge of translating in the written form what is embodied, affective, and multisensorial (Pruitt and Jeffrey 2020). As EDM scholar St. John points out, transposing ‘the field’ into scholarly language requires a commitment to value experiential knowledge and use creativity, developing what he defines a *sampledelic* method (St. John 2013). In a similar vein, my use of patchwork ethnography accounts for the methods of ‘mixing’ and ‘sampling’ multiple literatures, sources of knowledge and writing styles I employ in this paper in my attempt to textualise electronic dance music as a register of war. As a way of navigating this challenge, the two documentaries I discuss in this paper offer a particularly productive entry point because, as I show in my analysis, through a careful arrangement of showing and saying (Van Munster and Sylvest 2015), the films enable us to sense ‘the vibe’ in the complex

entanglements of dance music and everyday life in conflict. The use of interviews in both pieces works to foreground perspectives and reflections from protagonists of the respective music scenes that have largely been overlooked. I view these documentaries not as open windows on reality, but rather as political and creative interventions that complicate dominant representations of communities in these contexts, exclusively through the lenses of victimhood, war, and division. At the same time, the pieces reflect the interests of the filmmakers, the politics of the audience and the material structures of independent documentary production and circulation (Harman 2019). My reading is also informed by other testimonies collated in relevant published interviews, podcasts, and media articles I discuss in this paper, including background information on the documentaries I was able to gather.⁴

The first film, *Dancing on Narrow Ground: Youth and Dance in Ulster* (Bell 1995)⁵ by filmmaker and researcher of youth culture in NI, Des Bell, tells the story of two groups of dancers from the Lenadoon and Orangefield areas, respectively, a Catholic and a Protestant working-class neighbourhood in Belfast. These are spaces where the ramifications of sectarianism, divisions, and military and paramilitary violence were acutely felt by the young protagonists, even though social deprivation was starker in the Catholic neighbourhood.

Combining sociological inquiry, ethnography, and creative practice, and building on his previous filmmaking and research, Bell's film explores the meaning of dance as a youth (sub)culture that might transcend division. The film takes the form of his quest to bring the two groups together to meet 'the other side'. It follows the two crews of friends in nights out to clubs and illegal raves, interspersed with snippets of ordinary life in a divided city and interviews with the protagonists. Irrespective of certain similarities in their experiences, interests, and love for dancing, the encounter between the two groups cannot happen in the end. The film thus both complements and complicates existing narratives of the Northern Irish dance culture as untouched by divisions, highlighting important classed and gendered dynamics that curtail the possibilities of 'dancing together'. As Bell recounts, production took place between 1992 and 1994 having secured some funding through NI's community relation programme but did not find support from national broadcasters as initially hoped. Indeed, the documentary was never aired due to sensitivities around its themes, as well as marginal interest in NI.⁶ However, the documentary has been screened locally, reaching a wider audience after its release on YouTube. This is how I came across the film.

As mentioned, the making of the second film discussed here, *Rave against the machine* (Harvey et al. 2002), reflects the serendipitous encounter between the group of British filmmakers that travelled to Bosnia and a collective of DJs and musicians at the centre of Sarajevo's music and dance culture.⁷ Having spent time learning about real experiences of playing music as a means to survive, mentally, physically, and spiritually, the filmmakers set out to foreground overlooked stories about youth, music, and creativity in war.⁸ These narratives take centre stage as protagonists recall their war-time experiences with passion, generosity, and dark humour. They discuss hopes for the future, highlighting the role of music and dancing as survival strategy, source of community, as well as transnational connection through the arrival of Desert Storm Soundsystem. Original footage recorded by the British DJ collective during the trip and recordings from the music parties during Sarajevo's siege are also used to convey a realistic feel of the music

scene and everyday life during the war in Bosnia.⁹ The film was broadcast in the U.K. by Channel 4,¹⁰ as well as shown at several international film festivals. Crucially, the documentary has remained very popular among those interested in the music scene in Sarajevo. This is how I came across it during my fieldwork in 2010.

In my reading of these films and other relevant narratives, I wish to construct an alternative archive of the quotidian, affective as well as auditory registers of the two conflicts and their afterlives. To borrow from Kevin McSorley (McSorley 2012), if war lives and breeds through bodies, I foreground how dancing bodies also live on through war and explore the affective experiences, longings, and encounters that dancing to electronic music in these contexts signifies. To do so, I build on and develop interdisciplinary research that traces the interconnections between dancing and histories of conflict.

The body in rave: dancing subjects and the affective politics of/in war

At first sight, dancing might not seem like an activity with an immediate association to conflict, violence, and militarism. Yet, choreography and war have long been intertwined through military rituals and dances, parades, processions, and military drills (Morris and Gierdsof 2016, 1). As Linda Åhäll writes, even though relatively under researched in the field of IR, dance seems ‘everywhere’ and yields crucial insights into global politics, from the construction of national identity at Olympic ceremonies to the processes of everyday militarization surrounding WWI remembrance (Åhäll 2016). From the perspective of dance studies, Morris and Gierdsof share a similar concern with the experiential nature of contemporary warfare. Viewing war through the lens of dance and choreography, they argue, shifts the focus of study away from the abstractions of military and political theory to corporeal agency (Morris and Gierdsof 2016, 2). As feminist IR scholars Pruitt and Jeffrey point out, in a metaphorical sense dance also infuses discourses around peace wherein terms like ‘steps’, ‘choreography’, ‘flexibility’, and ‘partners’ are mobilized to describe efforts to resolve or respond to conflict (Pruitt and Jeffrey 2020, 27). Whether understood as metaphor, embodied practice, and scripted choreography, scholars in the field of dance studies and feminist IR share a similar argument: that paying attention to the intersections of dance and war matters politically and internationally. Crucially, attention to dance in places and times of conflict, scholars argue, offers important insights into the possibilities and resources for radical action, hope, and peace (Martin 2016; Pruitt and Jeffrey 2020; Mills 2021; Tjersland 2019).

In her analysis of remembrance practices, Åhäll argues that ‘dance is a useful way not only to see the politics of everyday IR, but as a way to understand, to feel and possibly to resist the politics of the normalisation of war in the everyday’ (p.162). While Åhäll mobilizes dance as a metaphor to explore how security logics, practices, and affects *dance* in the everyday, in this paper, I explore more specifically its political potential as a corporeal and social practice emerging in contexts shaped by histories of conflict, militarized violence, and their afterlives. As a conjunction of bodies, affect, movement, and sound, dance activates certain aesthetic sensibilities, enabling us to re-feel and re-think the encounter with war. Contributing to the emerging scholarship on dance and IR, in this paper I ask: What might dancing to electronic music do to the respective histories of war discussed in this paper? What kind of aesthetic and affective sensibilities are mediated in the entanglement between dance culture and war, militarism, and violence?

My analysis develops along three interrelated dimensions of dance as a register of war. Firstly, I start from the premise that dance is always inflected through both socio-cultural processes and aesthetic conventions (Kowal, Siegmund, and Martin 2017). While referring to dance as an artistic choreographic practice, this insight is relevant for the argument I make in this paper. The socio-cultural moment underpinning the two histories of conflict under examination coincides with the expansion of dance culture in the late 80s and early 1990 as a complex site of musical innovation, political protest against the state, anti-establishment and social upheaval, sociological and generational transformation, and consumerist culture. Just like war, dance culture can be understood as an assemblage constituted through certain sonic landscapes, spacings (the club, the rave, the dance floor), cultural practices (DJs, promoters, flyers, fashion) as well as certain affective responses mediated through dancing in a crowd to pulsing electronic music (think pleasure, joy, togetherness). What I track in the paper, thus, are the complex intersections between the electronic dance music-scenes as a youth culture and social practice associated with *jouissance*, coming together and excitement and its enactments in spaces of war, militarism, and violence. As I will show in my analysis, attending to these overlooked intersections complicates the geographies of Belfast and Sarajevo exclusively as conflict cities, situating them in the sonic and affective landscape of global dance culture and enabling us to see people in these cities not only as communities affected by conflict but also as dancers and music lovers.

Secondly, rather than as a metaphor, I dwell more specifically on dance as a simultaneous mode of being, moving, and feeling to explore the creative and political potential of dancing bodies to outlive war's universalizing shadows. Here, I build on the interdisciplinary scholarship that foregrounds the significance of dance as embodied knowledge and creative language that galvanizes for action in places and times of conflict. From the life affirming potential of a ballet school opened in Gaza City to the role of DJs during the protest in Lebanon and the opportunities for creativity and transnational connections mediated through hip-hop in post-war Iraq, Dana Mills' research illustrates how dancers, activists, and 'ordinary' citizens living in sites of conflict find in dance a language to express their complex (hi)stories as well as to outlive the legacies of war (Mills 2021). Grappling with creativity, compassion, and survival in narratives of/in the Chechnya war, Susanna Hast points that 'dance can be a means to survive, to move in a difficult terrain and oppressive environment more freely, together with other bodies' (Hast 2018, 71). Dancing then can be viewed as a form of agency that exceeds the oppressive shadow of war as a marker of one's identity: through movement, the making and unmaking of connections, and the expression of emotions, a more complex personhood emerges that dispels war as universalizing and totalizing (Hast 2018; Mills 2021). To be clear, attending to the creative potential of dancing in the context of war is not to underestimate violence's after-effects, trauma, and injuries. As I show in my analysis, dancing/raving in the face of violence becomes interwoven with loss, mourning, pain, frustration, and division, but it also signals a simultaneously painful/joyful response in war that evokes movement and, crucially, escape. In so doing, foregrounding dancing bodies add interesting layers to the corporeal and affective registers of lives touched by war, and to the often-overlooked subversions and oppositions mediated through dancing.

Finally, understanding dance as phenomenological spotlights the simultaneous experiences of feeling, doing, knowing, and desire. Through this lens, not only does dance speak of agency but it also raises questions about being together, belonging, and the becoming of bodies (Kowal, Siegmund, and Martin 2017). In other words, dancing is an ever-transforming and creative process. As a dancer and peace researcher, Hanne Tjersland writes, to dance is an active participation in the ever-unfolding experience of both oneself and others, responding to sensory experiences mediated through internal and relational dynamics (Tjersland 2019, 301–2). While the above literature focuses specifically on choreographed and scripted dance or conscious dance movement, this understanding echoes in the field of Electronic Dance Music studies where experiences of raving or dancing to electronic beats are conceptualized phenomenologically as a conjunction of feeling, becoming and belonging (Butler 2017; James 2020). Key features of dance cultures are narratives of togetherness and belonging mediated through music-specific and scene-specific factors, the music and beats, the DJs, and the clubs (Fitzgerald 1998; Pini 2017; Malbon 2012). At the same time, feminist scholars of dance culture remind us that the dance floor is a fractured space that both subverts and mirrors the complexities of everyday life (Rief 2011; Withers 2021). Through dancing, clubbers cultivate and re-imagine a certain way of being in the world and together with others, but they also carry and navigate the reverberations of their off-dance floor lives. In environments deeply shaped by war, militarism, and segregation, such as those under examination, I show how dancing offers a temporary escape from the grip of conflict before the dancing body is re-entangled in its oppressive and exclusionary logics. I also attend to the negotiation of collective, yet often tenuous, spaces of encounter and the field of relationships that dancing might enable, but also foreclose.

Dance yourself clean: complicating war's affective and sensory landscape

Sensing the politics of conflict through electronic dance music. Albeit with complicatedly different histories, Bosnia and Northern Ireland remain scripted within the study of armed conflict and peace as spaces relegated to the subject position of (post)conflict zones, with diversely successful peace efforts and perennially haunted by their violent past. Whether framed, respectively, as a pivotal location for post-Cold war ethnic conflict and international intervention or as a largely successful example of peace efforts, these locations remain synonymous with conflict, political violence, and war, but also with spaces invested in hopes and possibilities for outliving conflict. The documentaries and narratives under examination in this paper, however, situate these spaces also in an alternative history of the early 1990s shaped as much as by the complexities underpinning the respective histories of armed conflict, as by the emergence of dance and club culture as a site of musical innovation, youth culture, and alternative senses of belonging (e.g. Reynolds 2013; James 2020). Mediated through the music and aesthetics of dance culture, then, the films produce a multisensorial landscape that complicates dominant imagining of Belfast and Sarajevo simply as *conflict* cities, recalibrating our perceptions of the sensory politics of war, its reverberations in the everyday, and the creative attempts to outlive its shadows.

In both documentaries dance culture enters the frame of war through a specific aesthetics that constitutes what we can define as a dance culture assemblage (e.g. Fitzgerald 1998).¹¹ Integral to this assemblage is pulsing electronic music around

which practices and scenes of clubbing revolve. As Silvia Reif writes, ‘music is a key element that coordinates people’s practices, e.g. by orienting their movements to a particular rhythm’ (Reif 2011). Built around the music are also other evocative, material, and cultural components that produce the scene. There is a spatial component, most obviously, a club, a field, and/or dance floor. There is the embodied component conveyed through the bodies that dance. There are cultural features and social practices, for example fashion choices of clubbers and ravers, meetings before going out, journeys to the club/rave and afterparties. In the documentaries under examination, the aesthetics of dance culture is also conveyed through a particular ‘cinematic’ style that blends traditional war/conflict reporting with the genre of music documentaries about club culture, with interviews, live ‘vignettes’ from clubbing and raves, and electronic dance music soundtracks (Ludewig 2020).¹²

Dancing on Narrow Ground conveys these features from its outset, immersing the viewer into the audiovisual atmospheres of rave: at the sound of pulsing electronic music, we see cars arriving in the midst of the night to a secluded location, we see young ravers with bomber jackets, combat trousers, and Adidas tops setting up the sound system, the electronic generator, and DJ decks. As the sound of pounding electronic music and the MC voice reverberate against the red light and smoke coming from a flare and the fire pit, we see ravers dance ‘like they never have before they danced to drive away the evil spirits, they danced to save their souls’ (Bell, Des, dir 1995, 2:22). Evoked through these images and sounds, this is an affective scene that conveys all the aesthetic and ritual elements of rave parties. Yet, as the film unfolds, it becomes clear that this is no ‘ordinary’ rave: images and sounds from the rave scene interweave with typical aesthetic markers of the Troubles: an Irish tricolour over a coffin, the image of unionist leader and defender of Ulster, Reverend Ian Paisley, afflicted mourners in yet another episode of violence. As the narrator voice cues, these were ‘some of our darkest moments in Northern Ireland’ (Bell, Des, dir 1995, 2:56) and ‘As the political violence spiraled out of control, the sectarian divide became wider and deeper the young seem to dance on an ever narrower ground’ (Bell, Des, dir 1995, 3:01). And so the journey through dance culture in early 1990s Northern Ireland begins where the everyday, material, sensory, and affective politics of dancing; sectarian, class, and gendered divisions; and militarized violence intersect.

Despite the title, *Rave against the machine* recounts a more complex musical scene historicized through the role of music as a source of resistance, community and respite from violence during the siege of Sarajevo. The narrative developed in the film conveys how the time of war was also a moment of intense music creativity and dancing as the protagonists interviewed recount their experiences as musicians, DJs of Sarajevo Radio Zid, as well as regular punters of places like Club Obala, one of the places the kept people dancing during the siege. It is through the encounter with the collective Desert Storm that the Sarajevo wartime music and party scene, made mostly of alternative punk and hard-core bands, meets British dance music and culture. The film interweaves live archival footage of the siege made of now iconic scenes of warfare -sniper alley, the shelling of buildings- with lesser known footage of concerts and parties held in locations such as Obala, as well as other places in post- Dayton Sarajevo where young people and musicians hang out. Dance music enters the narrative frame from the opening scenes as an evocative piece by Adi Lukovac and Ornamenti, considered pioneers in the Bosnian electronic music scene, soundtracks the documentary

throughout. However, it is in the final part that the aesthetic of electronic dance music takes centre stage as the documentary traces the growth of club culture in Bosnia in the aftermath of the Dayton Peace Agreement. Just as in a DJ set, as the protagonists recall the birth of the local dance music scene, the soundtrack drops,¹³ interweaving pulsing electronic music, images of DJs playing and people on the dance floor. Through the complex auditory and aesthetic assemblage that merges punk and dance culture, personal memories of the war, and aspirations for the future of dance culture in Bosnia, *Rave against the machine* reframes Sarajevo not only as a city of war but also as a city of music, creativity, and resistance, inscribing it in the ‘map’ of global dance and club culture.

While differing in context and tone, both documentaries work to off-centre, over-deterministic ways of sensing and visualizing the respective conflicts by disrupting the conventional visual and auditory regimes we tend to associate with war and its afterlives. A growing area of research within international relations is drawing attention to the relevance of music, sound, and auditory regimes for our understanding of global politics (Davies 2005; Franklin 2005; Cooper-Cunningham 2020; Rosamond 2020; Baker 2020; Philpott 2020; Dunn 2014). For example, writing on the war in Iraq, Martin Daughtry, has developed the concept of the belliphonic to capture how the war was lived and enacted through an auditory regime ranging from the sound of a bomb attack or a missile falling into Baghdad to the music selection that soldiers brought to war through their iPods (Daughtry 2015). In a similar vein, I argue that the documentaries produce a complex audio-visual landscape where the sound/images of sirens, bomb explosions, and parades marching in different neighbourhoods are also enmeshed with the beats, tracks, and sonic intimacies of radio, concerts, and dance floors. As we follow dancing bodies, in both documentaries, an alternative visual map of the conflict space also emerges, taking the viewer to locations that we rarely associate with ‘the stuff’ of armed conflict (Whitmore and Harrison 2021). In the context of NI, this means following the ravers to secluded locations or through the bus journey to the now iconic club Kelly’s in Northern Ireland’s Atlantic coast. In Sarajevo, this means following the dancers as they run through ‘sniper alley’ to get to Obala, the cultural space where many of the parties took place at the time, or to the Radio Zid studio, as well as to clubs associated with the newly flourished dance and club culture that emerged after the war. This is not to suggest that the documentaries are enacting a simplistic or a naively joyful representation of these cities. What we sense is a complex sensorial and material landscape, layering how militarized violence and its afterlives materialize not only on the barricades, checkpoints, peace walls, bomb targets, and segregated spaces but are also felt, experienced (and momentarily outlived) through spaces of creativity, dancing, and sonic intimacy (James 2020).

Sensing the politics of conflict through electronic dance music and culture thus offsets conventional ways of tracking and feeling our ways through histories of militarized violence and armed conflict. At the same time, the documentaries also add interesting layers to existing narratives of global dance and club culture by spotlighting how sonic, embodied, affective, and material registers of the rave and club experiences are mediated through the local complexities and everyday realities of two ‘peripheral’ locations that

have rarely been prominent in the map of club cultures, irrespective of the transnational circulation of dance music and aesthetics (Collin 2018).

In the next section, I explore the affective grammar and structures of feeling that dancing in the face of violence and its afterlives engender, as well as curtail.

War through other feelings. Researchers of dance and club cultures highlight how dancing and clubbing are deeply affective practices that engender emotional states of liberation, euphoria, as well as forms of intimacy mediated through a combination of technological input and impulses on the body (think about the bodily effects of the bass and other sonic stimulation might have on your body) and through cultural codes (James 2020). As Morrison writes ‘Dancing intersects with all aspects of our lives: exercising, exorcizing, expression, communication, display, attraction and the consequence – or perhaps conversely, and more accurately, the driver of all these – pleasure’ (Morrison 2020, 33) As research on dance culture testifies, and those of us who spent time raving/clubbing can confirm, dancing to electronic music can have transcendental effects of both losing oneself in the rhythm and sound, while at the same time becoming one through moving in sync with other dancers, the DJ, and the sound. Dance floors, thus, can be seen as places of becoming where given identities can be transgressed and alternate sense of agency and intimacy can flourish, albeit only momentarily. While conventional narratives in club cultures, as well as in certain research, seem to overemphasize dance floors as spaces of encounters that cut across divisions such as gender, class, and race, feminist and other critical scholars draw also attention to the power relations and hierarchies that are inevitably re-constituted in dance floors and raves as spaces of creativity, agency, as well as consumption (Rief 2011; Withers 2021). Drawing upon such perspectives, I view dancing, whether in a field or in a club, as a fractious and ambivalent site of the political. I foreground how, in the contexts under examination, dancing activates and expresses affective registers of joy and hope, mobilizing aspirations for togetherness and alternative belonging while also sustaining aspirations for innocence, movement, and escape from conflict and militarism.

In the context of Northern Ireland, the association of dancing, raving, and joy emerges across testimonies on the dance scene, as well as in Bell’s documentary. For example, the trope of the electronic music scene as a gateway to joy runs through one of the interviews collected in Stuart Bailie’s book *Trouble Songs* (Bailie 2018). Recalling the emotions propelled by listening to Orbital during their now historic gig in the Art College, DJ/producer David Holmes states:

I’ve seen Orbital play many times at Glastonbury in front of how many thousands of people, this road of emotion of knowing the story that led back to that track becoming Belfast always puts a real smile on my face. It brings me back to that time. *Innocent and complete and utter joy.* (emphasis added) (Bailie 2018, 226)

This affective grammar also resonates in the series of testimonies collected in a podcast produced by the BBC, *The Roots of Rave*. In a similar vein to Holmes, local DJ Glen Molloy evokes the joyful and liberatory dimensions of raving, while also adding more sombre tones that gesture to the deep effects of growing up during the Troubles. The raves here are described as a ritualistic experience full of potentiality, while also associating raving with ecstasy consumption to escape the heavy weight of conflict: ‘It was complete madness, going to these raves meeting people who you were never meant to

meet, dancing with people that you barely knew' ('The Roots of Rave, Stories in Sound – BBC Radio Ulster' n.d.).

Raving, then, was a way of getting away from the Troubles and its everyday divisions, and from the fact that 'Belfast was a very miserable place in the early 90s' ('The Roots of Rave, Stories in Sound – BBC Radio Ulster' n.d.). The testimony continues:

It was still basically in the middle of the Troubles for like a short period of time, it was like a generation who grew up with all this madness around. You were just able to..sort of, almost like the matrix, pop this little pill and all your troubles away for a load hours, until you come back to the harsh reality of seeing Land Rovers and meat wagons and bombs and, you know, hearing the news.

Poignant here is how the liberatory, beatific elements of raving and the excitement of crossing boundaries by meeting people are also inexorably weighed down by the legacy of the conflict and militarism in the everyday. The rave as a liminal space offers a fleeting respite, a glimpse of possibility for those whose lives were still deeply shaped by the harsh, militarized reality of 1990s Northern Ireland which, lest we forget, was an intense, dark moment of sectarian violence and surveillance preceding the first IRA ceasefire and the beginning of the peace talks.

Bell's documentary conveys the joy of dancing visually through the live scenes of the groups of friends clubbing, hands in the air, faces grinning, moving in unison through the interaction of the sound, the crowd, and the DJs. These are joyful, yet messy scenes, depicting a conviviality produced through dancing, but also with alcohol and possibly ecstasy consumption. Nevertheless, dancing works as a getaway to joy, and crucially, a temporary escape from the violence of the everyday life as shaped by sectarian divisions, (para)military activity, and the threat of bombings, visualized in the documentary through images of military presence, the peace walls, helicopters, and checkpoints. This heavy atmosphere of the city also underpins the protagonists' words, for example, Barso, from the Lenadoon group, speaks of 'all the craziness happening. Brits and cops and all that [...] a lot of people getting about with guns for 24 hours. We are all stuck in the same place' (Bell, Des, dir 1995, 10:05). He continues 'Going to the raves. You are enjoying yourself, it gets you away, for a while anyway' (Bell, Des, dir 1995, 15:29). Even though the joy and respite might be only fleeting, living for the weekend gives a sense of hope and purpose.

The affective, lifesaving, significance of dancing also resonates with the testimonies of the protagonists from Sarajevo, who literally risked their lives to enter Obala for the parties or reach the studio of Radio Zid. Mediated through dancing/music in these testimonies are intense moments of creativity, joy, and crucially survival. As one of the Radio Zid DJs,¹⁴ Djoha, points out: 'There was nothing to do in the war. You could hide in the shelter or you could make it out through music' (Harvey et al. 2002, 02:59). The affective registers mediated through the music scene are so powerful that, looking back to wartime, some of the artists such as Faris Arapović, drummer of Sarajevo iconic band Sikter,¹⁵ feel a sense of nostalgia for a higher state of existence. As mentioned, the joy and 'buzz' of dancing to electronic music takes centre stage in the final part of the film wherein interviews alternate to live footage from the local clubbing and dance scene. Dancing's euphoria and liberatory potential are thus intertwined with the end of the war and the hopes that peace engendered, even though it will soon become clear that the

peace entrenched the very same wartime divisions that the Dayton Peace Agreement had promised to *resolve*. Nevertheless, the emergence of a dance music scene is inflected with attempts to maintain a space for new ideas, creativity, reconciliation, and togetherness against the machinery of political governance and ethnic divisions ushered in by so-called peace. This aspiration is expressed in a testimony by DJ Jasmina, who would go on to become one of Bosnia's most famous DJs:

I think we are fighting for our own world. I was once in a small place in the Republika Srpska and I was the first DJ from this part of Bosnia, the Federation, because there was a big massacre of Bosnian Muslims there. I see it as key to show to people that we can still live together. We love the same things. We love the same music (Harvey et al. 2002, 21:00).

This narrative also resonates for other DJs, like Armin: 'I really don't care what is your ethnic background. If we do concert and parties, we only have one price at the door and everybody is welcome' (Harvey et al. 2002, 21:23). Both testimonies then mobilize the idea of togetherness through sonic intimacy which has been central to narratives of/in dance and club cultures, while also investing in dance culture with hopes and aspirations to break down divisions entrenched through war. Although we know that fostering reconciliation and togetherness is a much more fraught process, these narratives illustrate how dance culture offered a significant affective landscape where peace and togetherness could be, at least, imagined.

In spaces touched by militarism and sectarian violence like Bosnia and Northern Ireland, clubbing, electronic music, and DJing are also infused with attempts to reinstate a sense of normality. This affective grammar echoes across both documentaries, while inflected with local complexities. For the Bosnian clubbers and DJs, dance culture and electronic music offers a way of continuing the creative experiment of Radio Zid against the entrenchment of divisions that the peace has entailed, as one of the protagonists Djoha points out: 'We have this music that keeps us going', echoed by fellow musician Choola 'We are just normal people, but have found ourselves in abnormal conditions' (Harvey et al. 2002, 23:00). Music, DJing, and dancing are imbued with attempts to come to terms with an (im)possible situation brought about by war.

In a similar vein, for Karen Ann, dancing and clubbing in Belfast is infused with attempts to escape the weight of conflict and its deep reverberations in ordinary life that normalize militarism and divisions:

You grew accustomed to it after a while and it doesn't make such a big difference to you, because you haven't lived anywhere else and so you don't really know. Our abnormalities are normal because this is the way we've been brought up and we don't know any different (Bell, Des, dir 1995, 4:02).

Across the interviews, dancing then is intertwined with a longing for a sense of normality that histories of violence have compromised. Dancing and clubbing enact aspirations to escape the overpowering presence of conflict and its legacies. It is in this sense that we can think of dancing as a form of agency where alternative ways of being in the world are momentarily re-imagined and the overpowering presence of militarism fleetingly dispelled. Dancing, raving, and dance floors can thus be viewed as fractured and ambivalent spaces of possibility and desires where alternative forms of agency, community, and intimacy emerge, albeit only fleetingly. Crucially, these are sites and practices of

becoming where bodies that are perennially pinned down by the encounter with war, its sectarian and militarized logics, can momentarily live and feel otherwise through movement and sonic intimacy. In this sense, the narratives of Belfast and Sarajevo clubbers resonate: the body in rave and the structures of feeling that dance culture mediates work to momentarily dispel war's overpowering shadows. At the same time, these affective registers are inevitably inflected with the histories of conflict and its reverberation into everyday life that weigh down dancing's liberatory and transformative potential. To this tension I will now turn.

Can dance set you free? The idea of dancing together and being part of a movement that is bigger than existing divisions is a key theme in dance culture. As mentioned, while this narrative might reflect positive aspirations, researchers have also critically interrogated the sentimental, uplifting, and convivial character of clubbing experiences and dance cultures. Feminist scholarship has contributed to complicating such narratives by tracing more ambivalent portraits of clubbing and dance floors shaped as much by the liberatory and uplifting potential, as by the complex social relations of the everyday (Rief 2011; Withers 2021). This scholarship does not imply that clubbing and dance culture are apolitical and simply hedonistic and consumeristic practices, nor it diminishes its affective significance in bringing people together and allowing for pleasure, rather it draws attention to complexities, nuances, and ambivalences within (Rief 2011; Ludewig 2020; Withers 2021; Pini 2017). These insights are helpful to explore how, in the contexts under consideration, aspirations for conviviality, escape, and becoming through clubbing/raving depicted in the documentaries are inflected through the complex afterlives of conflict. On the one hand, dancing and the culture around electronic music offer the promise of escape, momentarily shaking off the sticky imprint of conflict that pins down bodies through entrenched sectarianism, violence, and surveillance. However, in this section, I also show how the impact of armed conflict lingers on, weighing down the desire for life otherwise as ravers/clubbers continue to grapple with war's quotidian legacies.

The idea of dance music bringing people together runs through *Dancing on narrow ground* and there is a moment in the film where it seems that the two groups of Protestant and Catholic clubbers might meet up to go out and dance together. Ultimately, however, these hopes are crushed when, due to escalation of violence, heightened sectarian tensions, and long-standing fears, the group from Lenadoon does not show up. The documentary thus reflects broader complexities surrounding aspirations to move beyond the divisions of the conflict. These intricacies are also evoked in the testimonies collected in the BBC podcast 'The Roots Of Rave' illustrating how, even though dancing and club culture brought people together, perhaps for the first time, these were also spaces and encounters where class divisions mattered, particularly for young people from opposing communities in working-class neighbourhoods deeply shaped by the violence and social segregation underpinning the conflict. The documentary enlivens these complexities as the young protagonists continuously grapple between investing in the joy of coming together through dance culture and navigating the weight of sectarianism, deprivation, as well as gendered relations. While the film explores coming together through dancing in places such as Kelly's or raves, this is often a short-lived opportunity for the protagonists. Indeed, once the party is

over *ravers* are confronted with the harsh reality of conflict scripted in the protagonists' quotidian lives. This tension is at the core of the film.

The words by Barso, from the Lenadoon group, are poignant in revealing how dancing might offer only a fleeting respite from the sticky imprint of sectarian violence and its deeply embodied effect:

See if at the weekend and I was out late like at three o'clock and I was walking on my own from somewhere and I would see a car coming up late at night . I would think in the back of my head maybe it's the UVs, you wouldn't know and it would make me anxious [...] Just things like that, just watching out. I think everybody is that way when we run about late at night (Bell, Des, dir 1995, 4:30).

Lav, another young man from the Lenadoon area, echoes: 'you are always watching over your shoulders, 'cause you don't know what is going to happen' (Bell, Des, dir 1995, 5:03). The documentary then shows how conflict lingers on in the fear, mistrust, and everyday survival strategies instilled by the threat of violence, as well as by the protagonists' lived experience.

Clubbing in the film is entangled with complex experiences of trauma lived by the protagonists – whether it is the loss of a parent killed because of their job as a police officer as in the case of Johnny, from the Orangefield group, or learning about young members from the community being shot 'just for being Catholic' as in the case of Lav. Clubbing happens alongside quite disruptive behaviours – such as heavy drinking and drug consumption often used as a coping mechanism. But it also happens alongside the young protagonists' attempts to create alternative, yet segregated, communities – for example, by meeting in the park to rap and listening to music, by attending a youth community centre, or by hanging out outside of the Gospel tent. Ultimately, however, the film conveys how irrespective of similar interests and lived experiences shared by the two groups of friends, their lives rarely intersect shaped as they are by existing divisions, as these are reproduced, felt, and lived by the young protagonists. If the Orangefield boys are fully involved with the masculinity performances and celebratory practices associated with Protestant marching bands, the boys from the Lenadoon neighbourhood openly admit that they do not trust people 'from the other side', including the film director.

In the film, clubbing is also shaped by gendered relations and divisions that are momentarily outlived in the dance floor, but also reinstated when the 'party is over'. In this, the experiences of clubbing depicted in the documentary resonate with feminist analyses of club culture, dancing, and dance floors as spaces and practices where gender identities can be transformed through the liberatory force of dancing, but also reinstated (McRobbie 1993).

For example, the scenes of dancing in Kelly's nightclub convey the liberatory and uplifting effect of clubbing for the young women protagonists. While the Lenadoon group is made up of young men, young women in the Orangefield group are fully involved in the sense of comradeship and thrill that going out clubbing produces. This is significant given that experiences of women have long been marginalized in the gendered politics of Northern Ireland. Yet, in my reading, the film also conveys how, beyond the club, relationships among the group reproduce gendered patterns, for example as the boys admit not seeing the girls as real mates. The clubbing world depicted in the documentary is indeed a masculine space. Except for outspoken clubber Karen Ann,

who offers some of the most critical and poignant reflections on the conflict, we can see that, while these young women might find spaces of joy and liberation in clubbing, they are often not viewed as authentic members of the 'scene'.

In summary, we can read the documentary as narrating how dancing is invested with possibilities of outliving conflict and escaping from its deep inscriptions in the body and quotidian life. Such hopes, investments, and aspirations are shared and momentarily experienced across the two communities of 'ravers' foregrounded in the film, even though they rarely meet beyond brief encounters in clubs. In my reading, the film offers a powerful portrayal of how the protagonists continually grapple with this hopeful affective landscape, and enduring the legacy of conflict, in its gendered, class, and sectarian logics, that haunt their everyday life, while also highlighting the fragile glimpses of new imaginaries to come 'in the darkness of the rave' (Bell, Des dir. 1995, 54.04).

In my reading of *Rave Against the Machine*, investments in the power of club culture to undo the legacy of conflict are weighed down by the unfulfilled promises of peace and by a deep sense (and material reality of) immobility and isolation. On one level, the interviews collected in the documentary engage a more hopeful affective landscape compared to *Dancing on Narrow Ground*. As mentioned, the idea of dancing together or moving beyond the division of conflict figures prominently in the statements by DJ Jasmina, as well as by the other protagonists of the dance scene, even though this might be overemphasized by dance lovers. Mobilizing the idea of people coming together because of their talent, their creativity, and their love of dance music, irrespective of ethnic identities, such narratives reflect attachments to the inclusive and transformative ethos associated with dance culture. Attending to the timing and context of the filming is also important to unpack these narratives: interviews were collected in the aftermath of the Dayton Peace Agreement which ended the war after years of human rights violation and large-scale atrocities. It is plausible to infer that this sense of optimism for 'Bosnia as a new country' might infuse narratives about dance culture too. At the same time, these are fragile hopes as it becomes clear that the promises of the agreement and peace process have failed to live up to expectations. The documentary conveys this ambivalence as the protagonists acknowledge how, rather than bringing about change, the peace settlement gave power to the same elites who had mobilized for war, creating 'a machine that works for its own with no concern for people' as Faris points out (Harvey et al. 2002, 19:00). The interviews then express hopes and investments for transformation mediated through clubbing and dance culture – read: the war is over, we will dance together, the divisions will be overcome. However, in a similar vein to *Dancing on Narrow Ground*, these desires are weighed down at the realization that the logic of war lingers on through the entrenchment of the very ethnic divisions and structures of power that the peace settlement had promised to resolve. In this sense, the title, *Rave against the machine*, is emblematic of the young protagonists' frustration with the ethnonationalist and elitist machinery that the peace as (re)produced.

As mentioned, the testimonies of the Bosnian ravers express a longing for dance as a gateway to a sense of normality in the aftermath of protracted violence that echoes the experiences of the Belfast clubbers. In the context of Bosnia, however, aspirations for normality through dancing are also intertwined with a sense of immobility and isolation, as a tangible legacy of the war, lest we forget that Sarajevo was under siege for over 3 years but also as a result of the material ramifications of the geopolitical containment of Bosnia

as the danger zone of Europe. This theme emerges explicitly in the interview with Sarajevo clubbers, Suzana and Nina: 'If I have a VISA I would like to go somewhere and see Carl Cox, even in America. That's one life, why not. But I am from Bosnia and Herzegovina I am not allowed to see Carl Cox' (Harvey et al. 2002).

Even though the sense of being stuck and pinned down in an impossible situation also emerges in *Dancing on narrow ground*, the sense of isolation and immobility becomes much more amplified for the Bosnian ravers who would need a visa to leave the country. The narratives represented in *Rave Against the Machine* express aspirations of making connections, of situating Bosnia with global dance cultures and in doing so to shake off the sticky imprint that relegates Bosnia to a perennial site of conflict and problem of security. This is why the encounter with the Desert Storm crew and with the British filmmakers is significant: it highlights transnational connections and networks of solidarity through music and club culture that complicate an understanding of Bosnia exclusively as a paradigmatic site of post-Cold War ethnic conflict and international intervention. Yet, the encounter itself between the British filmmakers; the DJ collective Desert Storm; and the local musicians, DJs, and clubbers involved in the creative industries in Bosnia remains shaped by the legacy of conflict. Mobility, travelling, and circulation in networks and spaces of dance music are privileges that set apart the clubbers with a British passport and some of the young people in Bosnia who contributed to the documentary. In a similar vein to *Dancing on narrow ground*, a tension lies at the heart of the documentary as protagonists' attachments, investments, and creativity rub against the political and material conditions that weigh down the desire for dancing together and being part of 'global' dance culture.

Conclusion/One more tune

In her sustained critical analysis of Northern Ireland's literature, Caroline Magennis has proposed that 'we seek out moments of pleasure and let them stand beside moments of pain, to do justice to the myriad of affective states expressed by Northern Irish writers' (Magennis 2017, 155). I believe this invitation resonates for those of us in international relations interested in challenging simplistic narratives that unduly narrow the complex lived experiences and affective states felt by communities touched by war. Following this ethos, in this paper I have suggested that dwelling on testimonies and representations of the electronic dance music *scenes* in Northern Ireland and Bosnia reveals alternative stories of the respective conflicts and their everyday geographies, recalibrating our understanding of the sensory, affective, and embodied politics of war. By unravelling the multisensorial and affective dimension of dancing as a register of war, I have tracked encounters and structures of feeling mediated through and in between dancing bodies and sounds that complicate dominant representations of Belfast and Sarajevo exclusively as conflict cities. I have focused on dancing as the making of space for possibilities and movement that can complicate and dispel war's totalizing shadow, as fragile and ephemeral as these might be. I have explored the making of a new conviviality through dancing, the beats, the DJs, the fliers and tapes, the running across 'sniper alley' and the crossing of checkpoints, the short-lived friendships, and those which endured for a lifetime. At the same time, I have drawn attention to the inevitable reconstitution of divisions, fractures, and conflict logics mediated through such dancescapes.

I suggest that paying attention to dancing in the face of violence and its afterlives complicates and trouble naïve distinctions between war/peace. The stories, echoes, and resonances I have traced in this paper illustrate how embodied forms of peace can begin in the midst of conflict, where peace might be found and felt in a night out clubbing, in the structures of feeling, sense of movement and fleeting conviviality that dancing to electronic beats in a crowd, with other bodies produce. Conversely, attending to these stories also attunes us to the deeply corporeal, affective, and material after-effects of militarism and violence. In these stories, war lingers in the body in rave, whether it creeps up in ‘the fear’ of the rave’s aftermath when the young protagonists must return to the daily interaction with bomb scares, military patrols, and segregation in the case of Belfast and in the oppressive political structures and failed promises of an uneasy peace in the case of Sarajevo. It lingers in the sectarian, class, and gendered divisions that continue to pin down, structure, and limit the everyday experiences of the young people that figure in the paper. War’s after-effects also live on in the geopolitics and feeling of immobility and isolation expressed by the young protagonists in both Belfast and Sarajevo, although these manifest in different ways. Yet, I have argued that the stories and experiences collected here illustrate fragile glimpses of life otherwise where through moments of joy, through losing oneself to electronic music, and through spaces creativity, we encounter more complicated human stories of violence, loss, and survival. Attending to dance culture in settings shaped by violence, militarism, and armed conflict enables us to learn more about sounds, affects, and spacings that are conventionally overlooked in the study of these respective conflicts, and war writ large. I have shown how paying attention to dance as a register of war provokes us to take seriously alternative knowledges about the impact of conflict and militarism on everyday life, as well as about the micropolitics of resistance in its midst. After all, in the shadow of war, ‘Dance first, think later’ might be the natural order.

Notes

1. See <https://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2015/08/desert-storm-soundsystem-feature>
2. Personal communication with Holly Lubbock, editor and producer of Rave against the Machine, 30 August 2022. Information about the tour is available here: <https://www.technokratia.com/arhiva/misc/clubclass/index.htm>
3. In NI, plans are underway to document such histories. In November 2021 Belfast Film Festival included a screening of *The Shapes Between us*, a collaborative archive film project presented by Phil Kieran (DJ, producer, artist, and composer), Stuart Sloan (Second Chance Cinema), and Sara Gunn-Smith (Film Hub NI, part of the BFI Film Audience Network) <https://www.blackboxbelfast.com/event/bff-the-shapes-between-us-ni-dance-music-culture-on-screen/>. See also (‘The Roots of Rave, Stories in Sound – BBC Radio Ulster’ n.d.).
4. I had informal conversations with Desmond Bell, director of *Dancing on Narrow Ground* via phone and email, July and August 2022. Des is currently working on a forthcoming book which includes a chapter reflecting on the making of his film. He kindly shared a draft via email. See also interview with Bell published by Vice in 2014 <https://www.vice.com/en/article/pgw7p7/film-about-rave-culture-90s-sectarian-ulster> I also had an informal conversation with Holly Lubbock, editor and producer of Rave against the Machine about the making of the documentary, 30 August 2022.
5. Available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzo-42PpFLQ>
6. Forthcoming publication, draft shared by Des Bell via email 3 August 2022.

7. The film is available here: <https://vimeo.com/27628235>
8. Personal communication with Holly Lubbock, editor and producer of *Rave against the Machine*, 30 August 2022.
9. These are collected in the archive film, *Do you remember Sarajevo?* Available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fnu4yoGwEbs>
10. Important to note that Channel 4 was one of the broadcasters that declined to air *Dancing on Narrow Ground* in 1995.
11. On the aesthetics of electronic dance music see also (Wiltsher 2016a, 2016b; Garcia 2015).
12. For examples see <https://boilerroom.tv/playlist/film-documentaries>
13. Brancaccio and Aisher, 2001, *Smother*
14. Several of those involved in *Radio Zid* and contributors to the documentary formed the group .ORG/, a collective of DJs and designers based in Sarajevo (Harvey et al. 2002).
15. Arapović sadly passed away in September 2019, on his legacy see <https://www.klix.ba/magazin/muzika/preminuo-faris-arapovic-bivsi-clan-zabranjenog-pusenja-i-grupe-sikter/190919010>

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