

University of Denver

Digital Commons @ DU

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Graduate Studies

---

8-1-2013

## "Wee Women's Work": Women and Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland

Amanda E. Donahoe  
*University of Denver*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd>



Part of the [Peace and Conflict Studies Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Donahoe, Amanda E., ""Wee Women's Work": Women and Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland" (2013). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 167.  
<https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/167>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact [jennifer.cox@du.edu](mailto:jennifer.cox@du.edu), [dig-commons@du.edu](mailto:dig-commons@du.edu).

“WEE WOMEN’S WORK:” WOMEN AND PEACEBUILDING  
IN NORTHERN IRELAND

---

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Josef Korbel School of International Studies

University of Denver

---

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

---

by

Amanda E. Donahoe

August 2013

Advisor: Tim Sisk

©Copyright by Amanda E. Donahoe 2013

All Rights Reserved

Author: Amanda E. Donahoe

Title: "WEE WOMEN'S WORK:" WOMEN AND PEACEBUILDING IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Advisor: Tim Sisk

Degree Date: August 2013

## **ABSTRACT**

International norms on intrastate conflicts, such as United Nations Security Council

Resolution 1325, call for women to participate in peace processes in countries emerging from conflict and civil strife, including those divided by identity-based conflict.

However, scholars of post-war recovery in international relations and comparative politics have raised questions about the extent and effect of women's participation in peace processes, and in politics more generally, in divided societies given underlying

social, economic, and political barriers that impeded access to decisive or authoritative political decision-making. A critical question in the literature on women's participation

in post-conflict reconciliation-related dialogue and joint action relates to whether intra-group "community development" focusing principally on social and economic concerns

can contribute to fostering women's participation in intergroup reconciliation and peacebuilding. This study explores the experiences of community development in

Northern Ireland with the research question: How and under what conditions do women contribute to peacebuilding? The research represents formal interviews with experts in

the community and voluntary sector and the women's sector, informal focus groups, and six months of ethnographic field research based primarily in Belfast. Northern Ireland is a

case of protracted social conflict in which the society is still deeply divided, despite

successful implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. Women played a significant

role in the peace process by forming their own political party—the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition—and yet are poorly represented in political institutions today. Instead, women dominate the field of community development contributing to peace through capacity-building and other bottom-up practices. Women pursue community development in this case for two broad reasons: first, because it is not political in the formal institutional sense; second, in an environment where women are expected to play traditional roles, community development is interpreted as an extension of these roles allowing women to navigate through the constraints of a gendered public space and employ their roles as women to seek change that does not threaten the political status quo.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, thank you to the women of Northern Ireland who shared time, stories and ideas with me. I am grateful for your trust and hope that I have done well by you in these pages. Thanks also to Queens University Belfast, the School of Politics, International Studies and Philosophy and Yvonne Galligan for sponsoring my project.

The list of people who deserve my gratitude is long and I hope that my gratitude has been appropriately given elsewhere. To my mentors and support system at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies: Martin Rhodes, Susan Rivera, Tamra d'Estree and Jack Donnelly, thank you for your networks, your advice and your kind words. Thank you to Tim Sisk for being both a positive and pragmatic dissertation director. Thank you to Mari Fitzduff for participating on my committee and for being supportive not just of this project but of me and my family. And to Nicole Nicotera who chaired my defense in the summer. Special thanks to Greg Durbin and Jeff Miller for your role in facilitating this adventure to Belfast. Also thanks to Melinda Rhodes for editing a draft of the writing, residual errors are of course mine. I also want to thank Rebecca Otis, Nick Bowen, Regina Nockerts, Roni Kay O'Dell and Joel Day for their camaraderie in this process, I hope I have been as supportive to you as you have been to me.

Finally, to my fellow adventurers: Connor and Nichole your energy and smiles brought balance to this process; and Derek, what do you say about a partner who puts his life on hold to move across an ocean, live in a tiny apartment, get rain-drenched for six months of a life of poverty . . . and tries to convince me it was his idea? There is nothing to say except thank you. I simply could not have done this without you.

## CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Methodology.....	10
Design of the Dissertation.....	20
Chapter One: Conceptual Orientation.....	21
Peacebuilding.....	21
UNSCR 1325.....	32
Political Activity.....	41
Civil Society.....	53
Chapter Two: Setting the Scene.....	62
Gender in Northern Ireland.....	62
Using the Language of Identity.....	67
Troubles: the Gendered Past.....	72
Chapter Three: The Agreement and The Divide.....	90
The Coalition and the Peace Process.....	90
Benign Apartheid: a Tour of Belfast.....	109
Attitudes of Sectarian Divide.....	116
There Is No Peace Here.....	119
Chapter Four: The Development of Community Development.....	125
A Framework.....	129
Community Building.....	137
Community Development.....	144
From Para-Military to Para-Community Worker.....	152
Representative vs. Participative Politics.....	160
Conclusions.....	166
Chapter Five: Wee Women’s Work.....	167
Women’s Groups and Community Development.....	167
Women’s Centres.....	170
Umbrellas.....	190
The Work of the Women’s Sector.....	205
Conclusions.....	220
Chapter Six: The Big Lads.....	224
Women in Politics.....	226
Parties.....	238
Conclusions.....	247
Chapter Seven: Overt Peacebuilding.....	250
Conclusion.....	260

Findings.....	261
Limitations of the Research .....	270
Implications for Future Research.....	271
Works Cited .....	273
Appendix A: Interview Annex.....	288



## INTRODUCTION

Conflict<sup>1</sup> is gendered in many ways: women often experience, participate in and are victimized by violence in ways that are different from men.<sup>2</sup> Women's activities, both during and following conflict, reflect these differences. Women responded to the Troubles<sup>3</sup> in Northern Ireland with a full range of activities, not all of them peaceful.<sup>4</sup> More often than not, women took the opportunities offered to them by a new field of activity, a new public space: community development. This project focuses on women's community development and makes the argument that this is one form of bottom-up peacebuilding. Northern Ireland, as a case of protracted social conflict that is now considered post-conflict, offers the opportunity to ask: under what conditions do women contribute to peacebuilding?

Community development offered women a growing form of public activity that had not been claimed by men. Politics was the dominant field for men and politics in

---

<sup>1</sup> Conflict here refers to violent conflict.

<sup>2</sup> See for example: (Alison 2009, Cockburn 1998, Elshtain 1987, Enloe 1989, Goldstein 2001, Giles and Hyndman 2004, Jacobs, Jacobsen, and Marchbank 2000, Moser and Clark 2001, Ridd and Callaway 1986)

<sup>3</sup> The "Troubles" is the common term for the three decades of political violence in Northern Ireland from the late 1960s until the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

<sup>4</sup> The argument here is not that women are inherently peaceful.

Northern Ireland was generally translated into the ‘constitutional question’ that itself was translated into claims of belonging either in ‘union’ with the United Kingdom and loyalty to the British crown or in nationalist solidarity and republican affinity with Ireland.<sup>5</sup> The constitutional question asks whether Northern Ireland is inherently British or part of a united Ireland. The institutions of state in place at the beginning of the Troubles, housed at Stormont were described as Protestant Government for a Protestant People and became part of the contention. When the region destabilized and Stormont was dissolved in 1972, the installation of direct-rule from Westminster confirmed for many people that politics equaled conflict. Often Northern Ireland is described as having ‘no politics’ during this time. These two different conceptions amount to the same thing: there was but one overriding political issue, the constitutional question, and it was being fought in the streets.

Community development rose to fill in the gaps in the absence of local politics. In the beginning community development was largely about activism, developing out of the civil rights campaigns that became largely defunct once their primary method of nonviolence proved ineffectual and was itself met with violence.<sup>6</sup> It slowly became project focused and women began to claim this space as their own. Successful projects regarding food provision, after schools programs, training and education empowered local communities and the majority women community workers organizing them to push

---

<sup>5</sup> Unionism and Loyalism are labels that are often condensed into an inaccurate conglomerate term: Protestants. Nationalism and Republicanism are similarly represented by the term Catholic.

<sup>6</sup> The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association which patterned its marches on the successful nonviolence campaigns of Martin Luther King in the American South was rendered defunct following the violence of ‘Bloody Sunday’, January 30, 1972, when a civil rights march was fired on by security forces and thirteen unarmed civilians were killed. This event in turn led to direct-rule by Westminster. Many other marches were met with violence from a variety of actors but Bloody Sunday has become iconic.

for more. This field encouraged resilience within communities. A formal community and voluntary sector developed out of this movement and within it a sophisticated, largely self-taught, and professional class of women community workers.

One particular form of community development, and the most concentrated site of women's community action, is women's centres. These places focus on women's needs both in a broader sense of shared issues across Northern Ireland and in terms of localized, community specific issues. Women's centres developed in the 1980s, offering women shared space to talk, mechanisms of protection against domestic abuse, sources of personal development, education and training, and a collective expression of community needs. Some will argue that women are the gateway to their communities. They are a group whose identity coexists with the dominant social divisions within Northern Ireland. They are women who are also Catholic or Protestant or some *other* religion; they are Unionist/Loyalist or Nationalist/Republican or some *other* minority; they are representative of their class, middle or upper class with greater access to education and employment or working class with little education and grateful for whatever part time employment they can piece together. The women's centres serve as an important source of feedback not only regarding women's lives but of the concerns and needs of the community (ies) they represent.

Although there are plentiful examples of women's participation in paramilitaries, etc., women as a group have not been seen as a threat to the status quo. As a result, women throughout the Troubles and in cases across the globe have been able to navigate the social divide because they are only 'wee women' doing 'wee women's work'. When

the communities were violently divided and the lines of control between paramilitaries were strictly enforced, women reached across the divide and learned from each other best practices for applying funding, for organizing training, for structuring childcare, etc. Women stood by each other and in support of each other's efforts. Women seemed strategically socially located to be the drivers of community relations work, to build the bridges that would link the communities in healthy and productive ways.

Community relations work is slow at best, however. The Good Friday Agreement, the result of peace talks with two women at the table representing the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (the Coalition) was hailed as a great success in 1998; but fifteen years later Northern Ireland is still divided. The return of formal political institutions and the demilitarization of paramilitaries and security forces resulted in a process that is seen in numerous post-conflict environments. The men return home and pick up the reigns of daily life. Women, particularly those who had played such an important public role in community development, were thanked for their service and told that the men would "take it from here". This is a particularly sexist version of events, not all women returned to their kitchens, not all men embraced this kind of patriarchy. However, understanding that the community and voluntary sector was largely staffed and organized by women, it is easy to interpret the return of political institutions, largely staffed and organized by men, in this way. Community development lost its central role in Northern Ireland. This is not a condemnation of the political institutions nor of the peace process that instituted them. Stormont has struggled but is currently stable and representative. The constitutional issue is, if not settled for everyone, at least set aside so that the work of governing and

problem-solving can be productively engaged. Yet political institutions are still representative of a divided society and of political parties, many of whom developed out of the decommissioning of paramilitaries, that benefit from the distinct community lines that represent the status quo. As one taxi driver stated “no one wants those lines blurred”. Community relations attempts to blur lines.

Earlier versions of this project focused on women’s work in community relations and the potential for building social cohesion in Northern Ireland. That is not the argument made here. Instead, ‘wee women’s work’ is focused on bread and butter issues, the small ‘p’ politics that do not serve to threaten the status quo or blur the lines between communities and parties. This is why it is so important to broaden the understanding of ‘political activity’. Women across Northern Ireland, except those who actively engage in representative politics, often explain that they are not political. Even fifteen years later, their understanding of being political is still tied to the constitutional question, to the conflict and to the kinds of politics that Coalition members described, the abnormal, bear pit of aggressive politics that many women want no part in. Women such as Paula Bradley, sitting Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) at Stormont, and Naomi Long, Member of Parliament (MP) at Westminster, argue that this is changing, that aside from the broad acceptance of women in office which is itself increasing, political interaction and norms of behavior at Stormont and all levels of politics in Northern Ireland are moving away from verbal violence and open aggression. Still, each of the female politicians interviewed here shared their own experiences that confirmed the fears

of women outside these formal institutions, women who vote out of fear that the status quo will shift to their detriment if they do not, but who otherwise see no value in politics.

Yet the activities pursued by women's centres and women's groups across Northern Ireland *are* political. They may not challenge the status quo in terms of the constitutional question but they do challenge it in other ways. They challenge a socio-political environment in which working class women do not have a two-directional relationship with the state but instead the one directional flow of government benefits, which most working class families receive. Women's centres help women in their communities, and women in other communities who are willing to come, gain access to resources, educate themselves, get degrees, learn new technologies that help them stay informed and in many cases to visit Stormont. Where community relations work is slow in achieving social transformation—deliberate and often dependent on unique personalities who may change—the work of empowerment and capacity building is much more immediate though it is limited in breadth. Women learn first and perhaps most importantly that they can learn. This increased capacity builds the human capital of the community and also builds the capacity of these women's families, encouraging children and young women to pursue education, to find their own voice. Capacity building is the great contribution of women's peacebuilding from the bottom up.

This work is not always easy, nor is it always moving forward. The guiding research question for this project is “under what conditions do women contribute to peacebuilding?” Women's centres operate in an environment that is deeply constrained. One of the most obvious and public forms of constraint is that of funding. The funding of

women's centres is fickle. Today a number of women's centres across Northern Ireland have grants from the EU's peace monies and the Big Lottery Fund. While these are large pots of money, neither are permanent cash flows. The impetus to build social enterprise that will feed money back into the programs of women's centres is strong. Women's community development is finding ways of navigating this constraint and granting them more control.

There are other more subtle forms of constraint that are more powerful. As has been shown in other post-conflict societies, the return or creation of normalcy, the freedom to walk down the street without encountering British security or being afraid of bombs going off, often coincides with social conservatism. There are efforts made to maintain control of the identity group which is more difficult without a direct and offending *other* from whom the group reflexively defines itself. Women are often centerpieces of this conservatism as the preservation of culture is regularly rooted in the construction of the feminine, the role of the mother in society. Admittedly this is changing, equality measures written in reflection of the Agreement are actively engaged to combat sexism and remedy gender biases in the work place for example. Still, public debate regarding increasing women's participation in politics or in the workforce often hinge around issues of childcare. This is, of course, an important issue as the supply of childcare fails to meet the demand in Northern Ireland; this is not an issue for women, rather it is an issue for families. It is increasingly common to see men pushing prams through Belfast. A newcomer may interpret this with pleasure citing the increasing role of men as the primary caregiver. To the contrary, the popular opinion in Belfast is that this

is a shameful reflection on the state of the economy because men who have the choice to be employed would certainly take employment over this role. In any case, the issue of child care is often less important to women than issues of education, training, and self-esteem. Women are constrained by the assumption of these conservative roles.

The effects of the Troubles themselves are also a constraint. They are in evidence in two primary forms. First, the emotional and psychological trauma of the conflict continues. There is still a deep social divide within Northern Ireland society that is evidence of the fragility of the Agreement but that fragility runs deeper with the people themselves. Interviews, focus groups and informal interactions across Northern Ireland all ended with the same question: is there peace here? The answer is always no. People go about their lives, they work, they raise families, and they play; but they also wait, as if the current state of things is only a reprieve from conflict rather than a new beginning. The riots over the Belfast City Hall flag decision at the close of 2012, is evidence of this.<sup>7</sup> It is as if a sneeze might shatter the illusion. This waiting means that memories, losses and pain of trauma are never far beneath the surface. Women, who carried the weight of their families with husbands dead or in prison, explain that they had no time to deal with their own emotions or to assess their own damage. Furthermore, women did not have the resources to help them with their emotional and mental health. They did not have counseling or therapists. That is changing now. Women's centres are working to provide these kinds of services, but in the meantime women are becoming addicted to

---

<sup>7</sup> On December 3, 2012, Belfast City Council made a decision to limit the days that the Union flag will be flown over Belfast City Hall. The decision set off several weeks of rioting by Loyalists who argue that as a member of the United Kingdom, the Union flag ought to be flown above City Hall permanently. See for example (BBC 2013).



prescription anti-depressants. It is not uncommon for women in social settings to share prescriptions with one another. Women from several women's groups reported hearing things like: "Oh what are you on? I might have one of those." Depression and anxiety are common ailments that limit women's full participation.

The second form of constraint that has outlived the Troubles is local hierarchies of authority—groups or individuals often termed "Big Lads"—men who are to some degree in charge of the neighborhood. These have shifted, adapted, and taken on new roles in the wake of the Agreement; nonetheless, they still bound social interaction. Each community exhibits its own unique formation of these social pressures, whether it is post-paramilitary community workers or rigid party control, women's centres are consistently negotiating their agendas and directions for growth. Some groups are clearly limited by post-paramilitaries, or the Big Lads that still threaten them with physical violence and intimidation. In some areas the dominant social organization is the Orange Order. Others argue that they are not influenced by these kinds of forces but are at the same time active members of political party activities and are therefore complicit in these structures. Northern Ireland is still a very patriarchal society and the structures reflect the boundaries that were maintained even through the negotiations of the peace talks.

Women's centres are valuable assets in the peacebuilding of Northern Ireland. Women have been visible agents of change at the peace table and serve as Members of the Legislative Assembly and City Councils, they occupy important government posts and are represented on boards of directors in many sectors but none of these represent the critical threshold at which women are reportedly empowered to make a difference.

Instead, women dominate the community and voluntary sector. They work within their own communities to make change they can see and appreciate in real time. They are empowered to identify their needs and seek solutions. They discover that they can learn and value their education in a way they did not as young adults. Women experience the working of political institutions and learn to engage them just as they learn to engage women from *other* areas. In a society that values them as mothers and as gateways to their communities, these experiences may not lead to bridging community relations today but are passed to their children and lead to generational understanding and the future of peace. Women contribute to peacebuilding through community development in conditions of gendered social constraints.

### **Methodology**

This project follows a tradition of feminist international relations and scholarship that asks “Where are the women?”<sup>8</sup> Cynthia Enloe argues that:

[m]any forms of public power and private power are dependent for their operation, legitimation and perpetuation upon . . . controlling popular notions of femininity and masculinity. It therefore follows that if we do not become seriously interested in the conditions and lives of women, we are likely to craft analyses of international power dynamics that are at best incomplete, at worst faulty and unreliable. (Enloe 2007: 6)

The research presented here follows this practice of feminist inquiry guided by three principles: first, to take women’s lives seriously; second, to privilege personal choice over social structure; and third, to recognize and expose patriarchy—the privileging of the masculine experience—as well as other forms of inequality. Feminism so defined does not seek to privilege the feminine. Instead, it seeks to give voice to the

---

<sup>8</sup> See for example Cynthia Enloe (1983, 1989, 2000, 2004), V. Spike Peterson (1991), Christine Sylvester (1994, 2002), and Ann Tickner (1992)

experiences of women that would otherwise be unheard: voices of women pursuing peace from the bottom-up.

Northern Ireland is a case of protracted social conflict<sup>9</sup> in which three decades of communal violence was ended by the Belfast Agreement, also known as the Good Friday Accord because it was signed on Good Friday in 1998. Fifteen years later, however, most cities and towns in the region can still be described according to their communal identity. In broad strokes, areas are either predominantly Catholic or Protestant. The violence of conflict may have been largely resolved but the sectarian divide remains and is aggressively reproduced. Community relations work, the term used to describe efforts at fostering relationship building between the two main identity groups or what Putnam (2000: 22-24) would refer to as ‘bridging’ social capital rather than in-group ‘bonding’, has been pursued since the early 1970s. Still Northern Ireland is characterized by deficits in social cohesion. As such, Northern Ireland serves as a hypothesis-generating case of women’s peacebuilding with in divided society. Broader inferences can be made to the universe of cases of protracted social conflict such as Israel/Palestine and Kashmir as well as to post-conflict cases such as South Africa or Bosnia in which women pursue similar bottom-up peacebuilding strategies within their marginalized roles as women.

Under what conditions do women contribute to peacebuilding in protracted social conflict? In the Northern Ireland case, women occupy gendered public spaces and are constrained by a still very patriarchal post-conflict society. Bottom-up peacebuilding through community development and the women’s sector allows them to navigate through these constraints and employ their gender roles to serve their communities in

---

<sup>9</sup> See Edward E. Azar (1990).

ways that are perceived to be non-political or small “p” politics. Women can operate in these sectors as women because their contributions are seen to be non-threatening to the status quo, they are only doing “wee women’s work,” community development and women’s sector work that is interpreted as non-threatening by virtue of the fact that it is not political with a big “P” as much as because it is women doing it.

In researching this question, Northern Ireland is explored as a single qualitative, in-depth case study to evaluate how women contribute to post-conflict peacebuilding. Northern Ireland serves as an “instrumental” case study as it is used to support the refinement of theory and may represent other cases (Stake 1994). For this thesis, the case study of Northern Ireland will be instrumental in examining how social structure can be a barrier to the potential for women’s peacebuilding efforts. This allows the researcher to look in depth at ordinary activities in order to reach the external goal of evaluating the proposition that women are unique contributors to peacebuilding.

Northern Ireland was chosen as the case study for a number of reasons that enable it to be related to the universe of cases. The Good Friday Agreement, signed in 1998, achieved a formal cessation of violence between the divided communities but has not been translated into a stable peace or a social cohesion that bridges the divide. A brief history of the conflict compared to the current self-segregation of society shows large deficits of social cohesion and sectarian violence continues still.

Within this single case study, a small-N design is used to examine a few women’s groups through several methods with the intent to collect more in-depth qualitative and, to a limited degree, quantitative information (Johnson and Reynolds 2008: 148-150).

These will be triangulated to develop a descriptive and explanatory study of women's participation and contribution to peacebuilding in post-conflict Northern Ireland. In addressing the question of how women participate in post-conflict peacebuilding, three distinct methods will be used:

1. Participant observation
2. Life story interviews with a limited number of key interlocutors
3. Focus groups with the members of these groups.

Primary research was carried out during six months of fieldwork, primarily in Belfast, as this urban center has been historically the most concentrated area of violence during the Troubles. As Northern Ireland is both socially and geographically divisive, women's groups, which are for the most part founded locally through grassroots efforts, reflect the broader social identities of their communities. Therefore, even though the constitutions of women's groups generally state very clearly that they are cross-community and open to women regardless of religion, race or other factors, these groups are still generally reflective of the majority identity of the community in which they are located. For that reason, women's groups were selected in an effort to represent both sides of the social divide. Primarily, research was carried out with the Shankill Women's Centre, the Windsor Women's Centre, the Falls Women's Centre and the Ardoyne Women's Centre. To a lesser extent, time was also spent at the Greenway Women's Centre and with the Sandy Row Women's Group, as well as at The Women's Centre and Waterside Women's Centre in Derry/Londonderry, and Newry and Mourne Women.

As these groups are extremely localized, the women participating in these groups will then represent specific communities or neighborhoods as well as being limited to specific socio-economic status. As working class communities have been consistently the most affected by instability and violence, women's groups who are representative of women in these communities are preferred. The subject of this research will be limited to women who are primarily working-class and representative of the two majority identity (religious) groups within Belfast. There is obviously an inherent bias in selecting subjects that are almost uniformly representative of such narrow categories. However, this is done conscientiously as it may establish a sort of baseline for future work on the Northern Ireland or any case that might include broader categories including a wider variety of socio-economic class, ethnicity, religion, urban versus rural locations, and even gender as it relates to post-conflict community building as peacebuilding.

In using participant observation, the researcher sought to “take[] part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of [Belfast women's centres] as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture” (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011: 1). Simply put, there is no better way to learn about these women and the group itself than to engage with it personally and directly.

One of the key strengths of field research is the comprehensiveness of perspective it gives the researcher. By going directly to the social phenomenon under study and observing it as completely as possible, you can develop a deeper and fuller understanding of it. (Babbie 1995: 280)

The research for this project was carried out conscientiously by what Babbie describes as the ‘observer-as-participant’, consistent steps were taken such that the researcher maintained active participation within the Belfast women's groups, as a self-

identified researcher. The managers/directors or other leaders of the women's centres responded by serving as sponsors. Whyte (1993) emphasizes the value of sponsorship within the community and describes how group leaders are valuable not only in gaining access and entry to groups but in collaborating in the process of observation. One particularly valuable lesson that Whyte relates from his sponsor Doc is that "[i]f people accept you, you can just hang around, and you'll learn the answer in the long run without even having to ask the question" (Whyte 1993: 303). Whyte adds that in "hanging around" he often got answers to questions he did not know that he wanted and generally found the opportunity to supplement observational data with more formal interviews after the fact. In this way, being a participant observer in Belfast's women's centres provided information that interviews and focus groups could not, as well as guiding the research toward topics and questions that needed to be included in interviews that had not otherwise been planned for. Participant observation was necessary to shed light on the kinds of issues and questions that should be included to tell a more complete story.

Participant observation is a seductive method because it combines two things natural to most people: the ability to watch and the desire to play along. These natural inclinations might lead the researcher to assume that participant observation itself is natural and therefore easy. In combining participation with observation, as Bernard (2006) has suggested, we do neither task in its pure form. Observation is a removal of the observer from the activity being observed; it is, in form at least, objective. Participation, on the other hand allows the researcher to be a subject in the activity, rendering purely analytical observation impossible (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). If participant observation

could be described as a scale, it was the intention of the researcher to moderate the two poles as much as possible and when impossible, to err on the side of observation.

Next, this project relies heavily on the insight offered through both expert and life story interviews for two overlapping purposes. The first is to piece together an overarching narrative, not only of the women's experience during the Troubles, but more importantly of the motivations for their participation in women's groups and in their communities. The second purpose is to shed light on why women choose this form of political activity over formal and institutional forms of political activity. The women selected for interviews broadly fit into at least one, and in some instance more than one, of the following categories: community development expert, leadership role within a women's group and/or female politician.

In qualitative interviewing, the participant serves as a *meaningmaker* and plays a constructionist role in the *making* of information, rather than a passive role in the *collecting* of it (Warren 2002: 83). The interview is a guided conversation in which the participant can explore a variety of perspectives rather than a single standpoint.

For example, during an interview, the perspective of the respondent may shift from one standpoint in her experience to another, as she speaks, say, as a former child, then as a mother, as a caregiver, then as an employee, or even as one who watched the local news. (Warren 2002: 84)

The value of in-depth and life story interview is in the act of reflective thinking on the part of the participant (Atkinson 2002: 135). Interviews here serve an exploratory purpose, rather than one of verification (Johnson 2002: 112). It is the role of the researcher then to "hear the meaning" (Rubin and Rubin 1995: 7) through active listening. In offering the women of Northern Ireland, or at least a select group of them,



the opportunity to tell their own stories, this project serves both to encourage their participation and to validate its importance.

The Troubles in Northern Ireland lasted almost three decades and the peace process is ongoing in Northern Irish society. Therefore, it is safe to assume that an adult woman's life experiences will have been shaped by these events. Life story interviews are the method of choice as women's motivations for participation will be shaped by these events, perhaps in ways that they may not be aware of themselves. "Telling the stories of our lives is so basic to our nature that we are largely unaware of its importance (Atkinson 2002: 121)." Atkinson goes on to suggest that people "become fully aware, fully conscious of [their] own lives through the process of putting them together in story form (Atkinson 2002: 125)", that the act of telling the story allows the storyteller to create and interpret meaning in their own lives.

Rubin and Rubin (1995: 103) argue that people want to talk about themselves and that the interview itself is gratifying. Furthermore people want to control the narrative, the story-telling, of their communities. Though it was possible bordering on likely that not all of the women selected for in-depth interviews would want to participate, few of the women or centres contacted refused and only one for a reason other than poor timing. In any case, the pool of candidates for interviews was necessarily shifting.

The shifting nature of the research also necessitated follow-up interviews and so great efforts were made to cultivate relationships with participants. As Johnson states, "in-depth interviews develop and build on intimacy" and can result in friendships (Johnson 2002: 104). This does present ethical dilemmas as this intimacy serves a

functional purpose for the researcher rather than the social purpose of a friend. These relationships may put the respondent at risk in the context of trusting personal and private information with someone who seeks to use that information in a way that may not benefit the participant. Publishing this research may put these women at risk in a patriarchal society that is not openly welcoming of their efforts or may interpret their comments as a challenge to the status quo. Confidentiality will be used wherever there is a concern of any size. The second ethical dilemma that is created by these relationships is that information may be collected that is useful to the research but will ultimately be a danger to the participant. The value of the relationship and the safety of the participant are prioritized over the value of the research. Additionally, as Atkinson (2002) advocates, interview participants will be given transcripts of their life stories for the purposes of clarification and validation of content, but more importantly to give final permission for its use.

These interviews were semi-structured in an “attempt to understand the complex behavior of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry”(Fontana and Frey 1994: 366). In other words, a list of open-ended questions were prepared such as, “How or why did you first become involved in this community or women’s group?” Or, “How have ‘the Troubles’ affected you personally?” These questions are designed to be open-ended; to garner more than a basic yes or no answer so that the participants have freedom in their responses can contribute to an oral history of their experiences of conflict. In this way, those interviewed also have the freedom to add to the discussion in ways a structured interview or closed questions

would not allow. These questions were also designed to be as neutral as possible, acknowledging that complete neutrality may be impossible, so that the participants may answer freely and unbiased by the interviewer's own assumptions.

Focus groups constitute the final qualitative method used here. The interactions referred to here as focus groups mostly consisted of groups of women who were already organized for a purpose, whether they came together to play bingo, or were taking a class, or coming together for a couple hours of crochet and *craic*.<sup>10</sup> Though several efforts were made to put together formal focus groups, these felt forced and never came together. Instead, pre-existing groups who knew each other well, felt safe and open, had experienced things together and thought it funny that anyone was interested in what they had to say were open and ready sources of information as well as entertainment. In practice, these focus groups were only one part focus and three parts participant observation. As discussed above, there was better information and more learning collected from listening as these women chatted about all the things the researcher would never have known to ask. These were less valuable than expected in that the themes that arose in early focus groups were repeated, in some cases verbatim in focus groups in other areas. They were a great source of anecdotal evidence of women's experiences and in confirming which issues of concern were shared across communities. Otherwise, they are mostly used here as a source of participant observation.

The qualitative methods described above are used in coordination with archival research. This triangulation serves to ground and support the qualitative information. Further support will be made through comparison of the themes that emerge through

---

<sup>10</sup> *Craic*, which is pronounced crack, means fun. For example, people go to the pub for a bit o' craic.

qualitative work with survey data, primarily the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT) which "aims to put on record the attitudes, values and beliefs of the people in Northern Ireland on a wide range of social policy issues" yearly since 1998 (Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2009).

### **Design of the Dissertation**

The research presented here is organized as follows. Chapter One presents a conceptual grounding in the various bodies of literature that have been used to frame this project. Chapter Two gives a background into the gendered nature of Northern Ireland and the Troubles. Chapter Three begins with the peace process and the role of women and then addresses current segregation of Belfast. It also includes a discussion on the language of social division unique to this case. Chapter Four discusses why community development is so important to Northern Ireland and offers a simplified review of the factors that shaped and formed the community and voluntary sector there. Chapter Five focuses on women's groups and centres specifically, what has often been termed in Belfast 'Wee Women's Work', as a particular form of community development. Chapter Six addresses the forces that confront or challenge this form of community development, including a discussion of women in political parties. Chapter Seven offers conclusions regarding the conditions under which women may contribute to peace building.

## CHAPTER ONE: CONCEPTUAL ORIENTATION

### Peacebuilding

The terminology of post-conflict peacebuilding is loaded with ambiguity. To start, linking peacebuilding to the concept of “post-conflict” suggests that peacebuilding is not the process of ending conflict, but something begun once conflict is over. Chetail suggests that this ambiguity “stems from the fact that [this term] designates both the *process* of establishing a sustainable peace, and the political and institutional *strategies* used to do so” (Chetail 2009a: 26). The goal of peacebuilding the establishment of a sustainable peace, made sustainable through efforts that also prevent the recurrence of conflict in countries emerging from sustained social strife.

Lederach suggests that peacebuilding should be understood as:

A comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships. The term thus involves a wide range of activities that bot precede and follow formal peace accords. Metaphorically, peace is seen not merely as a stage in time or a condition. It is a dynamic social construct. (Lederach 1997: 20)

Peacebuilding became a part of the official lexicon of diplomacy with Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s *Agenda for Peace* in 1992 (Call and Cousens 2008: 3, Chetail 2009a: 2). Boutros-Ghali stated that the functions of peacebuilding are “rebuilding the institutions and infrastructures of nations torn by civil war and strife; and building bonds of peaceful

mutual benefit among nations formerly at war” (Boutros-Ghali 1992: 8). The dichotomy suggested here is that peacebuilding represents both the formal steps of ending conflict and restructuring institutions and infrastructures and the informal rebuilding of bonds among people.

Over the 1990s, the concept of peacebuilding became more expansive—arguably, to the point of incoherence. This was driven partly by growing awareness of the complexity of post-conflict transitions and the multiple, simultaneous needs of post-conflict societies, and partly by bureaucratic imperatives as more and more international agencies, parts of the UN system, and nongovernmental organizations began to incorporate “peacebuilding” into their roles and missions. . This conceptual breadth came at the cost of analytical and practical utility. (Call and Cousens 2008: 3)

Call and Cousens go on to suggest that three distinctive levels of peacebuilding can be usefully identified as a method of dealing with this incoherence: maximalist approaches which address the root causes of conflict; minimalist approaches which aim only to prevent renewed violence; and a moderate standard which seeks to prevent renewed violence in addition to providing decent governance (Call and Cousens 2008: 6-8). Other efforts at conceptual clarity have been put forward by Galtung and Lederach. Galtung (1976), predating the ambiguity in the 1990s, introduced the idea that peacemaking and peacebuilding were separate processes where peacebuilding referred to the structures that removed the causes of war and offered alternatives and peacemaking is the process of moving toward settlement. Lederach argues that instead of focusing on the structural elements of peacebuilding, the goal should be ‘conflict transformation’.

A sustainable transformative approach suggests that the key lies in the relationship of the involved parties, with all that the term encompasses at the psychological, spiritual, social, economic, political and military levels. (Lederach 1997: 75)

Transformation then, is about the process of redefinition, the forming of new patterns, rather than the elimination of divisive structures (Lederach 1997: 84-85). Each of these elements is necessary to actually build peace in divided societies. Peace agreements may end the official conflict but contention and animosity between neighbors requires deeper, more engaged processes to be quelled.

It is at the local level that women's contributions to peace are more readily recognized. "Women's leadership role is most visible in their communities; it is here that they organize to end conflict and build the skills necessary for peacebuilding and reconstruction" (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002). Kaufman notes that women have been most successful when working outside formal structures, making connections through grassroots, community level approaches that are not possible within the constraints of what she argues are patriarchal structures (Kaufman 2013). Mazurana and McKay (1999) build on this to suggest that women's peacebuilding is located at the community level because it is contextually based, it is shaped by local concerns.

The community-level concerns of women often find expression in traditional roles.

Women are adept at bridging ethnic, religious, political, and cultural divides. Social science research indicates that women generally are more collaborative than men and thus more inclined toward consensus and compromise. Women often use their role as mothers to cut across international borders and internal divides. Every effort to bridge divides, even if initially unsuccessful, teaches lessons and establishes connections to be built on later. (Institute for Inclusive Security 2012)

The literature on the gendered elements of conflict is vast<sup>11</sup> and it has been shown that conflict affects women differently than it does men.<sup>12</sup>

They are the first to experience extremism and the closing down of moderate space. The spikes in violence they experience in homes and communities are often the precursor to broader communal violence. (Anderlini 2007: 229)

It follows then, that their needs would be different when it comes to peacebuilding. Perhaps this is part of the reason we have rarely seen women play formal roles at peace talks. In understanding the local interest that women have, it is also important to recognize that they are often confined to this space rather than included in the larger processes of peacebuilding (de la Rey and McKay 2006). The Good Friday Agreement or Belfast Agreement is a rare example of including women, however. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition put forth a great effort and got two women elected to sit at the multi-party peace talks. Their platform was limited to two ideas, that women be represented at the table and the cessation of violence.

Formal peace talks are often focused on allocation of power and resources, both political and otherwise. The Good Friday Agreement, for example, included agreements regarding democratic institutions; rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity; decommissioning; policing and justice; and prisoners. These were the agreements made by elites. However, elite agreement or top-down models are not the only frame of peacebuilding.

True peace cannot be imposed from above, but must be built, nurtured, and sustained from the bottom up. Much of this difficult work of building peace is

---

<sup>11</sup> See for example: (Alison 2009, Cockburn 1998, Elshtain 1987, Enloe 1989, Goldstein 2001, Giles and Hyndman 2004, Jacobs, Jacobsen, and Marchbank 2000, Moser and Clark 2001, Ridd and Callaway 1986)

<sup>12</sup> In particular, Petesch (2011) shows that women who experienced violent conflict in their communities were more empowered across several measures. It is clear, Petesch argues, that while violence is not a good for the community, it produces new opportunities for women.



carried out at the community level by grassroots organizations and women's organizations, organizations that represent those very sectors of society that are generally excluded from participation at the formal negotiating table. (Marshall 2000: 20)

Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse offer an alternative frame which they term 'peacebuilding from below' arguing that

effective and sustainable peacemaking processes must be based not merely on the manipulation of peace agreements made by elites, but more importantly, on the empowerment of communities torn apart by war to build peace from below, marked by a recognition of the significance of local actors and of the non-governmental sector and the links with local knowledge and wisdom. (Miall, Ramsbotham, and Woodhouse 2011: 233)

Lederach refers to this approach as 'indigenous empowerment' and adds that "conflict transformation must actively envision, include, respect, and promote the human and cultural resources from within a given setting" (Lederach 1995: 212). Whether it is identified as peacebuilding from below, indigenous empowerment, or as this project will refer to it, bottom-up peacebuilding, it is in this frame that women's most effective contributions to peacebuilding are located.

Just as focusing on elite agreement is problematic, however, so is focusing on the local and indigenous. "[C]ommunities are sites of power asymmetry, patriarchy and privilege" (Miall, Ramsbotham, and Woodhouse 2011: 236). Patriarchy, an example of both asymmetry and privilege, is combated by women, both inside and outside of women's groups, every day in Northern Ireland. In choosing to meet their own needs and that of the community, women are an example of peacebuilding from below that has potential to do so much more than change the local community. They do not seek power or leadership, they fight to achieve peace as a "sense of order" (Parver and Wolf 2008: 55).

Lefranc posits that “‘bottom-up’ approaches work to transform individual prejudices and emphasize relations amongst ‘ordinary people’” arguing that

The individual becomes the only true agent of peace; a peace that is supposed to become a shared culture thanks to a gradual social diffusion, starting with the select few who are immediately connected with the international programs in question. (Lefranc 2011: 1)

Her focus on bottom-up peacebuilding is limited to dialogue-based practices but she argues that this individualization of peacebuilding seeks to circumvent the political system working to build a culture of peace rather than addressing structural causes of conflict. Lefranc concludes with the admonition that two facts about conflict ought not be forgotten:

First, that conflict brings *groups* to the fore... instead of individuals free from any social constraint. Second, neither a ‘cognitive’ relation to the past... nor adherence to humanistic values can provide reliable fortification from political collective violence. (Lefranc 2011: 18)

This is why conceptions of peacebuilding from below must extend beyond the individual agent of peace to include projects that build the group or community and encourage investment in group capacity as a fortification from political collective violence.

GSDRC, an NGO focused on Governance, Social Development, Humanitarian, and Conflict issues states that “bottom-up peacebuilding models have focused on conflict prevention, multi-track diplomacy and the creation of local capacities for peace” (GSDRC 2013). This description is embedded in a critique that these models under-emphasize statebuilding practices that are required to institutionalize stability and security. GSDRC argues instead for a combined approach. This project argues not for bottom-up peacebuilding to the exclusion of top-down, statebuilding models, but as part

of the ongoing process of building peace as a complement to equitable and just state structures, such as those provided for in the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland. With a functioning state in place, efforts must be made to engage society in at a minimum reducing the divide. GSDRC's inclusion of the "creation of local capacities for peace" is the element of bottom-up peacebuilding this project argues is where women are most effective.

Women, with their fundamental concern for subsistence and survival issues, are essential actors and leaders in grassroots movements, especially in times of civil strife. Women's participation in the quest for peace aid capacity-building in societies threatened by violence conflict. (Marshall 2000: 27)

An Accord Insight publication reported that "women's peace efforts can broaden the scope of peacebuilding by: promoting consensus and inclusion as a key strategy; advancing broader issues of social justice; building peace beyond the negotiating table" (Accord Insight 2013: 6). Women in Northern Ireland, it is argued here, have broadened the peacebuilding scope in their own communities although they often do not describe their work as such, their efforts to build a sense of order and build their own capacity is an active contribution to peace.

Women's roles in resolving conflict, as well as their involvement and participation in achieving and maintaining peace was the focus of UN Security Resolution 1325 (2000: 80) which stressed increasing women's activities in this field. There is also a strong body of literature which identifies the unique contributions of women, particularly in comparison to the disproportionate impact of conflict in their lives. "Resolution 1325's emphasis on human security has served as an impetus and focus for women's peacebuilding activism, which is increasingly understood as culturally specific and gendered in its processes" (de la Rey and McKay 2006: 144).

Anderlini suggests that:

. . . [W]omen are proving to be more amenable to working cooperatively, bridging political or ideological divides. That in many instances women are “trusted” more and perceived to be less corrupt, more dedicated to addressing people's needs, is in and of itself an important aspect of governance in the aftermath of violence conflict. (Anderlini 2007: 229)

While Anderlini is clear that women’s contributions to peacemaking are only a part of the story, she is also clear that women offer alternatives to the status quo, a potential for transformation in the way conflict and peace-making run their course. “To be true to them and their efforts, their achievements have to be qualified and contextualized because they rarely turn the tides completely” (Anderlini 2007: 231). It is paradoxical then that while women’s role in peacebuilding is crucial, their contribution is often unrecognized. How can women be an integral part of this process if it is so difficult to locate them within the process? This paradox is an artifact of the way these activities are investigated, rather than a sign that women are unimportant. Peacebuilding is often a focus on structures of power, institutions and formal processes of peace and it is this frame of analysis that perpetuates the gender bias in this process: women are often absent from formal processes and institutions.<sup>13</sup>

UNTerm, the UN terminology database uses the following definition:

In the aftermath of conflict, [peacebuilding] means identifying and supporting measures and structures which will solidify peace and build trust and interaction among former enemies, in order to avoid a relapse into conflict. It often involves elections organized, supervised or conducted by the United Nations, the rebuilding of civil physical infrastructures and institutions such as schools and hospitals, and economic reconstruction. A critical phase of peace which consolidates the progress made in peace process and fulfills the commitments in peace agreement. It takes place after violent conflict has slowed down or come to

---

<sup>13</sup> The Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition is an obvious exception to this statement and will be addressed in depth in what follows.

a halt. It consists of a wide range of activities including capacity-building, reconciliation and societal transformation. (UNTerm 2013)

This definition does more than address the formal processes of agreeing to end violence. It also includes a broader conception of activities that is more inclusive of women's peacebuilding. The final sentence draws attention to three linked processes, capacity-building, reconciliation and societal transformation that women in Northern Ireland actively engage in through women's centres in building peace in their communities. The first, capacity-building deserves definition for clarification.

Brinkerhoff and Morgan suggest that capacity is generated through five component capabilities:

- The capability to commit and engage. Actors are able to: mobilize resources (financial, human, organizational); create space and autonomy for independent action; motivate unwilling or unresponsive partners; plan, decide, and engage collectively to exercise their other capabilities.
- The capability to carry out technical, service delivery, and logistical tasks. Actors are able to: produce acceptable levels of performance; generate substantive outputs and outcomes (e.g., health or education services, employment opportunities, justice, and rule of law); sustain production over time; and add value for their clients, beneficiaries, citizens, etc.
- The capability to relate and attract support. Actors can: establish and manage linkages, alliances, and/or partnerships with others to leverage resources and actions; build legitimacy in the eyes of key stakeholders; deal effectively with competition, politics, and power differentials.
- The capability to adapt and self-renew. Actors are able to: adapt and modify plans and operations based on monitoring of progress and outcomes; proactively anticipate change and new challenges; learn by doing; cope with changing contexts and develop resiliency.
- The capability to balance diversity and coherence. Actors can: develop shared short- and long-term strategies and visions; balance control, flexibility, and consistency; integrate and harmonize plans and actions in complex, multi-actor settings; and cope with cycles of stability and change. (Brinkerhoff and Morgan 2010: 3)

Brinkerhoff and Morgan argue that capacity must be considered in terms of this complexity and that any of these component parts on its own is reductionist and these

components must be exercised. Developing these components, building capacity, it is argued, contributed to peacebuilding.

Capacity-building—as an integral part of peacebuilding—is understood as a process that reinforces individual, institutional, or community skills and knowledge, develops national structures, and promotes reconciliation on a sustainable basis. In peacebuilding it must respond to the particular challenges of the complex post-conflict setting. It is premised primarily on local ownership and responsibility, requires coordination among a variety of stakeholders at different levels, needs to be participatory and involves technical, financial, material, and infrastructural assistance as well as a transfer of knowledge and skills. (Turk 2009: 34)

This definition, taken from a ‘lexicon of peacebuilding’ (Chetail 2009b), describes the process of capacity-building, not only in terms of building skills and knowledge, but also in terms of the broader investment of ownership and responsibility among stakeholders to achieve it. Local capacity-building is an investment into communities, not only by those who seek it but by those who provide it. As will be described here, the women who seek training, education, and social experiences not in reach for them as individuals as well as the many women involved at the women’s centres who provide this, engage in capacity-building. Expanding out from this, the value placed on these activities by a range of stakeholders from community partnerships to city councils to decision-makers for funding at the Big Lottery fund, for example, to the EU who recognize these activities as qualifying for EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (PEACE) monies from the European Structural Funds Programme, funding that has been specifically designated to go to peacebuilding projects.

Turk argues that in contexts of underdevelopment, exemplified in Northern Ireland by communities with high levels of deprivation,<sup>14</sup> the inability of the state to exercise effective control can lead to conflict. Capacity-building contributes to support structures that strengthen the state and make it more difficult to slip back into violence. Initially, capacity-building was used as a tool to strengthen formal institutions; now it has been broadened to incorporate “strengthening the capacity of communities and civil society actors,” contributing to what the UN Development Programme (UNDP) terms human resource development (Turk 2009: 36). As the needs of underdevelopment are case specific, Turk argues that one of the key questions to ask in pursuing capacity-building is: Who is in need?

Returning to the UNTerm definition of peacebuilding, the third of three linked terms in the final sentence is societal transformation. Identity-based conflicts pose two groups in an adversarial relationship, in which they compete for access, resources and recognition. In this process the identity groups go through a process of mobilization in which identity is consolidated and purified, often in reaction to the *other* group.<sup>15</sup> This process is gendered such that women become defined by traditional, conservative and cultural roles.<sup>16</sup> The result is a patriarchal society. One answer to Turk’s question regarding who is in need of capacity-building post-conflict then, is women. The process of restructuring society focuses on equality. In Northern Ireland where equality was the

---

<sup>14</sup> Deprivation is measured in Northern Ireland by NISRA along several indicators such as income, employment, health, education, crime and disorder, proximity to services and others (NISRA 2010)

<sup>15</sup> See for example Anthony Smith. 1996. "Culture, Community and Territory: The Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism." *International Affairs* no. 72 (3):445.(Smith 1996)

<sup>16</sup> See for example Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis. 1989. *Woman-Nation-State*. New York: St. Martin’s Press.

primary claims of the civil rights movement that sparked the violence in the late '60s, equality measures that were built into the Good Friday Agreement have been instrumental in building gender equity into the processes of restructuring society to foster peace or at least to discourage the resurgence of violence.

The final linked process in the UN Terms definition of peacebuilding is reconciliation. Reconciliation may be happening in Northern Ireland but it is argued here that this is slow and incremental and may take generations to achieve. That being said, women, because of their gendered roles in a patriarchal society, are better placed to network and build relationships across the social divide. Women's centres pursue cross-community relations that may not result in sustained reconciliation now, but foster the possibility of reconciliation in younger generations.

This project argues that women are without question participating in peacebuilding activities and contributing to peace itself but that these activities take place in a space and through methods not readily acknowledged by formal or institutional peace processes. It is valuable then to identify the different ways, motivations, and expectations that women have in peacebuilding. "[W]omen's peacebuilding is culturally and contextually based and usually located at community and regional levels. Women's peacebuilding interests are likely to be shaped by local and regional concerns" (de la Rey and McKay 2006: 143).

#### UNSCR 1325

UN Security Council Resolution 1325, passed in October of 2000, calls on actors of all levels to include women in peacebuilding processes. It is an acknowledgement on the part of the UN Security Council that the nature of war itself is changing, that its



effects on civilians—specifically women—is changing and that as such, women cannot continue to be excluded from peace processes (USIP 2013). Gibbings describes UNSCR 1325 as the result of Member State pressure on the Security Council to be more democratic. One course of action to achieve this objective was meetings with NGO representatives and other non-member actors (Gibbings 2011). By 1998, an informal network of NGOs started taking shape examining the Women and Armed Conflict chapter from the Beijing Platform of Action (Cohn, Kinsella, and Gibbings 2004: 131). The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (NGOWG) formally organized in 2000 to “call for a Security Council resolution on Women, Peace and Security” (NGO Working Group on Women 2013).<sup>17</sup> “The first [goal of this advocacy] was to make gender a routinely considered component in the full range of work undertaken by the Security Council” (Cohn, Kinsella, and Gibbings 2004: 131).

This goal is one representation of gender mainstreaming, the tool or processes used in the UN discourse to achieve the norm of gender equity (Cohn, Kinsella, and Gibbings 2004: 134-135). This norm was in development in the late twentieth century as exhibited during the 1985 World Conference on Women in Nairobi which identified ‘women and peace’ as a UN priority (UN Women 1985), to the 1995 World Conference on Women resulting in the Beijing Platform (UN Women 1995) which called for equal participation for women in all forums. Paragraph 131 of this document states that:

An environment that maintains world peace and promotes and protects human rights, democracy and the peaceful settlement of disputes, in accordance with the principles of non-threat or use of force against territorial integrity or political

---

<sup>17</sup> “The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security initially consisted of Amnesty International, International Alert, the Hague Appeal for Peace, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, the International Peace Research Association and the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children” (Cohn, Kinsella, and Gibbings 2004: 140).

independence and of respect for sovereignty as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, is an important factor for the advancement of women. Peace is inextricably linked with equality between women and men and development. (UN Women 1995)

Pratt and Richter-Devroe argue that

Only once Boutros Ghali's Agenda for Peace in 1992 had introduced a bottom-up approach of peacebuilding to mainstream conflict resolution (to complement the dominant state-centric, top-down approach of peacemaking) that women achieved a major breakthrough with the Beijing Platform for Action. (Pratt and Richter-Devroe 2011: 491)

Five years after the Beijing Platform for Action, a review of its implementation found that 'Women and Armed Conflict', one of its areas of critical concern, had not been effectively implemented. Then President of the Security Council Anwarul K. Chowdhury of Bangladesh worked from within the council while the NGOWG worked from without. Chowdhury worked from a "long-standing engagement with the international women's agenda" and in March of 2000, coinciding with International Women's Day, he put the issue of 'women, peace and security' on the president's monthly work plan (Chowdhury 2011). Chowdhury describes the reaction to this 'soft issue' as ranging from disinterest to indifference and doubt that, as Bangladesh was new to the Council (January 200), the energy for this issue could be sustained. Eight months later, however, joint pressures from within and without the Council succeeded in achieving UNSCR 1325.

Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland, opened the Hanna's House All-Ireland "Women Building Peace and Security" Conference on UNSCR 1325 held in November of 2012 stating clearly how important it was "to take resolutions and turn them into mandates that can be made into realities...and can be turned into instruments of protection" and suggested that there was an urgency regarding UNSCR 1325 that it not

be allowed to “suffer the accusation of history of becoming merely rhetorical” (Higgins 2012). He goes on to commend the resolution as a “significant break from traditional views of conflict and its consequences” as well as its service to “focus the world’s attention on the very different affect that war has on men and women” (Higgins 2012). Though the policy implications of 1325 are not the focus of this project, the attention paid to women in peacebuilding roles is. UNSCR 1325 then is an important contribution to the literature on this topic.

Christine Chinkin, Keynote speaker at the conference, opened her remarks by quoting Jane Adams on her way to the International Congress of Women, held in the Hague in 1915:

We do not think we can settle the war, we do not think that by raising our hands we can make the armies cease slaughter, we do think that it is valuable to state a new point of view, we think it is fitting that women should meet and take council to see what may be done.

Here, Adams suggests not that women are more peaceful, not that women can end wars but simply that women have a contribution to make, a voice that ought to be heard.

Chinkin went on to clarify:

On the one hand, inclusion of women’s concerns emphasizes their relevance to the restructuring of social order and the role of women in making it effective. On the other hand, silence in a peace process on the position of women, perpetuates and institutionalizes their marginalization... It means women have to work...in a post-conflict world defined and sustained through the parameters of men. (Chinkin 2002)

Women experience conflict differently than men. These experiences are valuable in ensuring that the kinds of subjugation women often experience during conflict are not perpetuated by the structures of peace.

UN Security Resolution 1325 is structured into four pillars: prevention, protection, participation, and relief and recovery; “importantly, each are interlocking and interdependent” (Chinkin 2002). UNSCR 1325 was a watershed because it was the first time that the Security Council had directly addressed gender issues and called on states to recognize women as agents in security and peace processes (Pratt and Richter-Devroe 2011). Chinkin adds that women’s inclusion is recognized to be instrumental. It is not simply that women’s equality demands their participation but that women contribute to these processes. Specifically, Chinkin suggests that women “provide a tool for civil society seeking access to such processes” particularly as women are so rarely included in other capacities (Chinkin 2012). As a UN Security Council Resolution, 1325 is “cast in the language of the Security Council’s primary responsibility: the maintenance of international peace and security” (Chinkin 2002). In this way, it is tied to the broader processes of conflict resolution and post-Cold War transitions rather than relegated to the niche concerns of women’s issues and women’s equality. It is considered to be ‘soft law’.

Chinkin identifies four key themes that come through the resolution: participation, representation, capacity and agency. Participation in peace processes is, almost by default, top down. The angry masses are not invited to a quiet room to discuss the issues, but rather the elite, those in leadership positions, those with the power to either incite or quell the violence among their own ranks. The patriarchal structures that move to the fore with militarization produce a gendered politics in which women are rarely at the top.

Patriarchal, social and cultural systems exclude women from political participation and portray political power, resource, and wealth sharing as exclusively ‘men’s business.’ Women’s low representation in national political

life is thus replicated in peace processes and post conflict reconstruction. (Chinkin 2012)

The assumption is that including women and increasing their participation in these processes will ensure a gender perspective in peace building. This is not necessarily the case. The inclusion of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition did not ensure that the agreement included provisions that would increase women's participation post-conflict. For example, the Civic Forum was included but not continued. This body could have expanded the contribution of women already invested and participating in community development at a higher level. Further, the Coalition argued for the continuation of the election system for the peace talks such that parties would be elected rather than individuals such that women could be elected through pooled votes to their party rather than by the more public and competitive candidate system. This argument was dismissed. Perhaps in this instance the presence of more women in other parties could have contributed to a more gendered perspective in the final agreement. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against women notes that "if women's participation reaches 30 to 35 percent (generally termed a "critical mass"), there is a real impact on political style and the content of decisions, and political life is revitalized" (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women 1997). Rarely are numbers of women in political life this high in Northern Ireland.

In terms of contributing to a gendered perspective however, the example of the Coalition is unique. The Coalition ran on the argument that women ought to have a voice and so Pearl Sagar and Monica McWilliams and the contingent of Coalition members that served as their team, actively pursued a gendered perspective that would honor women's voices. In other cases, women have shown that they have their own agendas, that they

have political goals irrespective of being women. Simply adding women and stirring, as the saying goes, does not produce gendered perspectives in peace processes.

The opposite is true. We don't know what difference women would actually make but we do know that without women being included there is very rarely and inclusion within such processes of any gender equality. (Chinkin 2002)

Specifically, Bell and O'Rourke found that only 16 percent of peace agreements contain references to women and of those, it is only rarely that these "references illustrate good practice" (Bell and O'Rourke 2010). UNSCR 1325 clearly calls for women's participation but gives no guidance or suggestion about how this is to be achieved.

The issue of capacity must also be addressed. Women may simply lack the necessary skills required to contribute to these processes in substantive ways. Women's inclusion must be more than token, more than just having women in the room, making tea as is the joke in Northern Ireland. Lack of education, lack of experience, lack of self-confidence are issues that are taken up in Northern Ireland and addressed directly by women's groups in empowering women and building capacity. As will be discussed in the case of the Coalition, the women that came together for that experiment were fairly well-educated and came from a range of backgrounds that contributed to the success of the experiment. This kind of capacity is not always pre-existing in a given context. Peace processes combine a wide and varied range of issues such that building a gendered perspective into an agreement requires an understanding not just of the way these issues are gendered, but an expertise on the broader issue itself. Thus, to take seriously the inclusion of women, it is also necessary to commit to training and capacity building such that women's involvement is not only contributory but can be taken seriously by the men at the table.

Finally, agency is a reference to women as stakeholders with valuable experience that lends perspective to peace processes. It is interesting to note, as Chinkin does, that “the UN itself has never appointed a woman to be a chief mediator in an international process” (Chinkin 2012). In practice, UNSCR 1325 “means very little to women in conflict zones unless they know about it and have the security, resources and political space to organize and access decision-makers” (Cohn, Kinsella, and Gibbings 2004: 132).

No lasting peace can be achieved after conflict unless the needs of women are met—not only justice for the victims of crimes of war, but their active involvement in creating a society in which their rights are respected and their voices are heard. (Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2010)

This quotation, by UK Foreign Secretary William Hague, prefaces the UK Government National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 1325 Women, Peace and Security. This NAP “is intended to strengthen [the UK’s] ability” to pursue the goals of UNSCR1325 in “defence, diplomatic and development activity” (Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2010: 3). Specifically the UK has made commitments in the areas of training, programmes and operations for including the mandate of 1325 into conflict policy. The full extent of the NAP is admirable in the responsibilities shown and prerogatives taken to keep 1325, as President Higgins warns, from falling into mere rhetoric. Disappointingly for the purposes of this project however, is that the NAP ignores Northern Ireland as the UK has not recognized what happened there as a conflict. The women in Northern Ireland are therefore not subject to the promises made and attention given in the NAP to women in other conflict areas. As 1325 rests responsibility of these commitments with the state, the women of Northern Ireland are left unprotected by the resolution. Neither the Northern Ireland Assembly nor members of civil society were consulted in the adoption of the UK’s NAP.

The exclusion of Northern Ireland for the NAP has not been popular. The United Kingdom Women's National Commission has communicated disappointment regarding the UK's response to Northern Ireland. "Despite their skill and experience, women in Northern Ireland are consistently absent as contributors to peace-building and post-conflict initiatives" (United Kingdom Women's National Commission 2008: 10). The Commission goes on to advocate that 1325 be "fully implemented to ensure women's representation on all the institutions established as a result of the conflict in Northern Ireland" (United Kingdom Women's National Commission 2008: 44)

The Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP) has also criticized the UK Government for promoting 1325 internationally but not at home.

Women continue to be significantly under-represented in key institutions, including many of those set up directly as a result of the peace negotiations. For example, in relation to the Police Service for Northern Ireland, there has been an increase in the number of women from 13% in 2002 to 20% in 2006, a figure which is still very low. Of the 61 officers working on a part-time basis, 60 are women. Women continue to be very under-represented at senior level. The body which oversees policing in Northern Ireland, the Policing Board for Northern Ireland, is a public body consisting of independent and political members. Of a total of 19 members only 4 are women. In April 2007 the UK government established a panel to carry out a strategic review of parading in Northern Ireland (parades have been a source of tension and conflict over many years). Of a seven member panel 6, including the chair, are men. (NIWEP 2008: 5)

NIWEP recommended not only that 1325 be implemented in Northern Ireland but that this should include consulting women on the ground and working toward increased representation of women in decision making.

The continued marginalization of women ignores the gendered nature of conflict. By limiting peace talks only to belligerents, marginalizing peace groups, the international community is de facto legitimizing and normalizing violence, including the violence against women that continues post-conflict. 1325 does have transformative potential, it can transform into progressive politics, social relations, gender relations and sustainable peace; but where peace agreements sets



the power map of the future state, the omission of women carries through and undermines women's full citizenship in the post-conflict state. (Chinkin 2012)

The assumptions of UNSCR 1325 and the policy implications are not necessarily those of this project. However, the attention drawn to women and peacebuilding by the international policymaking community is useful in shedding light not only on the absence of such policies in Northern Ireland but on the fact that women's contributions to peacebuilding are easily overlooked. To resolve that women need to be included as a measure of policy communicates that they are not being included now: it requires a shift in thinking to incorporate them in formal processes. It is the argument of this project that women's peacebuilding is most often found at the community level, that their work is bottom-up. It is the argument of UNSCR 1325 that they must be incorporated more formally into peace processes.

### **Political Activity**

Women's marginalization in peace processes is intimately tied to their marginalization in formal political processes. The Accord Insight report discussed above, draws attention to the challenges of political participation for women in participating in peace processes. The example of the Coalition is cited as an example that women can achieve change despite the obstacles to their participation. Again the Coalition is rare because often women's inclusion in peace talks is reflective only of the party line. The Coalition's purpose as a party, however, was to draw attention to the perspective and experience of women. Therefore the women representing this party could both tow the party line so to speak, and be true to their voices as women. However, as has been the case in other contexts, the women of Northern Ireland have been politically marginalized post-settlement. "Women often influence formal political processes from the outside"

(Accord Insight 2013: 8). This speaks to women's contributions through community development and civil society. "Women... identified a lack of resources and capacity to engage in institutional politics, including deficits in funding, organisational and advocacy skills" (Accord Insight 2013: 8). Another oft-cited deficit in Northern Ireland is self-confidence.

If women are unwilling or unable to engage in political processes, then perhaps the simple answer is that civil society and community development roles are more appropriate to them. Catherine O'Rourke argues that

Calls for women's participation in politics are grounded in at least four broad claims about why women's participation matters, namely the justice claim, the different agenda claim, the politics of care claim and the "larger dream" claim. (O'Rourke 2012: 7)

The justice claim is a reference to a fair and representative political system representing women as half of the populace. Women are a large proportion of the governed and it is just that they be represented as such. The second claim, that of the different agenda, argues "that greater participation of women in politics would give rise to a "different agenda" in formal politics, one more concerned with the daily material concerns of childcare and family welfare, and the provision of basic goods to all" (O'Rourke 2012: 9-10). The different agenda addresses more than women's inclusion for its own sake making the implicit argument that women's inclusion will contribute to the breadth of gender roles in agenda-setting. However, this also assumes that women in politics will behave as women and pursue issues important to women as a constituency. The different agenda claim risks reducing women to essential roles. "Ironically, the idea

that women bring a “different agenda” of issues to processes... might in fact reinforce the basis for their continued exclusion from such processes” (O'Rourke 2012: 11).<sup>18</sup>

The politics of care claim is also essentialist as it presumes women's predisposition toward 'care work.' O'Rourke explains that this according to this claim

the greater number of women in politics would result in a qualitative transformation of politics away from the self-interest and individualism that motivates most contemporary political demands and towards a selfless and cooperative politics belonging to a higher moral order. (O'Rourke 2012: 11)

Women's propensity for care work and the care of the broader society is often translated into peacemaking and women's natural tendency toward a politics of conciliation. This view of women's participation is extremely restrictive and not widely appreciated in feminist theory as it is limiting not only in terms of how women's contributions are interpreted but in terms of women's agency and the range of choices for women that extend wider than this ideal-type woman as carer or woman as mother suggests.

The final claim that O'Rourke offers is the 'larger dream' claim in which increased women's participation is embedded in the larger dream of democracy. “Because women predominate in local community-based politics and civil society organizations, the “larger dream” is that the great inclusion of women in politics will alter the balance between citizens and representative in modern democracies” (O'Rourke 2012: 12-13). Women's participation is then a part of broader goals for a more participatory kind of democracy. This 'larger dream' claim knits together the bottom-up participation in peacebuilding that is the claim of this project, to more formal participation in politics.

---

<sup>18</sup> O'Rourke is here talking specifically about dealing with the past but the argument has broader application.

If women's greatest contribution to public activity and to peacebuilding is at the local level then their increased participation in politics would necessarily make this contribution public as well as bring the concerns of this work into formal decision-making.

As Kaufman and O'Rourke suggest, since the peace settlement in 1998, women are increasingly participating in local, grass-roots community initiatives that work across the two communities to bridge the divide. These bridges, relationships built between members of the historically opposing communities, are here referred to as *social cohesion*. The community work being done here, however, is often described by the women involved as being social, working in the community and voluntary sector and those who research and write about them also refer to these initiatives as focusing on "bread and butter issues"<sup>19</sup>, issues not perceived as priorities within mainstream politics with a capital or big "P". Yet these women are clearly involved in political activity, so it is necessary to reconsider what is meant and what is included by this concept.

The concept of political activity is difficult to define. It is both overly obvious and under scrutinized and hence is more easily identified than it is conceptualized. People vote, join political parties, run for office or participate in campaigns to elect people running for office. Each of these activities is overtly political because of its direct relationship to the formal institutions of governance.<sup>20</sup> Focusing a definition on these activities is limiting in some important ways. First, it focuses attention on activities that

---

<sup>19</sup> See for example Butalia (2001); Mulholland (2001); and Persic (2004).

<sup>20</sup> See the US code of Federal Regulations (US Office of Special Counsel 2001) or Canada's Public Service Employment Act (Public Service Commission 2010) for examples of institutional definitions of political activity.

are directly related to the formal institutions of politics and governance. Second, it limits the scope of political actors to those who participate in these identified activities, a limitation that is highly gendered.

[H]ighly institutionalized forms of government, increasingly bureaucratized and dominated by technologies that facilitate centralized control, daily erode space for genuine political action, for beginning something anew, for creating and sustaining social forms that allow human beings to be at home in the world. (Elshtain 1992: 118)

This project seeks to highlight what Elshtain terms 'genuine political action' as enacted daily by the women of Northern Ireland who, through women's groups and community activism, seek change for themselves and their neighborhoods in a society struggling to find stability post-conflict. This project asks: How do women participate; and focuses on derivative questions: Why do women pursue what will here be referred to as small "p" politics instead of big "P" or formal institutional politics? And what constitutes this realm of small "p" or "bread and butter issues" as it has also been referred to. It also addresses the larger question: Why do women participate at all in an environment that is patriarchal and divided, where their participation could be perceived as threatening to the status quo.

Lim (2010) differentiates between formal and process-oriented definitions of politics:

Politics, Formal Definition. A definition that limits "politics" to the *formal* political system, that is, to the concrete institutions of government (such as the parliament, the congress, and the bureaucracy) and to the constitutional and judicial rules that helped governments function. Put in slightly difference terms, this view of politics adopts a very narrow approach, one that locates politics only in the state and related institutions of national and local government. (Lim 2010: 39)

Lim is clear that this formal definition is narrow and offers an alternative process-oriented definition that we will come back to later. First, Merriam-Webster offers several definitions of “politics”. The first, second and fourth of which are directly tied to descriptions of government. As we are looking for broader conceptions of “politics” let’s look at the third definition:

3a: political affairs or business; specifically: competition between competing groups or individuals for power and leadership (as in a government). (Merriam-Webster 1990: 911)<sup>21</sup>

This definition, divested from the formal institutions of government, hinges on the concept of competition for power. This opens our understanding of politics to a much wider range of non-government or non-state actors; groups and individuals who may be understood to be political without fitting the earlier definitions. Groups that we define as civil society, a category that will be discussed further on, are political. There are several other elements of this definition that are worth considering. It is clear that the competition for power or leadership can be linked to government but is not necessarily so. Political activity then can be those activities tied to the competition for power and leadership in a wider spectrum of venues.

To define politics as a “competition” however, is still problematic. The concept of competition suggests winner and losers and while that is certainly true in some areas of formal institutions of politics, it is not necessarily true along the wider spectrum of venues. The IDEA Handbook on Women in Parliament states that this kind of political interaction is based on “male norms and values , and in some cases even male lifestyles . .

---

<sup>21</sup> The final entry in Merriam-Webster for “politics” takes a much wider approach: 5 the total complex of relations between people in society (Merriam-Webster 1990: 911). While it is valuable to consider the idea that all social interactions are political, this definition is now so broad as to be unhelpful to this project.

. [and] may often result in women either rejecting politics altogether or rejecting male-style politics (IDEA 2005: 35-36).” Perhaps this is what has happened in Northern Ireland. While this masculine view of politics may exclude women, it is also then likely that women conscientiously choose not to engage in this kind of political interaction. This should not be interpreted as women *not* participating or being actively engaged in politics, however. It is more a matter of this concept failing to include the alternative kinds of political approaches and activities that women are engaged in, activities based on “collaboration and consensus” (IDEA 2005: 36). Instead of viewing politics as a competition then, Lim (2010) chooses the language of “struggle” for power. The word struggle is open to a much greater range of interpretation, including but not limited to, struggles against poverty, structural violence, and ignorance, as well as against competing individuals and groups. Lim also augments his definition of power with “over the creation and distribution of resources, life chances, and well-being” (Lim 2010: 15). The struggle for power that defines politics then, is not power for power’s sake, it is much broader and complex.

Barnett and Duvall describe power as “the production, in and through social relations, of effects that shape the capacities of actors to determine their own circumstances and fate” (Barnett and Duvall 2005: 8) These authors go on to draw a conceptual distinction between the social relations of interaction and the social relations of constitution, linking the distinction to a common delineation: “power over” and “power to”. Concepts of power rooted in action and interaction . . . are then, “power over” concepts. Concepts of power tied to social relations of constitution, in contrast, consider how social relations define who the actors are and what capacities and practices

they are socially empowered to undertake; these concepts are, then, focused on the social production of actors' "power to". (Barnett and Duvall 2005: 10)

The choice of language in Barnett and Duvall's definition is appealing. Where common definitions focus on the material or force elements of power, they choose a much broader understanding of power in the language of "production of effects" and "shaping". To "produce an effect" is inclusive of a greater range of goals, behaviors and activities than the limited focus on force. Further, their inclusion of "power to" concepts being socially constituted invites conversations regarding, as Barnett and Duvall discuss, who the actors are, what "capacities and practices they are socially empowered to take." This discussion is at the heart of this project: Who are the actors engaged in post-conflict peacebuilding and what are their capacities?

To focus on definitions of politics and political activities that are limited to formal government institutions and actors, is to ignore an important segment of the population that are working to build stability in the wake of decades of violence from outside formal peace processes and governmental institutions. This focus ignores women. By definition, it also ignores the activities that they pursue; a focus on what has been referred to as small "p" politics or "bread and butter issues" because they are not formally competing for political power or leadership. Instead, they are "shaping" their communities, creating change in their neighborhoods that they see the formal institutions of government incapable of doing.

Women, a group that is often excluded from the official negotiation process, can play an important role in peacebuilding. The importance of their role is often not acknowledged due to the fact that their contribution can take non-traditional forms, may not be formally integrated in the peace process, or may be considered a part of their already existent gender roles. (Parver and Wolf 2008: 75)



Women's non-traditional forms, it is suggested here, offer potential for avenues of peacebuilding that more readily acknowledged forms cannot pursue.

Kenneth Boulding (1990) offers three categories of power, what he refers to as "fuzzy sets" because they are not perfectly clear or mutually exclusive, with which to conceptualize the different forms that power can take: destructive power which roughly corresponds to the behavior of threat, productive power which roughly corresponds to the behavior of exchange and integrative power which roughly corresponds to the behavior of love. Boulding then continues to associate the institutions with which this power is exercised. He links political-military institutions to threat, economic institutions to exchange and social institutions to love (Boulding 1990: 23-33). "Social power is the capacity to make people identify with some organization to which they give loyalty (Boulding 1990)." It is interesting to consider the potential for this kind of love to be expressed through the destructive power of ethnic or identity conflict the way it has been in Northern Ireland. There are obviously a multitude of ways in which these "fuzzy sets" can overlap and blend into other categories.

Since the distinction has been made between institutional and other forms of politics, one can assume that the destructive power and threat behaviors that are linked to it are well recognized and therefore less pertinent to the purposes of this project. More nuanced are the productive and integrative forms of power that are perhaps more descriptive of the activities women perform both in their traditional roles and in women's groups. Productive power may be the most inherently female since it is "found in the fertilized egg" (Boulding 1990: 25). It is also found in the production of nearly everything else, from artwork to industry and in its association with economic institutions

is less easily gendered than the previous initial assumption; particularly since the market is a public sphere and has therefore been historically dominated by men. Perhaps then integrative power, social power or the power of love is more readily associated with women's work. This is also problematic though, since the power to "inspire loyalty, to bind people together" creates in-groups and simultaneously out-groups such that it is also the power to "create enemies, to alienate people" and is therefore also both destructive and productive (Boulding 1990: 25). Boulding's categories are an interesting way of reconsidering conceptions of power but are ultimately "fuzzy" enough as to be useless here.

Common conceptions of power, politics and what it means to participate in political activities must be challenged. Otherwise, we risk invalidating the contribution of alternative approaches like those of women in post-conflict societies. Judy El-Bushra describes this problem from a different angle:

[M]en's power is limited by a variety of historical and institutional factors . . . whereas women, even while denied the outward, publicly acknowledged forms of power such as public political office, do exert forms of influence. . . . Everyday forms of resistance within existing gender relations frameworks provide scope for women to exercise political influence, often in ways that confound the outside observer. Women may claim rights, based on the *absence* of self- or group- interest, to approach powerful leaders to seek reconciliation. . . . Thus, in various ways, women exercise agency in the pursuit of self-identified goals, demonstrating that their lack of formal power does not deprive them of their capabilities or resilience. Yet this requirement to interpret the nuances inherent in the notion of power should not obscure the importance of gender as a major axis of power in its own right, and of gender relations as the site of both personal and institutional struggle by individuals to carve out niches of self-fulfillment. (El-Bushra 2000: 79-80)

In identifying gender as an axis of power, El-Bushra offers another challenge to the common and inadequate conceptions of power. A definition of power that is limited

to the dominant masculine experience is intentionally exclusive of other forms. It is here then, that we pick up the discussion of influence as a form of power.

*Potestas*, one Latin term for power, especially political power, control, supremacy or dominion. *Potentia*, another Latin term for power understood as might or ability, efficacy, potency, especially ‘unofficial and sinister’. Fascinatingly, these contrasting usages demarcate historically roughly the boundaries of male and female forms of power. (Elshtain 1992: 117)

Recognizing that there are different forms of power, aided by this gender lens, allows us to exceed the limitations of formal power that are generally associated with force or domination. It is interesting to note that the forms of power that demarcate the boundaries of female power, as Elshtain states, are interpreted as sinister. Unofficial forms of power would be in direct competition with official, therefore masculine, forms of power and would be interpreted as sinister because of the threat posed to the status quo. Clearly, the efforts being made to increase stability post-conflict by women’s groups is not sinister, but in challenging the status quo, in pursuing avenues that by-pass institutional politics, the efforts made at the community level could be translated as deviant from the patriarchal status quo. Recognizing alternative forms of power as valid diminishes the capacity of traditional power holders to ignore or invalidate the contributions made by these alternative or small “p” political actors.

As discussed above, Lim distinguishes between a formal, narrow, definition of politics and an alternative that he refers to as process-oriented:

A definition that views politics as a general process, one which is not confined to certain institutional arenas or sites. The “process” is centered on the ongoing allocation of resources and other sources of power in a society. Thus politics can occur on a wide range of settings, activities, and forms. (Lim 2010: 329)

Lim suggests that one implication of this definition is that it

clearly takes politics out of the governmental arena and puts it into almost all domains of life. These other domains include virtually all social and civil institutions and actors, such as churches, factories, corporations, trade unions, political parties, think tanks, ethnic groups and organizations, women's groups, organized crime and so on. (Lim 2010: 15)

Politics more broadly and correctly defined . . . extends beyond the activity of a few dazzling personalities or the agreements made by a handful of leaders. It is a complex set of conflictual power relations between classes, region, and religious systems struggling for control over scarce resources. (Bridenthal and Koonz 1977: 3-4)

Clearly then, women's groups are political actors.

This is true even if women do not see themselves as such:

In many countries, traditions continue to emphasize women's primary roles as mothers and housewives and to restrict them to those roles. A traditional strong, patriarchal value system favours sexually segregated roles, and 'traditional cultural values' militate against the advancement, progress and participation of women in any political process. Societies all over the world are dominated by an ideology of 'a woman's place'. According to this ideology, women should only play the role of 'working mother', which is generally low-paid and apolitical. (IDEA 2005: 44)

Women in many societies have eschewed politics; the women of Northern Ireland are only one case of this. Many state clearly that they are not engaged in politics and treat their experience with political processes with disdain. Instead, they respond to problems in their communities and wider societies by pursuing roles that fit the sexually segregated roles of traditional patriarchal societies as described above. It is interesting to note then, that Merriam-Webster defines activity as "3: natural or normal function" (Merriam-Webster 1990: 54). Women in post-conflict societies, the focus of this project, often describe their activities as simply those of a mother or wife; in other words, normal functions. Activities such as standing up against military blockades to bring food to a neighborhood under curfew can certainly be described as "motherly" in caring for their

extended families. To limit the understanding of these kinds of activities to an extension of a woman's traditional roles however, is to limit our understanding of its value, its contribution to society. Particularly as we look at post-conflict society and peace processes. To deny that the kinds of activities this project highlights are political is to deny that women are taking part in peace building. To limit our understanding of political activity to formal processes and institutions of government, is to ignore the role of women and ignore the value of a wide range of political activities that are contributing to post-conflict stability.

Moving forward, this project defines political activity as follows: politics is a process of engagement in the struggle for power. Power is here understood to represent a range of concepts that have been usefully summed up by the Latin: *potestas* and *potentia*. Political activity then is the state of being active in this struggle and the behaviors, strategies and goals pursued in this struggle.

### **Civil Society**

Women's political activity is embedded in local community activity as a form of bottom-up peacebuilding. It largely takes part in civil society. As Lim discusses above, women's groups are one instance of the domain of social and civil institutions that serve as political actors. In other words, they are a part of civil society. Civil society has been used to refer to a collective of actors, voluntary associations and "space" that exists between the individual and the state.<sup>22</sup> Civil society plays a particularly salient role in divided societies and post-conflict peacebuilding.

---

<sup>22</sup> See for example Edwards (2004); Putnam (1993, 2000); Sodaro (2008: 231).

Putnam argued that civil society has a direct role to play in the functioning of social institutions because civil society is itself built on the norms of reciprocity and associational life that create social capital (Putnam 1993). It is this associational life that “tends to shrink in a war situation, as the space for popular, voluntary and independent organizing diminishes” (Orjuela 2005: 59). People react to conflict by strengthening group bonds, reverting to primary groupings and separating from each other along the lines of ethnic identity (Belloni 2008, Pouligny 2005, Strand, Toje, and Samset 2003). These ethnic identities are reified during conflict, as those of Catholic and Protestant have been reified in Northern Ireland. Memberships in single-identity groups have historically only contributed to deepening the social divide. It has been argued, and is argued here, that membership in ascriptive groups can contribute to bridging the divide, what Paffenholz and Spurk (2006) describe as ‘community-building integration.’

Thus participation in social organizations helps to bridge societal cleavages, create civil virtues, and foster social cohesion also satisfying the needs of individuals to develop bonds and attachments. A pre-condition is that the self-organization of civil society does not take place purely under ethnic, religious or racist premises. (Paffenholz and Spurk 2006: 8)

Parver and Wolf contribute to this discussion by suggesting that civil society is in a unique position to contribute to peacebuilding because “[t]hese players can most fully understand the underlying social components of the conflict” (Parver and Wolf 2008: 71).

Civil society plays an important role, as Parver and Wolf claim above, in fostering social cohesion. Simply put, social cohesion is “the overall quality of relationships across groups” (Marc et al. 2013: 2). This term is particularly appropriate in discussing divided societies because the goal is evident in the figurative nature of the vocabulary: if divided society reflects conflict, then bringing societies together, building relationships and

making them more cohesive ought to be reflective of positive steps away from conflict. Put another way, cohesion is then “the glue that bonds society together, promoting harmony, a sense of community and a degree of commitment to promoting the common good” (Colletta, Lim, and Kelles-Viitanen 2001).

More cohesive societies enjoy higher levels of trust and collaboration, which provide the framework for groups to interact constructively on common goals and avoid, or move away from, the lower end of the fragility continuum. (Marc et al. 2013: 2)

Berger-Schmitt argues that cohesion occurs along two “societal goal dimensions”:

The first dimension can be shortly denoted as the *inequality dimension*. It concerns the goal of promoting equal opportunities and reducing disparities and divisions within a society. This also includes the aspect of social exclusion. The second dimension can be shortly denoted as the *social capital dimension*. It concerns the goal of strengthening social relations, interactions and ties and embraces all aspects which are generally considered as the social capital of a society. (Berger-Schmitt 2002: 404-405)

Conceptualized in this way, social cohesion is affected by two processes: equality and social capital. Where these are absent, as has been the case in Northern Ireland, social disintegration or divide will result. The societal goals of cohesion are then to reduce disparities and inequalities and to strengthen ties across the social divide. Easterly *et al.* define cohesion as “the nature and extent of social and economic divisions within society” (Easterly, Ritzen, and Woolcock 2006: 105). Where society is also divided along economic lines, institutional constraints limit the range of choices that elite can make to institute change.

It is the linkages between people and institutions that is the contribution of Chan *et al.* who define social cohesion as:

a state of affairs concerning both the vertical and the horizontal interactions among members of society as characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that

includes trust, a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioural manifestations. (Chan, To, and Chan 2006: 290)

Most common conceptions of cohesion focus on what Chan *et al.* term horizontal interactions—that is interactions among groups or individuals in society. The vertical refers to relationship between state and society. Accordingly then, steps taken to engender trust and a willingness to participate with the state on the part of groups who have historically been antagonistic of the state is building cohesion and, it is that argument of this project, peacebuilding. Civil society possesses the capacity to work in both directions.

In Northern Ireland, civil society seems to be thriving. “Three out of five adults are associated with a voluntary and civic organization. Most of these organizations work in community development and education and training” (Belloni 2010: 112). Belloni describes the development of civil society in Northern Ireland as a product of the political situation in which Protestant-dominated local government, left the excluded Catholic community to develop social networks as a coping mechanism to fulfill their needs as a community (Belloni 2010: 110). Though Protestants initially saw civil society as deviant and anti-state and therefore not in their interests, Protestant civil society has slowly developed as a mechanism for working-class Protestants to interact with the state and have their needs met. This development has led to a civil society based primarily on ethnic identity. “About three quarters of all organizations have management committees entirely or primarily from one community and more than one quarter of them are either wholly Protestant or wholly Catholic” (Belloni 2010: 113). Strengthening bonds among members of the same community “comes at the cost of preserving and perpetuating



differences and suspicions between the two communities” (Belloni 2010: 113). Belloni continues:

In-group social cohesion is very strong in Northern Ireland. Informal networks in deprived areas provide social and economic support and day-to-day safety nets to the most vulnerable. At the same time, memberships in support networks often depend on excluding others, contributing to distrust of wider institutions and hindering the development of intergroup ties. . . Not only do informal groups recreate existing communal divisions; the majority of formal organizations are also structured along ethnoreligious lines. (Belloni 2010: 119)

Belloni, whose entire piece on Northern Ireland’s civil society could usefully be quoted here, goes on to suggest that most “sites of socialization” fall along the existing social divide: “work, education, recreation, as well as housing, are effectively divided between the two communities, allowing most individuals to conduct their lives with very limited interaction with members of the other group (Belloni 2010: 120).” This persistence of divided civil society can at best prepare its members or set the stage for later intergroup efforts.

At its worst, single-identity work may increase segregation and reinforce the negative views of the “other side.” Since single-identity projects rarely incorporate systematic monitoring and evaluation, their impact remains speculative. It should be noted, however, that to the extent that single-identity work has no vision of eventually moving to cross-community work or of mitigating the conflict, it reflects an essentialist view of the conflict, perpetuating divisions within society. On balance, strong in-group solidarity in Northern Ireland has proved to be a hindrance to intergroup social cohesion (Belloni 2010: 121).

The issues of the prolonged social divide in Northern Ireland were addressed by a policy document titled *A Shared Future* in 2005, which argued the

need to establish over time a shared society defined by a culture of tolerance: a normal, civic society, in which all individuals are considered as equals, where violence is an illegitimate means to resolve differences, but where differences are resolved through dialogue in the public sphere and where all people are treated impartially . . . A society where there is equity, respect for diversity and recognition of our interdependence. (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister 2005: 3, 10)

Civil society is expected, if not entrusted to accomplish a great task in peacebuilding. “So far, civil society has been at its weakest in developing intergroup bridging ties—despite an apparent interest in community relations among civil society groups and activists” (Belloni 2010: 123).

However, as there is not space here for a thorough examination of civil society, what follows will focus on the roles that civil society plays and the contribution that women’s groups can make as members of civil society. Edwards (2004) suggests that civil society plays three distinct roles, each of which are exemplified in some form by the women’s groups examined in this project. The first role is associational life, where associations like women’s groups serve as ‘gene carriers’ for values like tolerance. The second role is the good society. In this role civil society pursues positive social goals, such as the education or job training of women in the community. The third role is the public sphere. In other words, civil society functions as a public sphere in which public dialogue can take place regarding public interest. Edwards argues that social change cannot be effective unless civil society performs all three of these roles.

Paffenholz and Spurk (2006)<sup>23</sup> suggest an analytical framework for assessing the different functions of civil society in peacebuilding: protection; monitoring and accountability; advocacy and public communication; socialization and culture of peace; conflict sensitive social cohesion; intermediation and facilitation; and service delivery. Since the protection and monitoring and accountability functions are intimately linked to formal/institutional political processes in conjunction with the fact that women's groups have not involved themselves in these functions, it is more valuable to focus on the remaining five functions. The research in this project sheds light on women's contribution in each of these functions. It will illustrate the ways in which women have advocated for their husbands who have been interred, for their families, for other women in similar conditions as well as for their communities and the broader community of Northern Ireland. Women's groups have started youth programs purposed and designed to remove at-risk youth from participation in the violence and to redirect them to productive activities that arguably contribute to the socialization of the next generation toward peace. Women's groups have also taken over service delivery roles that might be otherwise be taken on by a more stable and competent state apparatus. Each of these function of civil society are clearly exemplified by these women's groups in these and many other ways that the research illuminates.

The two functions of civil society that have yet to be addressed then are the conflict sensitive social cohesion and intermediation/facilitation functions. These roles are much more complicated. Cross-community women's groups exist in Northern Ireland but they are not nearly as prevalent as single identity groups. Ashutosh Varshney

---

<sup>23</sup> See also Parver and Wolf (2008).

suggests that “[w]hat matters for ethnic violence is not whether ethnic life or social capital exists but whether social and civic ties cut *across* ethnic groups” (Varshney 2001: 392). Civil society must be voluntary, yes, but for civil society to aid in regulating and managing conflict, these groups must be ascriptive, meaning, as in the case of Northern Ireland, that civil society reach across the social division, rather than reflect it. The social divide in Northern Ireland is deep and “[w]omen in society are naturally divided akin to society at large” (Paffenholz et al. 2010: 417). One might expect then, that women’s groups that are single-identity, that is, groups that are dominated both in terms of leadership and members, by one identity group or the other, will not contribute to build social cohesion, nor will they be able to play a role as facilitators across the ethnic divide.

Belloni argues that the service function of civil society is hindered by communal divisions:

Thus, existing spatial divisions limit opportunities for contact between members of the two main groups. Moreover, even when bridges are built, they might not have an effect on political life. Notably women’s organizations have developed a strong cross-community network to address common needs, but they failed to capitalize politically on this experience. The fate of the Women’s Coalition, which contested the 1998 elections and was able to win only two seats, illustrates the difficulty of turning intergroup ties into political power. (Belloni 2010: 125)

Belloni’s criticism regarding the capacity of women’s groups in service delivery hinges on the rather large assumption that political power is the goal. If instead the focus of these interactions is the contribution to peacebuilding, the contribution to a sense of order rather than political capital, these efforts can be more readily interpreted as productive and progressive. Women’s groups may serve these functions in interesting ways by virtue of the social roles they play as women.

Although the subordinate position of women often is an obstacle to participation in civil society peacework, it can also provide opportunities for engagement. The fact that women are often perceived as “nonpolitical” and “domestic” may, in fact, make it less dangerous to criticize warring parties and to call for change. (Paffenholz et al. 2010: 417)

The Institute for Inclusive Security suggests that

Women have access because they are often viewed as less threatening. Ironically, women’s status as second-class citizens is a source of empowerment, having made women adept at finding innovative ways to cope with problems. Because women are not ensconced within the mainstream, those in power consider them less threatening, and allow women to work unimpeded and “below the radar screen.” (Institute for Inclusive Security 2012)

Perhaps women are motivated instead by a need to fulfill the basic needs of their community, as a workshop of women activists in South Africa discussed: building peace entails the satisfaction of basic needs such as the need for food, water, and shelter (de la Rey and McKay 2006: 147). These motivations and the activities that are induced by them are at the heart of this project.

## CHAPTER TWO: SETTING THE SCENE

### Gender in Northern Ireland

As has been seen in conflicts across the globe<sup>24</sup>, women's participation during conflict rarely starts out as overtly feminist.<sup>25</sup> Instead, countless cases show women becoming actively involved through efforts to protect their families. In Northern Ireland, geography is political. The Troubles began with housing problems in the late '60s and the violence that ensued resulted in strictly communal neighborhoods.<sup>26</sup> Identity then is localized and often clearly demarcated according to geography. Both the Protestant and Catholic communities are governed by "strict codes of social and moral behavior"(Edgerton 1986: 61).

Gender has to be understood as the sexual division of power. Furthermore, gender is but one of the several criteria upon which society is organized: it is not the primary one, and is therefore almost always nested within other criteria with which it interacts. This means that we must always qualify gender by the other criteria which define the social structure of the societies of which they are part. (Miller 2001: 99)

---

<sup>24</sup> For a further discussion of women's activism during conflict and examples and case studies from other parts of the world, please see: Moser and Clark (2001); Jacobs, Jacobsen and Marchbank (2000), Ridd and Callaway (1986), Kaufman and Williams (2007), Giles and Hyndman (2004), and Goldstein (2001).

<sup>25</sup> A discussion of feminism will follow but for now, 'overtly feminist' refers to goals tied uniquely to women's needs, rights and issues and a focus on women's lives in general.

<sup>26</sup> See Rooney (1995),

The division of power between men and women in Northern Ireland must then be seen as a function of the dominant religious ideologies as well as the socio-economic factors that follow the dominant social divide. Scholars in gender and conflict studies have argued that male control over female group members is fundamental to controlling the group identity (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989). Anthony Smith (1996) refers to this as “consolidating identity” and identifies the purification of culture as one of its processes. Gender roles become solidified and distinctly separate in this process:

The construction of men as the representatives and agents and women as symbols for ethnicised and racialised collectives is detrimental to women in that it allows existing gender oppression to be legitimated to some extent, suppresses intragroup difference and thus has an essentialising effect . . . It also has a silencing effect in that it gives only men legitimate voice. In addition, constituting men as the mouthpieces of an ethnic or racial collectivity has another contradictory consequence. Since it constructs men as the ethnic agents, it constitutes women as marking the boundaries between groups: the ‘guardians of the “race.”’ (Lutz, Phoenix, and Yuval-Davis 1995: 10)

Women are often described as reproducers of culture and collective identity (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989, Charles and Hintjens 1998, Licht and Drakulic 2002). It follows then, that women’s sexuality, more specifically, the control over women’s sexuality is used to demarcate the boundaries of the group identity (Charles and Hintjens 1998, Milic 1993, Ranchod-Nilsson and Tetreault 2000). In maintaining this group identity, women are confined by a set of traditional sex roles (Roulston 1996). In Northern Ireland, to return to our case, women generally marry young and begin families almost immediately, living in tightly knit family communities. In an environment where “religious and political beliefs are almost synonymous, deviating from the accepted tenets of behaviour may be regarded as betrayal of one's community” (Edgerton 1986: 61-62).

In fact, deviation from this standard can threaten a woman's own belonging within the group (Rajasingham 1995, Schuler 1995, Wali 1995). The violence of the Troubles knits these communities even tighter, reinforcing both the community identity and the need for each member of the community to play their roles. For women, this means life in what Eileen Evason (1982) calls: "armed patriarchy."

The constraints of this patriarchal environment have not prevented women from standing together in some important and creative ways. Marie Mulholland (2001) writes about three women's centers that came together in 1989 to lobby collectively for a small grant allocation from the Unionist-dominated Belfast City Council. Money was given to the Downtown Women's Centre, considered a 'neutral' group, and the Shankill Women's Centre, a Protestant group, but the third center, the Falls Women's Centre which was the first center of its kind established by local Catholic women was rejected in a

barrage of slurs and insults that condemned the Falls Women as IRA sympathizers, leaving them open to attack from the loyalist death squads who needed no other rationale for choosing their targets (McIntyre 2004: 171)

The Council's decision and behavior were repugnant, but the response of the community was inspiring. The women from the other centers stood by the Falls Women, holding a press conference in the middle of the Catholic community. McIntyre describes the sight of Loyalist (generally Protestant) and Republican (generally Catholic) women standing shoulder to shoulder as "unparalleled" (McIntyre 2004: 171). The call for solidarity and the momentum from this event resulted in the formation of the Women's Support Network in



1990, an umbrella group that would support the development of women's groups in Belfast for over a decade.

A women's conference in 1991 in Belfast brought approximately four hundred women of both communities together to discuss a range of issues, showing a great willingness to work together across the communal divide to solve the problems that affected both communities. Eilish Rooney explains:

Had the conference been a gathering of men from the same communities discussing the same issues the event would have grabbed headlines and perhaps launched a turning point in politics in Northern Ireland. However, the conference was either ignored or barely acknowledged in the press and by the general public. One reason for this is that women are perceived as powerless. Women in these groups have utilized this "powerless" ostensibly unthreatening space, where what happens does not appear to count. (Rooney 1995: 45)

This is why women's activism in Northern Ireland has been frequently referred to as focusing on 'bread and butter' issues. They have not sought big 'P' political goals. Instead, they have organized around the issues that hinder the stability of their families and communities. They have organized to secure basic necessities for neighbors, training and education for out of work community members, daycare for members who have found work, after school activities for bored youth who have historically turned to participation in violence, and numerous other issues that they consider social rather than political.

There are always notable exceptions. It would be misrepresentative to suggest that women have never pursued big "P" politics, that is, formal, institutional politics. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition played an important role in the peace process, making women's voices from both

communities heard. Even with the Coalition however, their coming together was based on an understanding that their participation was non-sectarian and non-political except in the sense of working toward a peace settlement and advocating for a cessation of violence (Fearon 1999).

Women's groups seem to be functionally limited by the structure of Northern Ireland's divided society. Activities that challenge the group identity or boundaries are recognized as traitorous or at least disloyal (Schuler 1995). To do nothing at all is to be complicit in the status quo. Though the peace agreement brought a formal end to the violence, the two conflicting communities in Northern Ireland are still very much intact. They have maintained distinct, cultural boundaries as well as clearly delineated geographical boundaries. Only in small ways are these boundaries being chipped away. For example, when romantic couples of different religions move in together in one community neighborhood or the other, as described in "Belfast Girls" (Andersson 2006). These situations depend in large part on secrecy however. The accommodation of the peace agreement was a conflict management mechanism, not a mechanism for conflict transformation (Taylor 2001). The society remains deeply divided. Women within these divided communities strive daily for stability, for a normalcy defined at minimum as freedom from violence and access to basic needs fulfillment. They join groups in an effort to achieve these things and it is their motivations for participating in these groups, the goals and projects pursued by these groups, and the effects of these projects that are the focus of this project.

## Using the Language of Identity

Language is a tool that when used conscientiously and purposefully can communicate, empower, denigrate and even enrage. Language can serve as common ground but it can also be divisive, particularly in the local sense. For example, a shop window sign states: “WANTED: Reliable cook-general, Protestant (Christian preferred)” (Barritt 1969: 1). Protestant here refers to an identity group and an assumption of political loyalties, not to religious preference. This kind of discrimination is of course illegal today. Barritt explains that “one of the first things to understand is that Irishmen have given to the terms "Catholic" and "Protestant" a meaning which would be understood nowhere else on the earth” (Barritt 1969: Preface). Clearly there are theological differences between the two major identity groups in Northern Ireland but these differences exist in other places without the same political rivalries and associated violence.

A research project for the Community Relations Council (CRC) and the Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) describes it this way:

. . . the fundamental political dynamic in Northern Ireland remains a fundamental conflict over national identity between ethno-sectarian groups competing over territory and resources. Following common practice in Northern Ireland, we call these two groups Protestant and Catholic, but this does not mean we interpret the conflict as driven mainly by religion. Many people in Northern Ireland live lives that are largely segregated from people in the other main group, either living in geographically segregated spaces or, where this is not possible, adopting patterns of life that tend to avoid contact. The forces generating these divided and competing patterns of living are deeply rooted in history and although they are being modified to a small degree by contemporary economic and social forces (such as economic migration from the new member states of the European Union), they are not fundamentally changed by them. Despite the 'peace process' there remains a high degree of distrust between Catholic and Protestant people. A low level of sectarian violence remains, especially along interface communities where

segregated single identity areas about one another. (Acheson and Cairns 2006: 16-17)

Still, recognizing that the conflict between the groups is one of national identity rather than religious identity, the language of Protestant and Catholic predominates the rhetoric. In Belfast it is most common to hear people refer to themselves and the *other* group as Protestant or Catholic. It is often followed up, if the conversation goes deeper, with an explanation that these terms are not actually accurate, and further followed up with recognition that Belfast is increasingly not religious in terms of the number of people who actively attend church. Instead, there is an assumption made that these signifiers represent more than religious preference, that it extends to national identity and political beliefs.

To say that one is Protestant, to begin, is to assume that one makes claims to being either a Unionist or Loyalist. These terms are not synonymous. Unionist refers to a belief in Northern Ireland's union with Great Britain and assures Northern Ireland its place within the United Kingdom (UK). Loyalism refers to loyalty to the Queen as distinct from allegiance to the state of the UK. Those who use the term Loyalist deliberately, rather than as a reflection of the language of their community, make claims to be descended from the original Ulster planters. Loyalists are more vehement in their political claims and have generally been more supportive of the use of violence to achieve them. Paramilitary groups such as the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and the Ulster Defense Association (UDA) have strongholds in areas that are self-described Loyalist communities. Most books on the Troubles will have some discussion of the distinctions between these two terms (Coogan 1995, Fay, Morrissey, and Smyth 1999,

McCall 1999, O'Leary and McGarry 1997, Aughey and Morrow 1996).<sup>27</sup> However, on the ground in Belfast, communities hold fast to their identity as being either Unionist or Loyalist often without being able to explain what the difference is or why they identify with one over the other. One exception is people who describe themselves as Unionist and are referring specifically to their political choice to support the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP).

Further confounding the linguistic identity markers for this broad group is the fact that Protestant is itself, not significant of a cohesive religious community. Protestants can belong to any number of non-Catholic Christian churches, or, as implied by the help wanted sign mentioned above, can simply be non-Catholic but British. The 'quasi-religious Orange Order' was created, some argue, to unite the Protestants under a single umbrella, an organized force that Catholics believe historically has served to hold them down as second class citizens (Barritt 1969: 2). The Protestant community has also been described as being Orange. Another common saying in the rhetoric of identity in Northern Ireland is that there are 'shades of Orange and Green.' An individual may be Protestant, may live in a Unionist or Loyalist or Orange community but may not feel strongly about what that means, may only identify that way because they are not Catholic, rather than out of any feeling of antipathy or political competition. In other words, there are shades within these communities, there are those who identify with a party or even more aggressively with paramilitary groups, as deeply Orange, but there are those who are only a light shade of Orange as a result of not being Green. In an effort to be both consistent and representative of this complex of identity factors, this community

---

<sup>27</sup> For a more concise version see (Irish Conflict)

will broadly be referred to here as PUL, standing for Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist, recognizing that no single term is actually representative of everyone who might associate themselves with this broad community. More specific language will be used where accurate.

Many of the same issues apply when addressing the Catholic community. There is a greater sense of community among Catholics in one sense, because of a coherent shared theology. One Protestant community relations worker described frustration in disseminating information across PUL areas but described her ability to walk into a Catholic church on Sunday to make the same announcements and know that this information would reach the entire community.<sup>28</sup> However, the number of people who actively attend service is in decline so to suggest that the Catholic community is united in a religious identity is inaccurate. Instead, to suggest that someone is Catholic could more easily be unpacked to mean 'Irish', identifying themselves with an historical Irish identity. It is for this reason that a growing number of Catholic community members speak Irish as well as pursuing other culturally Irish traditions such as dancing. However, this has its focus point around Falls Road and the Gaeltacht quarter and seems to thin out the further removed you are from this area, so to suggest that this community is united by this culture is also not always accurate.

Politically speaking, Catholics generally describe themselves as being either Republican or Nationalist. Both of these political identities make claims for a united Ireland and refer to the 'six counties' as if they are only temporarily separated from Ireland. In comparison, PULs refer to the six counties as Ulster, preferring the reference

---

<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that this particular community worker's willingness to enter a Catholic church was decidedly rare.

to the Ulster Plantation by the British centuries ago. The distinction between Republicans and Nationalists is often more vague than that between Unionists and Loyalists. Rarely did participants in this project identify themselves as Nationalist with a capital “N”, instead identifying with the sentiment of an Irish nationalism, a shared and cohesive Irish nation that ought not to have been divided. Republicans have a tendency to be more outspoken about their political identity and often, though not always, those who claim to be Republican have a history, whether direct or through family members, to either the IRA or Sinn Fein and sometimes both. The competing political party in this community is the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP). With great emphasis on democratic process, this party distances itself from the more extreme Republicanism of Sinn Fein and is therefore recognized as being more moderate, though often this word is not used in a way that is meant to be complimentary. Returning to the language or color, those who identify with the SDLP are perhaps a lighter shade of green than their Sinn Fein counterparts and are often represented exactly in that way on political maps.

As with the PUL community, there are shades of Green, shades of Catholicism, shades of Republicanism and Nationalism. There are those, such as the Real Irish Republican Army (RIRA) or the Continuity IRA (CIRA) who are still actively engaged in paramilitary activities and still fighting the battle against the British. They are referred to as dissenters and are splinters from the IRA who ‘betrayed’ them at one point or another by being part of the peace process or by simply being too moderate. They represent the darkest shades of Green. On the other end of the spectrum, you have members of this community who see themselves as Catholic because they are not Protestant or not British. They might describe themselves as Irish but even this is complicated by the choices made

to stay in Northern Ireland instead of fleeing South. Acknowledging that this community is equally complex, and in an effort to stay consistent and representative, this group will be referred to in what follows as CRN standing for Catholic/Republican/Nationalist and its broad variations. Again, more specific language will be used where accurate and where representative of specific texts or speakers.

It should also be noted that the language of community speaks to a number of different things. Community can speak to the broader PUL or CRN communities, in this sense, signifying communal identity rather than a geographic one. This is much less often used in Northern Ireland, specifically in Belfast than the use of community that signifies the union of people and place. Community here is much more regularly used to signify clearly delineated space the way that ‘neighborhood’ does. Even so, these ‘communities’ though locally specific are also usually communally homogenous, or at very least they are spoken of as though they were. There are then broad issues that speak to the larger, regional ‘community’ of CRN or PUL but generally it is more accurate to describe CRN or PUL communities, in the plural.

### **Troubles: the Gendered Past**

When the Troubles were at their height, what was wrong was right and what was right was wrong. And you didn't live life in a normal way. It was normal for people in the communities but it wasn't normal for people outside that.<sup>29</sup>

There is no agreement as to the start date of the Troubles<sup>30</sup>, as the three decades of ethnic and political violence in Northern Ireland that came to an end in 1998 is commonly

---

<sup>29</sup> Michele Baird (CEO, Women's Information Northern Ireland), interview with author, October 4, 2012.

<sup>30</sup> For preceding history and analysis of causes of the Troubles see for example, (Aughey and Morrow 1996, Coogan 2002, Mulholland 2003, O'Leary and McGarry 1997)



known, except to locate it in the late 1960s.<sup>31</sup> Instead, experts find commonality in the events and movements that signify its beginning. T.P. Coogan, recognized expert on Northern Ireland, argues that the Troubles were already centuries old by the time Columbus discovered the Americas arguing that “[t]he tragedy of the last twenty-five years did come upon the two islands both gradually and suddenly—like bankruptcy” (Coogan 2002: 1). Most scholars locate the start of the Troubles much more recently. In a section entitled ‘The End of the Unionist Hegemony’, Cathal McCall (1999) describes Prime Minister Terence O’Neill’s policy of pervasive economic and social modernization for Northern Ireland in 1963 as simultaneously raising Catholic hopes and Unionist fears. The resulting public policy decisions “continued to offend the day-to-day sensibilities of middle-class Catholics who had believed that O’Neill’s commitment was genuine” (McCall 1999: 40). Catholic expectations however did not dissipate which could have fueled the events in the years that followed. Patrick Brogan begins his discussion of the Troubles with a peaceful civil rights march in Londonderry, July of 1969 that was violently attacked by the B Specials, a Protestant paramilitary group (Warner 2006: 418). Begona Aretxaga suggests that the Troubles began in 1968 with the Catholic civil rights campaign that was itself incited by the structural discrimination against Catholics in housing allocation and public employment and left “Catholics ... twice as likely as Protestants to be poor and therefore to be excluded from electoral politics” (Aretxaga 1997: 30). Access to housing, jobs and universal franchise were the primary goals of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) that started at Queen’s University in

---

<sup>31</sup> Carmel Roulston describes the Troubles as beginning in the 1970s (Melaugh 2011b: 44).

Belfast in 1967 and grew rapidly through the Catholic population outside the university (Aretxaga 1997: 31).

Out of this grew the People's Democracy, an unstructured and militant body, which quickly drew up six specific demands:

One man, one vote  
Fair boundaries  
Houses on Need  
Jobs on Merit  
Free Speech  
Repeal of the Special Powers Act  
(Arthur 1996: 13)<sup>32</sup>

It is interesting to note, as Cynthia Cockburn (1998) does, that this truly was a civil rights movement. Influenced by the civil rights movement in the US, Catholics called for 'one man, one vote' (Cockburn 1998: 19, Arthur 1996: 12, Buckley and Lonergan 1984: 76).<sup>33</sup> This was not a movement for nationalism, not a call for independence, but a demand for justice and fairness for a minority population. However, the Catholic civil rights marches were "ruthlessly repressed by the local police force recruited exclusively from the Protestant community" (Cockburn 1998: 19-20). Aretxaga also notes that "[t]he regular police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), was overwhelmingly Protestant and the part-time voluntary force (known as B specials) was exclusively Protestant and known for its anti-Catholic practices" (Aretxaga 1997: 31).

It was not a women's rights movement either. Attitudes regarding gender equality were not well-developed during this time in Northern Ireland. Poverty and unemployment were widespread and women were becoming a greater force in the economy as some of

---

<sup>32</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland, see Paul Arthur (1996)

<sup>33</sup> The irony of the language used in 'one *man*, one vote' in the context of this projects, is lost neither on Cockburn nor on this author.

O'Neill's modernization and development programs brought in new industries to replace declining textile and garment manufacturing. Still, however, women were not given an equal wage, daycare centers that had been opened during World War II had since been closed and female breadwinners were often still responsible for childcare and domestic responsibilities (Roulston 1996: 45, Buckley and Lonergan 1984: 85). Roulston (1996) also adds that because the communities were so entrenched in their religious identities, Stormont was extremely cautious about reforms that might offend local sensibilities meaning that religious conservatism played a large role in determining women's rights and gender roles in Northern Ireland.

O'Neill's government actually offered minimal social reforms at the end of the day and even though these were not enough to satisfy Catholics, Protestants, who had long enjoyed an advantage over Catholics, felt that this advantage was being eroded and became frustrated. Women in Protestant communities often said in the course of research, "when you have the most, you have the most to lose." Tensions between the two communities came to a head in August of 1969 when Protestant mobs and local police attacked Catholic homes and businesses in both Derry and Belfast forcing Catholics to flee into more secure Catholic areas (Aretxaga 1997, Cockburn 1998). Catholics were not without their share in the violence however as Protestants were forced from their homes in Catholic majority neighborhoods as well. Families that had been forced out as a minority from one neighborhood would take the homes of an *other* family in a neighborhood where they were the majority. "It was a case of swopping houses" offered one resident (English 2003: 102). This communal violence in early August turned into full-scale riots with Catholics and Protestants throwing rocks, bottles and petrol bombs at

each other with police in the cross-fire. One riot that began at the site of the Protestant Apprentice Boys' parade in Derry on August 12 would spread to Belfast.<sup>34</sup> The destruction would leave thousands of mostly Catholic people homeless "An official report suggests that between 1969 and 1972 between thirty and sixty thousand people were driven out, 80 percent of them Catholic, 20 percent Protestant" (Cockburn 1998: 20). The early years of violence consolidated community lines, the peace lines would come later but as tour guides in Belfast are fond of saying, the British may have built the peace walls, but we told them where to put them.

This cleansing or purifying of communities may suggest that the people of Northern Ireland simply ticked a box for membership in the Catholic, Protestant or other community and then followed the course. There are, it is important to note, numerous accounts of mixed loyalties and compassion that crossed the lines. Baroness May Blood for example recounts growing up next door and across the street from Catholic families and playing with Catholic kids after she came home from her Protestant school.

So we knew about one another's family and all that so when the Trouble started, that all separated and we had to move. We were burned out of our home by Protestants because we chose to help our Catholic neighbors. Because they came one night to burn the Catholics next door out and my father stood in the way and said 'get a grip, this woman's done no harm, she's only rearing a family'. That's okay, away they went but a fortnight later they set fire to our house, so it's all history now.<sup>35</sup>

Another oft heard saying that seems to follow up any conversation discussing communal violence is that 'there's good and bad on both sides.' Violence was enacted both across and within communal boundaries.

---

<sup>34</sup> Parades and marches, as will be discussed in what follows, have been a consistent source of agitation and violence in Northern Ireland.

<sup>35</sup> May Blood (Baroness of Blackwatertown MBE), interview with author, August 17, 2012.

Then nationalist Stormont MP for Derry, John Hume, warned: “If the situation is not to deteriorate further with serious risk to human life then the Westminster government must intervene at once and take control” (Bayliss, Smith, and Owens 2008: 102) On August 14, 1969, the British army was sent into Northern Ireland where its long-term presence contributed to, rather than mitigated, the violence in the region, adding to the Catholic distrust of the British (Aretxaga 1997: 31). “The soldiers were at first welcomed by Catholics as protectors, but their brutal treatment of civilians quickly came to be felt as a profound injustice” (Cockburn 1998: 20). The Protestants saw the presence of the security forces as an indication that they were alone and would have to protect themselves. Coogan describes the Ulster Defense Association (UDA) growing out of this volunteer vigilantism amidst the barricades by 1971 (Coogan 2002: 154). The Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) was similarly motivated to protect its own communities though it had been active in its present form since 1966.<sup>36</sup>

The actions of the British were primarily of local concern until the events of January 30, 1972 attracted international attention when 13 unarmed civilians were killed in a demonstration in Derry when paratroopers opened fire in what has since become known as Bloody Sunday (Arthur 1996, Cockburn 1998). “The British government was now being internationally blamed for events in Northern Ireland without having complete political responsibility for policy” (Arthur 1996: 18). In March 1972 direct rule from

---

<sup>36</sup> The original UVF was organized to fight Irish Home Rule in 1912 and honored in memorials and such throughout Northern Ireland for their role and deaths in large numbers at the Battle of the Somme in 1916 (2013b). The later reincarnation of this organization is often granted the infamy of taking the first life of the Troubles, an elderly Protestant woman who lived next to a Catholic pub that the UVF bombed. They are similarly credited with firing the first shots of the Troubles that same month in 1966 (Coogan 2002)58

Westminster was imposed replacing Stormont (Arthur 1996, Cockburn 1998, Mulholland 2001).

The Irish Republican Army, which had lost its base support in a waning campaign from 1954-1962, was revived when it seemed clear that Catholics were not going to be protected by the British security forces but actually needed protection from them (Fraser 2008: 213). It split in 1969, introducing the Provisional IRA (English 2003), known more commonly as the Provos and later in the Troubles simply as the IRA, which focused its political goals on “the issue of Irish unification” and targeted its paramilitary activities against the British security forces though attacks on Ulster Protestant organizations were also frequent (Cockburn 1998: 20). By this time, a call for civil rights was transitioning to a full nationalist movement. It was clear following Bloody Sunday that there could be no non-violent civil rights movement. Buckley and Lonergan (1984) also suggest that the civil rights movement had since been infiltrated by the IRA and used for propaganda.

Three deeply intertwined practices of the security forces had gendered affects that led to women operating either outside of traditional roles or redefining appropriate behaviors within traditional roles: house searches/raids, curfews and internment. To begin talking about house searches and raids, it is valuable to begin with the Falls Road Curfew of 1970 and what Aretxaga terms “the staging of female solidarity” (Aretxaga 1997: 56). On Friday June 3, 1970, at 4:30 P.M., following a tip regarding weapons and explosives being hidden at 24 Balkan Street, British security forces raided the house and found a cache of weapons as crowds gathered to watch the scene. The crowd grew into a full riot after a military vehicle, deliberately—according to some accounts—killed a man standing on the curb. Accounts vary regarding whether the riot started before or after the man was

killed but the result was that at 10:20 P.M. a helicopter flew over the area broadcasting via loudspeaker that a curfew was in place and people found outside would be arrested (Aretxaga 1997, Morrow 1996, Fraser 2008).

By midnight an armed force of fifteen hundred surrounded a population of barely ten thousand civilians . . . In the following days, residents made reports to the press and citizens' defense committees about soldiers wrecking houses, smashing windows and doors, and stealing property. Young men were forced to lie flat on their faces on the street or to kneel with their hands at the back of their heads while being interrogated. The whole episode lasted three days, during which five civilians were killed. (Aretxaga 1997: 56)

Geoffrey Warner's account lists "six civilians killed and fifty-seven wounded as opposed to eighteen soldiers wounded. There were 337 arrests" (Warner 2006: 326). Warner also lists the "twenty-nine rifles and carbines, three submachine guns, eight shotguns, thirty-two revolvers, nineteen automatic pistols, 24,973 rounds of ball ammunition and 621 shotgun cartridges" that were confiscated in the search but goes on to ask if this bounty was worth the price paid (Warner 2006: 326). This "enactment of state power" did nothing but antagonize the Catholic community (Aretxaga 1997: 69).

The reason Aretxaga refers to this event as the 'staging of female solidarity' is that the Falls Road curfew was lifted as a result of 3,000 women who marched through the security cordon to bring milk and bread to residents who had been trapped in their homes for days. She cites several newspapers in describing both the women marchers and the security forces' reactions, suggesting that this contravention of the curfew was only successful because it was women. The security forces would not have stepped aside for 3,000 men bullying their way through the barriers.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> It is interesting to note that other sources on the Falls Road curfew do not mention the women's march at all and address women only to say that the curfew was lifted temporarily to "allow housewives to buy fresh food supplies" (Coogan 1995).

The curfew itself kept women from fulfilling those roles of wife and mother by preventing them from caring for their families. The march that ended the curfew was made up of women. They were the ones who could successfully get through the barricades with provisions. Even so, women were not an instrumental solution. It was not men who organized the march, men did not gather to strategize. The plan was made and carried out by women. Finally, it is important, according to Aretxaga, to note the role of milk as both staple and metaphor in the Falls Road curfew. The women who marched carried no political slogans, they merely carried placards accusing the security forces of being “women and child beaters” (Aretxaga 1997: 58). This was a show of female solidarity. The women marching with milk and bread are merely one instance that supports the claim that women are not interested in politics, they are interested only in ‘bread and butter issues’ (Mulholland 2001, Persic 2004, Butalia 2001).

A number of other gendered elements are important both in this particular event and in the house searches/raids and curfews that followed over the course of the Troubles. The first is that the searches took place in a physical space that is gendered. Women are traditionally recognized as guarantors of hearth and home. Where men are public social actors, women operate in their houses, “a space culturally defined as feminine” (Aretxaga 1997: 69).

Internment and the widespread raids of people’s homes blurred the boundaries between household and communal space and at certain moments practically erased them. Army raids transformed the secure intimacy of the household into a vulnerable space, susceptible to arbitrary violation by armed men. That the raids, accompanied by intimidation and destruction of property, were conducted in the predawn hours when people were asleep, unprepared, and disoriented on awakening deepened the feelings of violation and vulnerability. The disproportionate and arbitrary nature of the searches, which sometimes included sealing off whole streets, asserted their character as collective punishments. The



minimal results, obtained by the army and police in thousands of house searches conducted in the nationalist districts, make it difficult to avoid characterizing the raids and concomitant arrests as ritual of authority. (Aretxaga 1997: 69)

House raids are a violation of feminine space. It is not a coincidence that the Falls Roads curfew has come to be known as ‘the Rape of the Lower Falls.’ House raids serve as a gendered barrier to family normalcy (Edgerton 1986, McIntyre 2004, Mulholland 2001). Alice McIntyre suggests that raids serve three separate purposes: to uncover guns and ammunition; to find information; and, perhaps less explicit but more importantly, to intimidate and humiliate the Catholics (McIntyre 2004: 51):

It was normal for them-- and for the women of Monument Road--to have their houses raided many times over. One of the women told me that when her mother thought the army would be raiding the house, she would “clean it up so no one, not even the Brits, could say that she was a dirty fenian” (a pejorative term for Catholic). Mary told me that she used to sleep in her clothes on Sunday nights because most of the raids occurred on Monday morning about 6a.m. Since she had to go to work, she “figured that rather than be late, I’d be ready to go after the Brits ruined the house. Either that,” she said, “or I’d get lifted and if I was goin’ to prison, I intended to go fully dressed.” (McIntyre 2004: 53)

Women, often with their husbands interned, were left to literally pick up the pieces, replace torn up floorboards, right furniture and reorganize emptied cabinets and dressers. This does not even begin to address the emotional toll in the wake of such a violent intrusion into the most private aspects of their personal lives and the strength required to care for their traumatized children.

Further adding to the belief that “[t]he ‘security forces’ were . . . a threat to working-class homes” (Edgerton 1986: 67), was the introduction of “internment (imprisonment without right of early trial) for suspected ‘terrorists’,” which Cockburn refers to as the “suspension of] what remained of justice in Northern Ireland” (Cockburn 1998: 20). Internment, enacted on August 9, 1971 at 4:30am, was intended “to dismantle

the IRA that was allegedly reorganizing itself after abandoning armed activity in 1962 . . . through sweeping arrests in nationalist areas” (Aretxaga 1997: 64). T. P. Coogan gives a thorough account of “Operation Demetrius, as the internment drive was termed” suggesting it was “botched in practically every respect one can think of” (Coogan 2002: 149). He describes outdated lists of IRA leaders, incomplete descriptions of suspects and a large number of innocent men who were nonetheless beaten before being released. None of the men ‘lifted’ in Operation Demetrius were Protestant.

Internment was to continue until 5 December 1975. During that time 1,981<sup>38</sup> people were detained; 1,874 were Catholic/Republican, while 107 were Protestant/Loyalist. Internment had been proposed by the Unionist politicians as the solution to the security situation in Northern Ireland but was to lead to a very high level of violence over the next few years and to increased support for the IRA. Even members of the security forces remarked on the drawbacks of internment. (Melaugh 2011b)

Paul Arthur describes this policy as a disaster because

Many innocents, and few of the actual [IRA] leaders were detained. The Catholic population was alienated . . . especially after well-founded allegations of brutality were laid against the Army’s treatment of internees. (Arthur 1996: 17)

“In a matter of hours, average citizens lost their basic freedoms” (Public Service Commission 2010: 91). This policy was a disaster in the day-to-day lives of the women of Northern Ireland as well as a political disaster for Stormont. “Many households were deprived of their main source of income, and hundreds of women were left to raise their families alone for the foreseeable future” (Aretxaga 1997: 64). Callie Persic (2004) describes internment as “a significant marker in the lives of local women:”

Internment is of importance for working-class Catholic women because while it virtually paralyzed the movement of men, it did not have the same effect for women. Instead, internment had a massive influence on women due [to] the high number of arrests of local men. Women were often at the fore of protests and

---

<sup>38</sup> Buckley and Lonergan use a lower number of interned people: 1576 (Buckley and Lonergan 1984)

pickets on behalf of husbands, fathers, sons and partners. In the aftermath of internment, women developed strategies in an effort to alert the community to the army's presence and established the famous 'hen patrols', which were a response to the army's night-time 'duck patrols'. (Persic 2004: 169)

Women became public figures by banging on trash can lids. Internment had a number of other unanticipated effects on women's agency. In the absence of their interned men, women became single parents in numerous cases for a year or more at a time before husband/fathers were returned. Women whose roles had been socio-culturally restricted had new needs and new demands on them in their efforts to maintain their families. Persic goes on to explain that the 'ordinary woman,' women who might not have been active in the civil rights movement or otherwise considered themselves political became political in protesting and picketing on behalf of their interred men (Persic 2004). Women became politically engaged in large numbers, entering "male arenas of political organization and street protest, their actions were interpreted according to the parameters of dominant gender ideology" (Aretxaga 1997: 66). Aretxaga adds that the assumption that women were merely victims of these policies led to the assumption seen in other conflicts, that women were safe. Women were, for a time at least, invisible to the security forces or at most a nuisance impeding their progress. This in turn led to a manipulation of these roles, and ultimately a reversal in which women were able to transport ammunition without harassment or would chaperone men in public to ensure that they were safe. It was women who patrolled the streets.

The role of women as protectors of the family and community established during internment provided a context in the years to follow in which women became likely candidates for future community activism. (Persic 2004: 170)

For these reasons, and perhaps countless others, women became much more active in community groups in the 1970s. Internment, house searches/raids and curfews gave women a cause, compounded by issues of poverty and housing. As has been seen in so many other conflicts, women became actively involved as “guardians of family life” rather than in fighting for their own needs as women; “the mobilization of women is often achieved by reference to their responsibilities in and for the family rather than by appealing to their individual needs or interests” (Melaugh 2011b: 45). Women also mobilized to protect their families and communities against paramilitary and communal violence.

Communal violence did more than affect the activities of women, it affected how they thought. Much of the violence in the early years of the Troubles affected Catholics disproportionately. These acts of violence and violation against Catholics compound feelings of victimhood at the hands of Protestants. Alice McIntyre, who worked with the Catholic women of the Monument Road community, relates a conversation she had with a group of women at the Reccy community center regarding the murder of two Loyalists (and therefore probably Protestant) on the Road. The women discussing the event related how they cheered and encouraged those responsible for the killing to get away and hide.

I was disturbed, but not surprised, by the women's responses to the killing of two loyalists. The women knew the two men who had been murdered and explained to me that they were members of a paramilitary group, and therefore, knew they were putting themselves in danger of being killed. For many of the women of Monument Road, as for many other people living in the North of Ireland, the conflict that exists in the six counties is a war. People die in wars. As Lucy stated, “People die for their convictions. And we have our convictions and they have theirs.” (McIntyre 2004: 58)

It is the discussion of Loyalist paramilitary groups that offers a different slant on the beginning of the Troubles. Richard English suggests that it was the formation of the new Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) in 1966<sup>39</sup> in response to fears of a new IRA uprising and the three people that they murdered the first year marks the beginning of the Troubles (English 2003: 99-100) . English seems eager to point out that the deaths at UVF hands predate the formation of the Provisional IRA by several years and so, the Troubles themselves clearly cannot be laid at the feet of the IRA. While the initial rioting and communal violence of the Troubles laid the foundation for decades of deep distrust and outright hatred between Catholics and Protestants, it is the security forces and paramilitaries that have the most blood on their hands. According to the Cost of the Troubles Study, responsibility for 80 percent of the deaths during the Troubles can be found with the paramilitaries. Two hundred and fifty-four of those deaths were attributed to the UVF itself. Of course Republican organizations were responsible for a much greater death toll. The IRA itself was responsible for the deaths of 1,684 people (Fay, Morrissey, and Smyth 1999: 168-169).<sup>40</sup>

The dilemma in reporting these kinds of details regarding the Troubles, as they relate to this project, is that the personal dimension of violence, the individual stories of trauma and loss are themselves lost. To simply suggest that paramilitaries killed 80 percent of the people who died violently in these decades says nothing of the violence itself. It says nothing of how these people died, how they suffered, or anything about those who witnessed and were traumatized by these events. Nor does it say anything

---

<sup>39</sup> The original UVF was formed in 1913 (English 2003: 9-10)

<sup>40</sup> For a more thorough statistical analysis of the 'human costs' of the Troubles, see: Fay, Morrissey and Smyth (2008), Northern Ireland's Troubles.

about those who were left behind to suffer without their loved ones. It does not tell stories of Protestant and Catholic women sitting nervously in their living rooms, waiting to hear if their husbands or sons were among the dead security forces of a bomb blast, or the victims of security forces shootings. It says nothing of the hours spent traveling to and from prisons to visit loved ones and the bodily searches sustained for these visits. Further, it says nothing regarding the perpetrators of these acts, for it is paramilitaries, particularly the IRA that led to the association between the Troubles and terrorism. A case study of Northern Ireland could be written that contained chapter after chapter full of tales of women suffering in one form or another but none of these would be complete without a discussion of women's participation in the violence in general and in terrorism specifically.

Fay et al. state that 91 percent of the people killed during the Troubles were men (Fay, Morrissey, and Smyth 1999). This suggests that men suffered the most but as Fay et al. suggest, "The indirect effects of these deaths are not revealed in the data – these are probably more visited on women" (Sodaro 2008: 161). The sustained loss of men in a patriarchal society affects change in a number of unpredictable ways. By their *Ard Fais* or annual congress in 1972, the Official Sinn Fein/IRA began "formally accepting women as equals" (Buckley and Lonergan 1984: 80). Sean MacStiofain, first chief of staff of the Provisional IRA suggested that in "a society in which women's contributions are usually underrated," women's contributions to the counterinsurgency were overlooked by the security forces (MacStiofain 1975: 218). They were not overlooked for long. On January 1, 1973, Elizabeth McKee "became the first woman picked up under the Detention of Terrorists order," she was 19 years old (Buckley and Lonergan 1984: 80). McKee may

have been the first to be detained but in the months that followed, numerous women are arrested for terrorist acts (Buckley and Lonergan 1984: 81). Sinn Fein and the IRA are often recognized as being more egalitarian in their organization.

While there were women participating in violence, so too were there women calling for peace. Women Together was a non-sectarian group launched in 1970 that organized community projects, including “Peace for Christmas” in 1971 which was sadly unsuccessful. Women for Peace, founded in 1972 had similar goals and called for a cease-fire with the same results (Melaugh 2011a: 78-79). More successful than either of these was Peace People. On August 10, 1976 a tragic accident would catalyze two women, who would later win a Nobel Peace Prize, to begin the Peace People movement calling for an end to the violence in Northern Ireland. The event that set this movement in motion was the death of three young children: six-week old Andrew, eight-year-old Joanne and two-year-old John and their mother, Anne, who was physically injured in the accident and would eventually take her own life as a result of the emotional damage the accident caused. Moments before the accident, IRA man Danny Lennon was shot dead by British Security forces while driving his car. Lennon’s death left the car careening out of control into the Maguire family who were out for a walk (Merriam-Webster 1990, Public Service Commission 2010: 92, Morrow 1996). The response was not of blame for either the IRA or the British troops which “seemed almost profane” (Peace People), but to condemn the violence itself. Mairead Corrigan, the aunt of the children who were killed, became the spokesperson for the family and called for an end to the violence. She also visited Danny Lennon’s mother, because this woman too had lost her child (Public Service Commission 2010: 92). So touched by these events was Betty Williams, an

unrelated woman in a nearby community, that she began collecting signatures on a petition for peace. Several rallies were held over the course of that August and the movement, initially called the Women's Peace Movement because the rallies were mostly attended by women, became the Peace People. The Peace People is notable for a number of reasons but for the conflict in Northern Ireland, it would symbolize the first time that large numbers of Catholics and Protestants would come out into the streets together, calling for peace. It is also notable because, as mentioned earlier, its founders Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams were awarded a Nobel Peace prize for their efforts in 1977 (Edgerton 1986, Morgan 1996, Sales 1997). Though the Peace People have continued their work, they lost their momentum after accusations that in being non-sectarian, they were not vocal enough in condemning the perpetrators of state violence or in addressing the inequalities that led to the violence; they also suffered from internal instability and though still operating, are much smaller today (Melaugh 2011a: 84).

The United Campaign Against Plastic Bullets is another example of the work of the women in Northern Ireland to end the violence in their neighborhoods. Emma Groves was shot in the face and blinded by a plastic bullet fired by British soldier who was raiding a neighbor's house. She formed the United Campaign Against Plastic Bullets with friend Clara Reilly. Emma was described as having "lost her sight but not her vision" as she began compiling statistics of the use of plastic bullets, brought the families of those who had suffered from the use of this weapon together to protested against its use (McCarney 2007, Wikipedia 2011).



It is easy to understand why the two communities seem to distrust each other so completely. A documentary titled “Belfast Girls” follows two young women from either side of the peace walls that separate the Protestant and Catholic neighborhoods of Belfast. Mairead, the Catholic girl describes a particular street that is Catholic on one end and Protestant on the other saying that:

You know your own. You know your own people from your own community. They know their own. We know our own. If them were to walk up here we would know they were a Protestant and they'd probably get attacked. They wouldn't know our faces so they would know we were a Catholic and they would probably attack us. I wouldn't walk down there until they started walking up here, until the reassurance that you are able to, and not get hurt. But I can't see it happen, like. I don't believe it would happen. You wouldn't be able to build trust. You wouldn't. ...One person can't make a difference. They always turn against you for trying to make a difference. ‘What about your history?’ ‘Don't forget your roots.’ (Andersson 2006)

This kind of distrust might be expected during the Troubles but one would hope it had dissipated since the 1998 Good Friday Agreement that formalized peace between the two communities over a decade ago. Yet, the documentary was made in 2006, following these young women as they navigate their way around physical and social barriers to cross-community interaction. Both young women face concerns about dating men from the *other* group. Christine, the Protestant young woman describes her hopes for her daughter’s future:

I would like to think hopefully when Kasey is at my age it has all been sorted out, it's settled down and she can get on with her life, not have to worry about what school she wants to go to, who she makes friend with and stuff, you know. What kind of boyfriend she has, he can be black, white, Catholic, anything, as long as she's happy. (Andersson 2006)

## **CHAPTER THREE: THE AGREEMENT AND THE DIVIDE**

### **The Coalition and the Peace Process**

They understand that writing an agreement is just the paper it's written on but it's much harder to make it and build it.<sup>41</sup>

The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, or simply the Coalition, is the exception that proves the rule, or at least the argument being made here, that women seem to prefer in overwhelming number to engage in local, community oriented, small "p" politics, rather than pursuing formal, institutionalized big "P" politics. The Coalition, a party made up of women from a diverse field of community and voluntary sector groups as well as business, trade unions, the arts, etc., serves as an anomaly, a blip on the political radar. This party served temporarily as a bridge, bringing women out of the small "p" of local involvement into a formal engagement with big "P" politics. It extended their influence by linking their local issues and concerns into a shared party voice, chaired by Monica McWilliams, from the Centre for Research on Women and from a CRN community, and Pearl Sagar, a social worker from a PUL community.

The big thing that happened here was the formation of the women's coalition, shook people up because it's quite something to break the mold in this part of the world, where this kind of typical sectarian politics has been in existence, and they

---

<sup>41</sup> Monica McWilliams (Associate Researcher, Transitional Justice Institute, Chair in Women's Studies, School of Politics, Criminology and Social Policy, University of Ulster, former Co-Chair NIWC), interview with author, August 8, 2012.

did that, and they were women and they were articulate women, very capable women, efficient women and they've come from all different places. So that also kind of shook the political parties a bit as well, well they say 'we've got women', the Unionists will say 'we've always promoted our women,' in fact they could have stood women in safe seats on many occasions and didn't. Sinn Fein came up more, showed to be more adept at getting women to the forefront of politics. ...well women have also rejected politics because it was a line to violence, they equated politics to violence, so that was another thing that they didn't want to touch.<sup>42</sup>

Politics in Northern Ireland has historically been played out by parties, both official and unofficial, with guns. The very concept of politics has been conflated with violence. This is exacerbated by what is commonly referred to as the absence of politics in Northern Ireland once Stormont was disbanded and governance was handed down directly from Westminster. Power struggles in Northern Ireland were handled, for the better part of three decades, by parties, by the paramilitaries and their political wings or security forces, with guns. When it came time to broker peace the major parties involved did not include women. Avila Kilmurray, dubbed the 'power behind the throne' by several members of the Coalition, who now serves as the Director the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, remembered with a laugh the challenge that the Coalition served in forming itself as a party:

Well the idea of the Coalition came from two points really. One, there had been a concern over an extended number of years about the lack of women's voice in political decision making. Indeed there had been a conference held about a year before the Coalition was established, in the rural college in Draperstown, . . . it really just laid out a range of options but it didn't come to any conclusive decisions. Just a whole range of views for the people who were at it. So that was one. . . . The second aspect was the fact that just before the elections in 1996 to the Peacetalks, the British government, the Northern Ireland office of the British government issued an outline about how the elections would be conducted but also named a number of parties that would contest the election. That was originally ten parties. And some of us felt that that was just anti-democratic. A

---

<sup>42</sup> Lynda Edgerton Walker (Women's Rights Activist, Instructor, former member of the NIWC), interview with author, August 29, 2012.

party government does not decide who will contest an election. So out of almost sheer badness, we sort of suggested—what would happen if there was a women's party? Which of course threw the establishment into a state of headless chickens.<sup>43</sup>

Bronagh Hinds, now Senior Associate with DemocraShe and consultant with a number of organizations that strive to increase and improve women's participation in politics, recalls the decision to form the party and the process of naming it:

On a Monday night at about half past five... I wrote a letter and asked Monica McWilliams, Kate Fearon from Democratic Dialogue, Margaret Logue from Derry Women's Centre so we could cover the Northwest, Kathleen Feenan from the working class women's information groups... , and May Blood and myself so that I could send it out in their names to inviting any women's group that we could find across Northern Ireland to come to a meeting at the Ulster People's College, where I was the director. So that was done... Michael McCabe rang and said, a number of people have written to us about this, including you... we accept your case and we are minded to open this process to more than the existing political parties, can you tell me the name of your party and who is your party leader? And I said what?... Because this is a different kind of electoral system and we don't have a law for it, we have to include all of the parties in the legislation. And I said, oh we've called a meeting of women to discuss this and I don't have the answer can I get back to you. And he said well I have to send a draft over...to London. He said, I'll leave you out and you can lobby to get back in and I said No don't do that, I'll ring you in half an hour. ... I rang May Blood didn't get her, rang Margaret Logue didn't get her, I rang Kathleen Feenan...I'm fine with whatever. Rang Monica, ... so we brainstormed and we came up with the name Women's Coalition and we went well Women's Coalition will be at the bottom of the list, besides, its initial will be shortened to WC which mean watercloset, so let's call it Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, that'll get it up the list, actually we would have been better at the bottom of the list because finding—we didn't know there'd be so many people and finding somebody at the middle of the list could be difficult. So then we had an argument about who'd be the party leader, no you be the party leader, no you be the party leader and finally I said okay Monica, leave it with me, so she went off [to Australia for 10 days]...believing that I would ring Chris McCabe and say okay, the name is Women's Coalition and I'm the party leader, I rang him up and said okay the name is the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and Monica McWilliams is the party leader.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Avila Kilmurray (Director, Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, former member NIWC), interview with author, September 10, 2012.

<sup>44</sup> Bronagh Hinds (Commissioner, Women's National Commission, former member NIWC), interview with author, November 26, 2012.

May Blood, or more formally Baroness May Blood, got her start as a trade unionist working as a 'millie' in the linen mills of Belfast, though she likes to tease in relating that she was in fact a 'hooker,' because of the large hook she used in her job at the mill. May has a history of community involvement, focusing now on early education and integrated education. Her commitment to Northern Ireland is so well-known and respected that it earned her the title of Baroness and a place in the House of Lords at Westminster. For Baroness May, the interesting part of the story of the Coalition was the reaction it received:

We had six weeks to form a political party. And we were told, I was told by many numerous male politicians 'You're whistling in the wind, women don't want to be in politics.' I done an RTE program with a Unionist politician and he said 'You do realize May, if women go into politics, it'll be the end of family life as we know it' I said what does that mean? But he really believed that, that if women dared enter into politics, it would do away with the wee woman in the house, rearing the family. That was his job, don't you dare. We formed the women's coalition and we were told women weren't interested and we couldn't fill in the forms quick enough for them to stand. We had 78 women stood. And in actual fact we were the 8th party out of ten parties at the talks, we were the 8th one. And it astounded people.<sup>45</sup>

The Coalition was a threat, not only to politicians who already had a place, but the wider community, political and otherwise who simply 'recognized' that this was no place for women. For women to take part in the talks, to recognize them in this public way threatened to shift gender norms, that it would be the 'end of family life as we know it.' Perhaps the politician May spoke with was right, perhaps the example of the Coalition served to exemplify that women were capable of much more than their household responsibilities. The truth of the matter is that women were already breaking out of those traditional roles; the Coalition was just a more public challenge.

---

<sup>45</sup> May Blood (Baroness of Blackwatertown MBE), interview with author, August 17, 2012.

Forming a party was only a start however. The Coalition, once formed, still had to be elected. This was made possible through the specific ‘format’ of the elections, as Avila describes:

Essentially their intent was to get the paramilitary groups at the table. Or the proxies, the paramilitary proxies at the table. Everybody knew that Sinn Fein was going to be elected but the issue was how do you get the UDA, the UVF there? So, the format they come up with was that you have your normal 18 constituencies across Northern Ireland, and that they would be competed for on the basis of proportional representation which is what we've had for a number of years, and that that would then return 5 or 6 people for each constituency. But that was not going to guarantee at that stage that the Ulster Democratic Party, which was the UDA party and the Progressive Unionist Party would actually get elected. So what they did was, they said on top of the usual PR constituency based election system, they would have a cumulative vote for each party standing across the whole of Northern Ireland. And so that you could put up x number of candidates and even if they didn't get elected in their constituency, you add up their votes together right across Northern Ireland so all the Progressive Unionist candidates that stand, their vote is added up and the top ten parties that got the highest cumulative vote would each get two representatives. And they did that. .... So I'd done political science so I looked at that and reckoned that—I went back and looked at the previous local election results, where actually when you looked at the cumulative vote, it didn't take much to get elected in terms of those top ten. So we reckoned that 100 votes for 100 women would get enough votes to get into the peace talks, into the top ten parties. And that's what we based it on. So in essence what we did when we set up the party, we actually put an ad in the paper looking for candidates. And we basically sort of said, if you agree with these three principles- human rights, social inclusion and equality, and are a woman and are prepared to stand for the women's coalition, we don't even care if you're a member of another party, you can stand. We knew that they weren't going to get elected in the constituencies, but every vote that all those women got, added to the cumulative total. And we reckoned that if - and it didn't work out this way- each of them got 100 votes, it would be enough to get in. and it was. So that's how we managed to get into the peace talks.<sup>46</sup>

At best, women seemed hesitant to stand for election. Running as a candidate would mean they would be subject to a kind of publicity and scrutiny most women had never experienced, nor did they want to. “[A]s soon as we told women that, because they

---

<sup>46</sup> Avila Kilmurray (Director, Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, former member NIWC), interview with author, September 10, 2012.

were all afraid of running, getting elected, we said actually, you're doing a service, you're collecting votes so that we get enough all across Northern Ireland and they got it.”<sup>47</sup>

Under the system in place, the women who ran as members of the Coalition could stand under a Coalition banner, firm in the knowledge that they were not candidates themselves but vote collectors.

Yeah, it was a big decision to for us to take to stand for election and to move into the big “P” politics because women had been most active in the small “p,” informal community politics and were real community leaders and in fact informal politicians, making decisions, holding budgets, running resources, centres, etc. But had been quite turned off what they saw as main stream politics and it hadn't got a great name here in terms of the tribal, adversarial nature of the politics and so when the peace talks came it was quite a difficult decision and there were those that said that we might jeopardize all that had gone before in relation to the respect that community politics had got and women's role in community politics . . .by becoming a political party and that there were lots of political parties and they got hooked in and became just as adversarial as everyone else, whereas if the women stayed in community politics they'd see the outcome of their work, that they had innovative, original ways of doing their work whereas it was much more status quo and you were joining the status quo going into the mainstream and becoming a political party. And we took on that debate and said if you just remain in the margins, if you stay outside you're always shouting in and some might hear you and some might not but if you're inside they have to listen and if you're inside you have the potential to make change from inside. So we were outsiders who became insiders.<sup>48</sup>

The Coalition itself was an argument that women’s voices would not necessarily be represented by those representing their communities. Women’s movements and women’s issues are often conscientiously subverted to the goals of nationalism. In standing for a range of issues that did not fit the major social divide, these women

---

<sup>47</sup> Bronagh Hinds (Commissioner, Women’s National Commission, former member NIWC), interview with author, November 26, 2012.

<sup>48</sup> Monica McWilliams (Associate Researcher, Transitional Justice Institute, Chair in Women's Studies, School of Politics, Criminology and Social Policy, University of Ulster, former Co-Chair NIWC), interview with author, August 8, 2012.

challenged the content of the political discussion itself, let alone the way the discussion took place.

Another thing that we deliberately did was to try and crack the mold of political parties. And actually sort of challenge how you saw politics. Cos if you saw politics as you know, active citizenship and people being active, we thought that we'd a perfect platform for actually looking at ways of doing that. We knew we were never going to get elected in terms of managing government, so we could afford to do silly things, you know? So for example, we took the decision that we would have two leaders, one Catholic and one Protestant, which again of course caused—the ones that caused the most discomfort to were political correspondents, were journalists. They could not handle doing things differently. They didn't know what to do with us. They call us up and say we want to talk to your leader and we say which one? You know, they really were out of their comfort zone. Actually in fairness to him, people like Tony Blair thought it was a great wheeze. I mean they didn't mind. Some of the more traditional politicians took great offense to it because they interpreted it as standing up their style of politics which it was... We refused to have political policies because we said well there's no point in spending months dreaming up agricultural policy, we're never going to be minister of agriculture so instead we took the three principles of inclusion, human rights and equality and we said we would proof our policy stands on those three principles. That actually was very good in terms of a position of conflict transformation because it meant you weren't having silly arguments of subsection three on a policy that was never going to see the light of day in terms of governance. You were actually having more macro discussions around those principles. And because we deliberately set the party up—the other thing is, we didn't call it a party, we deliberately called it a coalition because... we didn't preclude people who had dual memberships of other parties joining us, as long as they accepted the principles. And that was basically saying if someone feels strongly about the border or whatever, that's fine, the Women's Coalition is not going to... get hung up on that. We're actually interested in a broader politics, rather than getting hung up on the issues that other political parties have made their default positions. So we had a number of members who were members of the Alliance party in the coalition, ...we trolled across a range of different backgrounds.<sup>49</sup>

Women in Northern Ireland had for many years built up a capacity to do this, to engage with women on the other side of the 'constitutional issue,' as it is called, and 'leave politics at the door' as is the saying at women's centres, in order to focus on shared

---

<sup>49</sup> Avila Kilmurray (Director, Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, former member NIWC), interview with author, September 10, 2012.



problems and real solutions. For example, Bernadette McAliskey's pregnant daughter was in prison and in need of medical care. This could have driven a wedge down the center of the Coalition. To be a part of the team that went to see her would have been a very Nationalist move, thus alienating Unionist member. However, arguing firmly on the basis of human rights, one of the Coalition's three principles, they were able to send a doctor, a member of the Coalition to tend to her. This did not split the Coalition, members who argued against the tending to a Nationalist agenda gave way on the principle of human rights. Avila gives further examples of the Coalition's principles allowing the party to play roles that could not have been played by any other party. Parties were excluded at multiple points because of their relationship to paramilitary activities. Sinn Fein, the DUP and the PUP were each excluded at one point for this reason.

We maintained contact with those parties while they were excluded to keep them up to speed on what was happening on the peace talks and that could have gone down lines—oh you shouldn't be talking to Sinn Fein, you shouldn't be talking to loyalists but we said well look, irrespective of politics, the principle is there so we'll do it on that bases. So the principles were actually quite important as a shared platform for discussion, over the years.<sup>50</sup>

At an All Ireland UNSCR 1325 conference in Dublin's Croke Park in November of 2012, a Sinn Fein member publicly acknowledged the work that the Coalition put into keeping Sinn Fein informed. Former members of the Coalition commented afterwards that it was the first time they had received any recognition by Sinn Fein for their determination to maintain their principle of inclusion.

---

<sup>50</sup> Avila Kilmurray (Director, Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, former member NIWC), interview with author, September 10, 2012.

They went forward with their three principles and used those to mediate not only relationships within the Coalition but across the communities that their members represented.

Well, they had been used to crossing into each other's communities in a way that many of the men couldn't because it was too dangerous for them. They would have been targeted as strangers and not known. Whereas we had long term networks operating in every community... so we were quite accustomed to knowing the nuances of how people thought in both the nationalist and unionist communities whereas the other parties we were facing were either nationalist or unionist and the Alliance party was not a community party . . . It was more a very professional, seen as a middle class party, whereas we were seen as having our roots in the community... And they had lots of skills of listening and not always talking about their own certainty about what needed to happen. They were accustomed to trying to listen through dialogue, working out what needed to happen next, breaking things down incrementally, taking things step by step, putting in lots of confidence building measures, talking and facilitating meetings between all the different groups. These were all skills that women had brought from the community that they were accustomed to, weren't new to but they were skills that the other parties weren't accustomed to. The other parties were extremely efficient in terms of knowing what their own parties were thinking but not what other parties were thinking and that's not a good base to start negotiations from. So that was certainly one, also we were prepared to write papers where other parties, we discovered, were not responding to the invitation from the chair of the peace talks to write papers. We spent a lot of time talking around what the subject was, how we would frame the question, what kind of possible responses and put forward options and recommendations. We discovered the others weren't doing that, either because they wanted to keep their cards close to their chest until the very end, or because they felt too nervous at that stage to share their thinking with each other in case that was seen as giving too much away. We had very little lose and everything to gain by talking, sharing, listening, dialoguing, engaging and that's what we did.<sup>51</sup>

The Coalition must have been difficult to deal with. They managed their party differently, communicated differently, and shed all the trappings of the established parties.

---

<sup>51</sup> Monica McWilliams (Associate Researcher, Transitional Justice Institute, Chair in Women's Studies, School of Politics, Criminology and Social Policy, University of Ulster, former Co-Chair NIWC), interview with author, August 8, 2012.

Marching season were [sic] vicious during the talks and the SDLP left and the women's coalition came under pressure from Sinn Fein and the SDLP, why are you still in with those Unionists, and the Unionists then started attacking the women's Coalition as the next Other, and people in the Women's Coalition were breaking down, in tears, they were being physically jostled, they were being abused, it was very stressful, now I'm not saying it's life threatening... but it was very, very stressful and ... May [Blood] came to me and said to me "they can't leave the forum and this is why, once they leave the forum the women's coalition will be classed as a nationalist group' and she was right because the people who had left were nationalist groups. And abstentionism in the Unionist mind because the nationalist haven't for such a long time, probably still didn't take their seats in Westminster, abstentionism is a nationalist tactic, so we had to say to the women, no you can't leave and by the way our policy of inclusion is that we include ourselves even in the most difficult situations and we insist on the inclusion of others, we insist others include themselves and we insist that others don't exclude others. That's our line... they turned victimhood into something very empowering... what the public saw, when they saw men on men vicious language and demonizing and everything else, sure that had been the culture accepted for twenty years, because all they saw were male people, when the SDLP removed themselves, mainly you saw men in suits against men in suits. Suddenly, the public saw it against women and they were horrified. And you know what happened? They started getting bad press. So women standing up and saying we're not going to be victims here, and this is unacceptable behavior, it did prove that women could run and could be leaders... they were all saying 'these wee women don't know anything about politics'... but no, this is abnormal politics in an abnormal society and we're not having any more of it and they didn't know that we were doing this as a complete strategy, to actually name and shame the behavior that was going on because that behavior was being used to block discussions and progress so neither the parties or the media knew it, [US Senator George] Mitchell<sup>52</sup> got exactly what we were at and came out to say 'actually these women are right.'"<sup>53</sup>

The treatment that the politicians handed out to the Coalition was reflective of the kinds of antagonism that had characterized politics in Northern Ireland. On one hand it could be argued that the women of the Coalition got what they asked for. They wanted to be a part of the system, this is what the system looks like. On the other hand, it has been argued that this kind of politics was abnormal and it took public broadcasts containing

---

<sup>52</sup> US Senator George Mitchell was US President Clinton's Economic Envoy to Northern Ireland who chaired the peace talks.

<sup>53</sup> Bronagh Hinds (Commissioner, Women's National Commission, former member NIWC), interview with author, November 26, 2012.

outright sexual harassment on the news to make the point that politics did not have to look this way and in fact should not look this way. “These politicians, these male politicians didn't want women anywhere near them. It really was silly and tragic to see it,”<sup>54</sup> and it was seen publicly. The Coalition tactic of ‘naming and shaming’ seemed to be both pragmatic and effective.

Bronagh Hinds, in a talk delivered to the 2009 Hanna’s House Conference, suggested that the Coalition pursued a deliberate strategy in shifting the conception of how parties ought to interact by putting forward a new model of negotiation in which they:

- Assume good faith, honesty and integrity in bargaining
- Build trust, confidence and relationships
- Listen actively—to verbal and non-verbal
- Deal with opposition and resistance
- Lead change in behavior patterns
- Cope with the unknown and unpredictable
- Think creatively and be innovative
- Frame and Reframe

(Hinds 2009)

Hence, while constitutional politics was being played between the Nationalist and Unionist parties, the Coalition focused on solutions.

What was happening was that a lot of parties were focusing on the problem and still couldn't get to a solution and I remember saying to all our people, we need to break ourselves down into teams and focus on different subjects but also find a solution to each one of these, what would we recommend. And we realized there were also gaps that needed to be addressed and so we started making proposals and putting them on paper and sending them up. And the officials were really surprised that while they were still listening to a lot of whining and problem-

---

<sup>54</sup> May Blood (Baroness of Blackwattertown MBE), interview with author, August 17, 2012.

making from the others, we were putting forward solutions and putting forward papers and actually writing clauses that ended up in the agreement, proposals.<sup>55</sup>

The structure of the peace talks was such that there were two people at the negotiating table, the plenary session which would have received the media attention. Behind the scenes however, were numerous smaller committees and meetings between parties. The Coalition may only have had two women publicly elected but there was a team of twenty to thirty women operating in the various structures of the negotiations. These women were engaged in discussions with other parties' members, with their own communities and with experts in various fields who could offer information and counsel. They had teams on the diverse issues such as police, and the reform of police and criminal justice; economic and social chapter; reconciliation and victims, human rights, equality, some on constitutional issues; education and numerous others that would be a part of the Agreement. They also had people working to identify and address the gaps once the Agreement had been drafted. The women of the Coalition learned on the job the structure and language of formal documents. They developed writing skills, negotiation skills and basic political skills that helped them navigate a world they historically had not been welcome in; but they also employed a set of skills learned through community work and networking that aided in their success.

No we learned ... as we went along. Because we could see from previous rounds of negotiations what they looked like, what proposals looked like. The governments were using framework documents so we could see what was in those and we knew it wasn't that difficult to write. And some of the women were trade unionists so they knew how to negotiate and they knew how to draft clauses and some drew on their legal expertise as well but where we didn't have that we went and sought it and got it. ... So it was really having the networks that was so

---

<sup>55</sup> Monica McWilliams (Associate Researcher, Transitional Justice Institute, Chair in Women's Studies, School of Politics, Criminology and Social Policy, University of Ulster, former Co-Chair NIWC), interview with author, August 8, 2012.

important, I think that's what come from community development is that you build a huge stake in the local community but you also reach out ... and when you need it you draw it. I was quite amazed at how the other parties were not drawing in until the very last minute, experts from other areas. ... we had a whole address book of experts and people that we needed to contact... we would call public meetings and draw in those experts so that our wider constituency in Northern Ireland could come and hear them and then as a result of what they said, we would then propose that this would be the way out on that problem. So a lot of that generation of ideas had been going on for quite some time during the talks. So it was both between holding meetings with networks, drawing in experts who were working in specialist fields and using our own internal expertise.<sup>56</sup>

Monica McWilliams and Pearl Sagar, the two elected members of the Coalition, signed the Good Friday Agreement in April of 1998. It was hailed as a great success and Northern Ireland was filled with a sense of hope that things might be different moving forward. For the Coalition, the task was complete. A window of opportunity had opened, they had formed something unusual and creative and this new thing had been productive in terms having real input in the peace agreement and effective in terms of proving themselves capable and opening new opportunities in the other parties. Its members could pack up the party into memorabilia boxes and head home. Except this was not the way it worked.

Well, we were successful in '98 in being signatories to the agreement. We didn't want to stay as a coalition after that because we only formed ourselves to be at the peace talks, but we then learned that in order to implement the agreement, you had to be part of the new Northern Ireland Assembly, had to be an official party. So again we had to stand for election in order to be part of the implementation. And not many of us had an appetite for wanting to be in the new assembly, to be members of the legislative... You had to run as individuals, in individual constituencies, under the party name, but it was the individual who was getting the vote and had to go out and find the votes rather than across the whole country, the party being voted for. And we had strongly pushed for that electoral system to be part of the agreement but we couldn't get the support of the bigger parties. Which was a shame because to this day I believe that it would have been better

---

<sup>56</sup> Monica McWilliams (Associate Researcher, Transitional Justice Institute, Chair in Women's Studies, School of Politics, Criminology and Social Policy, University of Ulster, former Co-Chair NIWC), interview with author, August 8, 2012.

for Northern Ireland to have had a list system, rather than this constituency-based system which creates a lot of adversarial politics where you have individual politicians within that constituency often dividing that community. You often hear people say here 'we had reached a solution until one of the politicians arrived' and so often times politicians . . . go in front of the media, winds the people up, looks for a sound bite when behind the scenes the community activists have been working for months trying to get consensus... That was really important, we felt that we'd reached this agreement and we didn't want it to unravel.<sup>57</sup>

Based on the results of the initial election, it was clear that Coalition members would have a difficult time getting elected directly by their own constituencies but they were not the only ones that stood to lose out. The Ulster Democratic Party which came from Loyalist paramilitary backgrounds, for example, was not able to hold its seat and many of its members returned to paramilitarism.

...but the other parties always believed that we had never legitimately got elected because we came in from the top up but I think that creates pluralism, it creates diversity and it's good for peace. But they never got that, they wanted to close and close and close and narrow the whole thing back down to big majority parties and keep the smaller parties out of it.<sup>58</sup>

Two coalition members were elected in the following election. With two seats in the Assembly they were considered a proper party and had a paid secretariat. With only two of them however, they spread themselves thin across issues, going to meetings and doing their utmost to represent not only their own constituents' needs but those of people across Northern Ireland who had supported what the Coalition set out to do and did not feel that their needs were met by their own politicians. Further, the Coalition focused its attention on getting women elected at all levels of politics.

---

<sup>57</sup> Monica McWilliams (Associate Researcher, Transitional Justice Institute, Chair in Women's Studies, School of Politics, Criminology and Social Policy, University of Ulster, former Co-Chair NIWC), interview with author, August 8, 2012.

<sup>58</sup> Monica McWilliams (Associate Researcher, Transitional Justice Institute, Chair in Women's Studies, School of Politics, Criminology and Social Policy, University of Ulster, former Co-Chair NIWC), interview with author, August 8, 2012.

There were local elections where we had two women elected to local councils, there was Westminster elections, there was European elections, there was Assembly elections. Every year there was an election and all of these cost huge amounts of money and remember we were a small party with no finances, so we had to go out and raise all that money, mostly abroad, in the States, which was another huge burden, so we were run ragged. Really up against it in terms of making sure we didn't go into debt, making sure that women got lots of skills, not just the two that were elected.<sup>59</sup>

The Assembly in Northern Ireland has a spotty record in its short history. It collapsed shortly after its creation for almost a year because of the decommissioning issue. Because the Coalition had no weapons, they were not invited to these meetings despite the fact that everyone was focused on this issue. One result was that the work of the other parties on other issues was lost. Political parties require public attention and the Coalition, along with other small, non-paramilitary related parties became marginalized. Many believed that the peace was failing and as a result, it was necessary to revert back to support of the 'big lads.'

Suddenly things went belly up and you get blamed along with everybody else and what was worse was people decided to go back to what they knew best which was their own tribal parties, where they'd been prepared to give a vote in the past to new parties, to new voices, to new ways of doing things, making politics work differently. They were now so depressed and so disillusioned that many people said to me, I'm going back to vote for the extremes, because I believe now that those two parties are going to have to make it work and if I've only got one vote, that's who I'm going to give it to and so we'd lost our seats.<sup>60</sup>

In the Talks, the Coalition promoted a Civic Forum which would sit parallel to the legislative assembly. This Forum would be comprised of a range of public sectors representing business and unions, children, victims, church, disability, pensioners,

---

<sup>59</sup> Monica McWilliams (Associate Researcher, Transitional Justice Institute, Chair in Women's Studies, School of Politics, Criminology and Social Policy, University of Ulster, former Co-Chair NIWC), interview with author, August 8, 2012.

<sup>60</sup> Monica McWilliams (Associate Researcher, Transitional Justice Institute, Chair in Women's Studies, School of Politics, Criminology and Social Policy, University of Ulster, former Co-Chair NIWC), interview with author, August 8, 2012.



women and so on. The Forum was supposed to serve as a conduit of information and a forum for discussion such that the needs of the people represented in the various sectors had a direct conduit to the institutions of governance. The forum was short lived.

It was the first body to be stood down and it has never been reinstated. ...The politicians immediately, once they got into power said we don't need this, we're here now, things are working, abolish it. And yet it's part of the agreement.”<sup>61</sup>

Despite its formal acceptance in the agreement, it has been deemed irrelevant. When the issue is brought up, arguments are made regarding the expense of the forum, though the Coalition argues that the Forum would not have cost anything. In essence, civil society was effectively cut out of the implementation of peace. The message that was sent is that the community and voluntary sector play no role in the institutions of Northern Irish governance.

The parties to the agreement were each allowed one thing that ‘belonged to them’ in the agreement, for the Coalition, the Civic Forum, a role for the community and voluntary sector was it: “the idea of trying to introduce active citizenship, civic society as an element in politics. But as a non-party aligned element which again the traditional parties didn't like.”<sup>62</sup> As Monica McWilliams states at the beginning of this section, there is a difference between writing an agreement and actually building the peace that that agreement outlines. The Civic Forum was a measure designed to ensure that the community and voluntary sector, in short Northern Ireland’s civil society, would continue to play a direct role in building that peace. A recent report of the Northern Ireland

---

<sup>61</sup> Monica McWilliams (Associate Researcher, Transitional Justice Institute, Chair in Women's Studies, School of Politics, Criminology and Social Policy, University of Ulster, former Co-Chair NIWC), interview with author, August 8, 2012.

<sup>62</sup> Avila Kilmurray (Director, Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, former member NIWC), interview with author, September 10, 2012.

Community and Voluntary Association (NICVA) suggests that 78 percent of this sector is women. As Monica McWilliams suggests:

So where you do find the women is still in local communities, still running local centres, advice centres, refuges, shelters, church based organizations and probably considering that that's either where they want to be because that's where they see themselves as most productive or don't see themselves as prepared to take on those big jobs.<sup>63</sup>

Women in Northern Ireland choose, in overwhelming numbers, to participate in local community politics, small “p”. This is not to say that women do not run for office or get elected, that women are not holding important positions in government. They are, as will be discussed later, but in such small numbers that they are noteworthy. The Civic Forum was important to the Coalition because it would guarantee women who were actively engaged in other forms of serving their communities, would still have access to the Assembly and input in peace building. In disengaging from the Civic Forum, Stormont disengaged from the women of Northern Ireland.

The legacy of the Coalition is that women are willing and capable of public political roles. They can coordinate and manage political campaigns, inspire votes and accomplish political goals. However, the Coalition is often remembered as having failed. It could not maintain membership; its candidates could not get elected. Members of the Coalition remember it differently. They remember an opportunity to challenge the status quo, to get their voice heard and to accomplish something beyond the curiosity of a successful women's party. Monica McWilliams was Chief Commissioner of Human Rights and was required to be independent. She certainly could not serve as a party

---

<sup>63</sup> Monica McWilliams (Associate Researcher, Transitional Justice Institute, Chair in Women's Studies, School of Politics, Criminology and Social Policy, University of Ulster, former Co-Chair NIWC), interview with author, August 8, 2012.

leader. Party members, through both formal and informal interviews make it clear that the Coalition was not designed to be sustained.

And so it was a kind of temporary measure, that's how I see the Women's Coalition as a temporary ... affirmative action measure that was coming along as a window had opened, we went through it, did our piece, proved that it could be done, . . .and part of the Coalition's role anyway, was to get more women into public life... there were a number of other women starting to come forward into public life and that's what we wanted to see. The other thing that the Women's Coalition wanted was women in public life doing really important jobs, being seen in such a patriarchal, conservative society, to be able to make those changes and get to that level. I had succeeded in one of the aims of the Coalition in becoming Chief Commissioner. And felt anyway that my role was extremely political because there was no Assembly. ...So I still continued to do, not in a formal elected role but in an independent statutory role, with very serious legal power, doing a job that the Women's Coalition would have been advocating for. And so in 2006 we held a meeting and decided that that was the tenth year of our formation and that was the time to stand down. We said that's it, it's time to go. Let's stand down as official party but keep all the women as active as they've been. Doing what they've been doing... So, although the Coalition as an official party doesn't continue, the actual community politics continues and the advocacy continues and that forum continues.<sup>64</sup>

The concept of the party was always time bound in relation to the peace process.

Women were not going to be directly represented at the Talks, it was a gap that needed to be filled. Once it had been filled and it became clear that not fielding women would be costly, there was no longer a need for the Coalition. There had always been a tension between those within the Coalition who were a part of the community and voluntary sector and did not see themselves as political and those who enjoyed the political success of the endeavor. At the end it seemed almost a relief to return to the fields had given the Coalition its start. It did not fail; it was retired. As Baroness May Blood remembers:

And I'm very often challenged, ...what happened to the Women's Coalition? Now in my opinion, I was part of the women's coalition for one reason, to get women

---

<sup>64</sup> Monica McWilliams (Associate Researcher, Transitional Justice Institute, Chair in Women's Studies, School of Politics, Criminology and Social Policy, University of Ulster, former Co-Chair NIWC), interview with author, August 8, 2012.

into politics and today we have leading women in politics, today we have three women ministers, twelve years ago that would have been unheard of that a woman would have been given a ministerial post, the MLAs, but we have three women ministers, ... In my opinion that was the kickback from the women's coalition because I think other parties said 'hang on here, there's a women's vote out there, we need to put a woman up. And all of a sudden the leading parties started to have women in the front row, that would have been totally unheard of, totally, that would never ever have crossed anybody's mind in politics here that a woman could actually hold a leading post. That's a man's job. But Northern Ireland is still very male dominated, still that way.<sup>65</sup>

The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition challenged common conceptions of politics in a number of significant ways. First, they were elected as an all-women party in a traditional, conservative society. Their very existence made the argument that women could be political, that their needs were worthy of representation, and that they did not feel that any of the existing parties were actually representing them. Further, politics in Northern Ireland had historically been driven by violence and antagonism and the women of the Coalition offered an alternative not only in terms of their goals, a desire to address local community problems rather than focus on the constitutional issue, but also in terms of their methods of addressing these problems. The Coalition exhibited behaviors of openness and diligence in addition to their core principles of inclusion, equality and human rights. This allowed them to make a path through the bickering and abstentions of the other parties. They proved women capable. They proved that women were worthy of supporting and that communities would support them. The Coalition proved that not putting women forward was costing votes for other parties. The Coalition, a ten year experiment in women's politics changed the politically scenery in Northern Ireland.

---

<sup>65</sup> May Blood (Baroness of Blackwatertown MBE), interview with author, August 17, 2012.

## **Benign Apartheid: a Tour of Belfast**

Today, a visitor in Belfast who was not looking for signs of communalism and segregation might miss them . . . unless they arrived in marching season. Marching season, which people will argue gets longer every year, is focused on the July 12<sup>th</sup> March celebrating William of Orange's, or more affectionately King Billy for PULs, defeat of Catholic King James at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. Thousands of bands across Northern Ireland and Scotland gather in Belfast to march from Carlisle Circus to 'the field' at Barnett Demesne for speeches and celebration and then a return march through Belfast to their starting points. For some bands this means over five or six miles along parade routes with happy parade-goers offering beverages of all kinds. Visitors are warned that the best time to watch the marching bands is as they go out in the morning because the return trip is often drunk and disorderly.

Marching season is divisive for a number of reasons. Overnight, the streets of Unionist/Loyalist areas are adorned with thousands of Union Flags and the Red Hand of Ulster flags. Pennant strings zigzag across major roads and minor roads, along fences and roofs. Posters and murals of the Queen, intensified in 2012 by the Queen's visit as part of her Diamond Jubilee, and her handshake with former IRA member and now Northern Ireland's Deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness, adorn buildings and windows. Cars, pets, strollers and people are adorned with outward symbols of their Britishness. By contrast, a CRN community looks naked in the absence of these symbols. Clear delineations separate communities and mark territory. The flying of flags states clearly a community's position on the 'constitutional question': should Northern Ireland be British or part of a united Ireland? Often accompanying these flags are those of Israel and

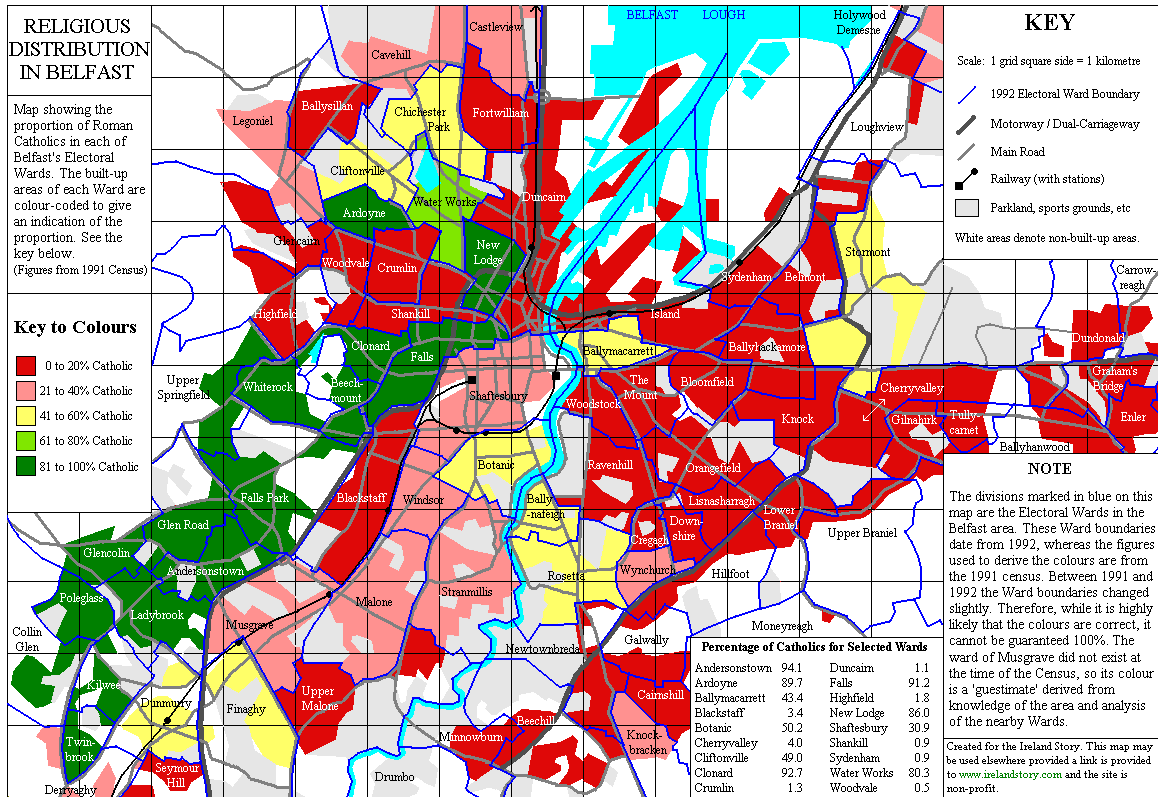
Palestine. The Israeli flag hung next to the Union flag and the Palestinian flag hung next to the Irish Tricolour. Often those who hang these flags know little to nothing about the conflict situation they invoke except to stand in solidarity with the position of those they represent.

Further dividing communities in the run up to the 12<sup>th</sup> March are the Eleventh Night Bonfires. Commemorating the signaling of William's forces against King James, PUL communities spend days, perhaps even weeks collecting pallets, old furniture and boxes to stack into a great pyre to be lit at midnight on the night of July 11<sup>th</sup>. Members of several communities describe how these bonfires used to be made up of tires but that great efforts have been made to make these bonfires more environmentally friendly. They are not however, cross-community friendly. Following street fairs with bouncy castles and face painting for children, grilled sausages and chips and paid performers, community members make their way to designated bonfire sites held in empty lots (of which there are many as a result of bombings during the Troubles) to watch great pyres be lit on fire. Communities contest who has built the biggest bonfire. In 2012, the Sandy Row bonfire boasted eight stories while neighboring Donegall Pass had only four or five stories. Bonfires are a great source of community pride and they are topped off by a tricolor flag and, in many cases, a Celtic football jersey. Though some members of these communities have argued that the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> should be seen as celebrations for the whole family—a time of fun and togetherness—there is no question that a line is being drawn between those who take pride in being British and those who have fought against it. This is an effigy to the *other*. Outsiders, those who are not from the *other* community, are made incredibly welcome; particularly American visitors who, it is assumed, are on

the side of the Catholics. “Our community is welcoming and friendly, come and meet my friends, they are your friends now,” cried one reveler. “Yes, we have done some terrible things but we are not terrible people.”

Marches and the Eleventh Night bonfires are, however, interpreted as a celebration of the ‘terrible things’ done to Catholics. The songs played and sung at the marches tell stories of great victories over this *other*. Each Orange Lodge marches with its own banner carrying slogans such as: Trust in God and Keep Your Powder Dry; In Defense of Freedom; No Surrender; and Fear God Honour the Queen. The bands are characterized by big bass drums, referred to as ‘Kick the Pope Drums’ recalling historical slogans that ‘Home Rule’ would be ‘Rome Rule.’ These Marches celebrate a particular identity, they celebrate a culture. “How can they tell us not to celebrate our culture? We don’t try to take away St. Patrick’s Day!” The problem, as it has been argued in CRN communities is that it overtly celebrates the conquest of their community.

Further, the celebration of the conquest of the Catholics marches directly through CRN communities. Belfast is a patchwork of communities, a city comprised of small villages. Interfaces are locations where these villages share a boundary with an *other* community. Some interfaces are marked by major roads. For example, the Markets are separated from Donegal Pass by Ormeau Road; the Village is separated from the Falls and the broader Catholic West Belfast by the M1 motorway. Some interfaces are marked by peace walls like the three story high wall with gates that are still today locked at night to prevent interface riots and violence, that separates the Falls from the Shankill.



Map 3.1 The Religious Distribution in Belfast

Map 3.1, illustrates the religious distribution in Belfast. Though it is based on 1991 census data, little seems to have changed. West Belfast is generally referred to as Catholic, where East Belfast is generally referred to as Protestant. Areas in yellow, where the numbers of Catholics and Protestants seem fairly balanced, are also areas that could be usefully described as middle or upper class. The houses on these streets are bigger than the traditional two-up-two-down houses that have historically lined the streets in working class areas. The cars are nicer on these streets, particularly when many people in working class neighborhoods do not own cars. In fact many people do not have driver's licenses since these cost money, preferring instead to carry their free voter registration as their primary form of identification.



Areas of the map marked in pink or light green are a bit more complicated. These are not cases of the majority population being thinned out. Rather, they are areas made up of smaller villages—smaller, tightly knit clusters of one group. For example, the pink area designated Shaftesbury toward the center of the map, is actually made up of the PUL communities of the Village, Sandy Row and Donegall Pass, as well as the CRN area known as the Markets. It also likely includes some spillover student population from Queen’s University Belfast to the south, designated as Botanic.

These small communities each have identities of their own, within the larger CRN or PUL identities. They have their own heroes and villains, their own histories and shared memory of events and stories that are told nowhere else, and often, their own butchers, bakers and candlestick makers. One of the problems with the patchwork of communities in Belfast, and the segregation of towns in Northern Ireland, is the redundancy of goods and services. People largely stick to their own. In so doing, they visit the grocer or pharmacist in their community and when they need something that cannot be found in their community, they rarely travel into Other communities, choosing instead to travel to ‘the Town’, meaning Belfast city center to get their needs met. The average community member, the average individual, by which is meant people who are not directly or professionally engaged in public service or the community and voluntary sector, has little cause to engage with anyone from ‘another area’. Often, this sounds more like people are saying ‘an Other area’. Law dictates that employment must be fair and equal but, for example, someone from the Falls would not seek employment at a shop on the Shankill Road and vice versa. This may suggest that people are still afraid to go into an Other area. For many people this is true. Community workers describe that moment when crossing

from one community to the other, of thinking ‘do they know I’m not one of them?’ Other community workers proclaim that they will go wherever they choose without fear, but embedded in this proclamation is an awareness that they are entering into areas that are not their own. In numerous other interviews and focus groups, women discuss, sometimes with anxiety and sometimes without, the simple fact that they have no cause to enter ‘an other area.’

As a member of a Belfast community, the boundaries between communities are obvious. As a visitor, there is a learning curve to recognizing the signs. At certain times of the year, the presence of either a British flag or an Irish tricolor is enough. Other symbols include painted kerbs such as those found in the Fountain community in Derry/Londonderry, painted red, white, blue and marking the Fountain as PUL. In West Belfast, the Gaeltacht quarter is marked with signs in Irish, a language that is rarely if ever found in PUL communities. In PUL homes you might find photos of the queen or other members of the royal family where in CRN homes you are more likely to find pictures of the Pope or other Catholic regalia. Other symbols are less obvious without a more in-depth background. Communities are often marked with paramilitary tags or flags, UVF scratched in a fencepost or RIRA spray-painted on a wall. Graffiti is often more incendiary. A well placed KAH, standing for Kill All Huns, comparing PUL communities to the German Huns, or FAT, standing for Fuck All Teags, a shortened representation of Catholics based on an historical McTague family, can mark community hostilities. Football jerseys are signals of loyalty as PUL communities typically celebrate the Rangers while, as previously mentioned, putting Celtic jerseys on their bonfire pyres. Even school uniforms are symbolic as PUL community members go to state schools and

CRN members go to private Catholic schools. There are so few integrated schools that incorrect assumptions can easily be made about a uniform bearing the colors and emblem of a school that is unfamiliar.

Another sign of the segregation or communalism of Belfast is the public transit system. Buses go in and out from city center such that a bus map looks like a star with City Hall as the epicenter. There are no cross town buses. When asked why there were no buses that linked, for example, North Belfast to West Belfast without changing buses, one bus driver answered simply “Who would take that bus?” Few people travel from one area to another. The biggest flows of traffic are into and out of the town. Cross town buses are not offered because no one would take them.

In 1969, a National Friends’ Peace Board (Quaker) pamphlet described segregated living in Northern Ireland as follows:

Protestants and Catholics--as the terms are understood in Northern Ireland-- have a traditional suspicion of each other. Especially in the less well educated sections of society, old ideas, composed of a mixture of tribal law and religious belief, are handed down from generation to generation, and these ideas are stimulated and sustained by segregated living which, in many instances, the people actually seem to prefer. At this level, fact and reason appear to batter in vain against the fortress of the closed mind, and much of this arises from a basic herd instinct which draws security, comfort, and pride from belonging to a clearly-identified group which has “right” on its side, and allows one to believe anything which is bad about “the other sort”. (Barritt 1969: 1-2)

In a very important way, Northern Ireland and Belfast in particular, still looks this way. Particularly, as Barritt suggests, in less well educated sections, those sections that coincide with the working class. Taxi drivers and tour guides are fond of the claim that Northern Ireland is a Benign Apartheid. ‘They didn’t negotiate peace, they negotiated a separation.’ There are two clearly identified groups of people here, living in well-defined communities. They are separate. They are Us and Them and ‘them’uns’ are from ‘other

areas.’ At the close of every interview, every focus group, even informal interactions with museum directors, shopkeepers, people on the bus, or anywhere else, the same question was asked: Is there peace here? Never was the answer yes. Not once. Instead, people answer positively No. Then, after some thought, more expansive answers are offered which include explanation about how much better it is: there are no soldiers on the streets; there are no bombs. There is a clear understanding however, that this is not peace. This is separation, benign apartheid and it is the best that can be hoped for, for now.

### **Attitudes of Sectarian Divide**

The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT) is the best source of attitudinal data specific to Northern Ireland. Launched in 1998 by Queen’s University Belfast and University of Ulster and run every year except for 2011 because of a lag in funding, the NILT offers consistent information on the attitudes, values and beliefs of the people in Northern Ireland across a variety of modules that vary from year to year according to shifts in attitudes and funding. One of the modules, on Community Relations, offers insight into the ongoing social divide. Asking ‘how many of your friends would you say are the same religion as you?’ respondents in 2010<sup>66</sup> answered by a majority (fifty-two percent plus nine percent) that ‘Most’ or ‘All’ of their friends shared their religion. Further, fifty-five percent of people answered that ‘Most’ or ‘All’ of their neighbors are the same religion. These questions are about what people believe to be true about their own lives, however, not how they feel about these things.

---

<sup>66</sup> 2010 is the most up to date survey results available until the 2012 survey is published in 2013.

When asked whether they would prefer to live in a neighborhood with people only of their own religion or in a mixed religion neighborhood, eighty-three percent of people stated a preference for a mixed religion neighborhood. There are problems, however with this kind of information. Northern Ireland is heavily researched and as such there is a great potential for bias in terms of learned responses. In focus groups on both sides of the divide, women regularly tell stories about violence and victimization wrought on them by the *other* side. Without fail however, as if rebooting their programming, they conclude these stories with the statement that ‘there’s good and bad on both sides.’ It is of course possible that a large majority of people would prefer a mixed religion neighborhood but there is a wide margin of error regarding what ‘mixed-religion’ means to any individual. In a focus group of Loyalist women, in discussing the topic of community relations, one woman proudly pointed out the window to talk about her son who was dating a ‘wee Catholic girl.’ The other women joined in talking about how lovely she was or adding that they also knew young people who were dating or married to Catholics and how ‘och no, I wouldn’t mind if they moved in next door!’ As the conversation continues and these women were asked about the results of the ‘wee Catholic girl’s’ family moving in as well, the women begin to reverse course. ‘Well we couldn’t have too many,’ one says; and another adds ‘well there’s got be more of us than them’uns.’ In a focus group on the other side of the divide, talk of mixed-religion neighborhoods resulted in stories in which daughters that married Protestants and moved into mixed neighborhoods still spent all their time at mommy’s house. The issue of housing is still a sensitive topic in Northern Ireland and people are still trying to decide how safe they can be in an *other* area.

The issue of education is similarly divisive. The British Department of Education defines integrated schools as those “which contain a reasonable number of pupils from both the Protestant and the Catholic communities” and then states that there are at present sixty-one grant-aided integrated schools in Northern Ireland with over five percent of total pupils in Northern Ireland attending (Department of Education 2012). The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education goes further in arguing that integrated education is also dependent on a staff representing both religious groups (NICIE 2013). The NILT reports that seventy percent of people in Northern Ireland would choose a mixed religion school to send their children to while only twenty-four percent of people would choose education with their own religion only for their children. It would seem then that the supply for integrated schools has lagged behind the demand for such opportunities. Women throughout Northern Ireland and on both sides of the divide have acknowledged the value of integrated schools in building cohesion in future generations, May Blood refers to the issue of integrated education as her great passion. There seems to be a consensus that children have to learn that the children in *other* groups share a great deal in common with them. However, recognition that this is the way to bridge the divide does not answer the silent companion question: should the divide be bridged? For many people in Northern Ireland benign apartheid is acceptable. Political parties are dependent on this divide to maintain the status quo. There are other sources of power and influence with a stake in the game as well. The Catholic church worked diligently to maintain its interests in education. It is common belief among Catholic communities and within some Protestant communities that the Catholic church actively seeks to thwart integrated education because mixed education will result in mixed marriages and will ultimately

dilute the role of Catholicism in future generations. On the Protestant side, education is provided by the state and as such the potential is already there for schools to be integrated. No further efforts ought to be required. Still, a large majority of Northern Ireland's children are educated in co-religionist schools.

Ultimately eighty-eight percent of people agreed with an NILT statement that “better relations will come about through more mixing” (NILT 2013). Absent from this kind of survey data is of course the question of how best to pursue this. Equality regulations are increasing mixed interactions in the work place, there is a common belief the children ought to be educated together, the people ought to live together, and yet people are consistently reluctant to actually pursue these kinds of changes. That being said, sixty-two percent of people believe that relations between Catholics and Protestants are better than they were five years ago, but only fifty-two percent believe they will be better five years from now with forty-one percent believing it will stay about the same. There seems to be a hedged optimism about the path that Northern Ireland is on but people and in particular the women who participated in this project put a lot of stock in the upcoming generation to make these kinds of changes. As one woman described, ‘I’m not bitter and it’s not in my heart to hate but I’ve been through what I’ve been through. Maybe what comes next is for those who haven’t been through it.’

#### There Is No Peace Here

*There’s no peace here, this is a carefully negotiated standoff.*  
(Belfast Taxi Driver)

In February of 2013, the Community Relations Council published its Peace Monitoring Report which focused on four domains: the sense of security, equality,

political progress and the degree of cohesion and sharing in the society as a whole. Dr. Paul Nolan, who wrote the report, noted that

To date, the indicators have been sending out contradictory messages. Violence has declined but it most certainly has not gone away. There is increased cooperation at the political level but there is also an increase in the number of interface barriers. We have seen interesting experiments in shared housing and shared education but 92.5 percent of school enrolments are still in schools that are perceived to be for one community only, and 90 percent of social housing is for single identity communities. At times, Northern Ireland seems to be moving forward; at other times it seems in danger of lurching back into the past. Which is it to be? Are we leaving the Troubles behind or does the continuation of sectarian division mean that at some point in the future the underlying tensions could see a violent eruption? Is it possible that this period of peace might turn out to be only a generation truce? (Nolan 2012)

In his visit to Belfast for the G8 Summit, US President Barack Obama urged the youth of Northern Ireland not to let that happen. “You are the first generation in this land to inherit more than just the hardened attitudes and the bitter prejudices of the past. You’re an inheritor of a just and hard-earned peace” (Morse 2013). Obama went on to caution that peace was about more than the politics of agreement, it is about empathy and the breaking down of divisions that are carried through generations. During the decades of the Troubles, it was assumed that the social divisions in Northern Ireland were a product of conflict, that it was the violence driving the wedge between the communities. At the time of writing, nearly fourteen years have passed since the Good Friday Accord and Northern Ireland is still a segregated society. The indicators that Nolan refers to, present, as he says, contradictory messages. On the positive side:

- The political institutions are secure: parties are willing to work together within the established political institutions and are tackling a range of issues that set aside the ‘constitutional issue’;



- The level of violence is down: the report cites crime statistics, security-related deaths, bombings, forms of paramilitary violence, even domestic abuse as continuing to decline. “While post-conflict societies like Kosovo, Guatemala or (especially) South Africa often record increases in crime statistics following a peace settlement, this has not been the case in Northern Ireland.” (Nolan 2012)
- A new confident and neutral urban culture has emerged: Belfast and Derry/Londonderry are thriving cities. There has been an expansion of public space, shopping, restaurants, night clubs, and coffee houses in addition to a resurgence of tourism. This is helped by events that garner the region worldwide attention such as Belfast hosting the MTV awards and Derry/Londonderry securing the City of Culture contract for 2013. Town centers are increasingly recognized as “safe and welcoming spaces.” (Nolan 2012)

These three positive indicators are a sign of progress certainly but in light of the remaining seven indicators are certainly not indicative of overall change:

- Paramilitarism still remains a threat: while the UVF and UDA have kept to the terms of decommissioning, there are other forms of violence, such as punishment beatings that have continued; further, the nature of the command structures have left room for what the report refers to as ‘rogue adventurism’ of members who have not found a place in the community development or other political roles that were created post-Agreement. Younger members of Loyalist communities have also begun asserting their

identity as seen in the Belfast City Council flag riots that began in December of 2012. Republican dissenter paramilitaries have never made commitments to decommission and act as ‘spoilers’ to the peace process. Events such as the killing of Magherafelt Prison Guard David Black on November 1, 2012 which was claimed by the ‘IRA’ as a merger of other factions are emblematic of this. The report argues however that dissenter violence has actually “consolidate[d] the existing consensus,” an unintended consequence and an odd silver lining of the continued paramilitary threat.

- The policing deal is not secure: a representative police force was a key element of the Agreement but it has not been achieved. According to the report only 27.5 percent of the police force is Catholic compared to estimates of 46 percent of the population and 55 percent of prisoners. The CRN community seems to be losing faith in the PSNI.
- The recession affecting the equality agenda: “Catholics still lag behind Protestants on a range of indicators to do with unemployment and social deprivation” (Nolan 2012)
- Youth employment is destabilising: the report cites a 2011 World Bank report linking urban violence to youth unemployment which is currently on the rise in Northern Ireland.
- Northern Ireland is still a very divided society: “the number of interface walls has increased from [twenty-two] at the time the Agreement was signed to [forty-eight] today” or more depending on definitions (Nolan

2012). The report mentions a dispute of the flying of the Union Jack in Ballyclare as an example of the “inadequacy of the Flags Protocol as a mechanism for the regulation of contested symbols” (Nolan 2012). It is interesting then to note that while this was written early in 2012, the close of the same year saw riots in Belfast over the same issue.

- There is no strategy for reconciliation: in 2005 a policy framework entitled *A Shared Future* was rejected by both Sinn Fein and the DUP, despite the concept of reconciliation being central to the Agreement, neither party has been able to put together an alternative. The Alliance party produced the *Cohesion Sharing and Integration* framework but it was rejected in the consultation phase. Northern Ireland is still waiting for a framework to address the comprehensive sectarianism that divides its society.
- No solution has been found for dealing with the past: the report concludes with a discussion about the pursuit of justice in the wake of the Troubles. Processes undertaken by groups such as the Historical Enquiries Team, the Commission for Victims and Survivors and the Saville Report which concluded that the British security forces fired the first shot against unarmed civilians on Sunday January 30, 1972 which has popularly become known as Bloody Sunday. Such enquiries have the potential to satisfy old grievances but they also open old wounds and findings in either direction cause controversy and potentially new waves of violence. Solutions to this dilemma have not been uniformly accepted.

The picture that the Peace Monitoring Report paints is one of delicate balance in which small shifts such as rising unemployment or a widening in the deprivation gap can spark the kindling of unsatisfied claims and historical resentments that contribute to ongoing divisions in Northern Ireland. Peter Shirlow, professor of Conflict Transformation at Queen's University Belfast argues that Northern Ireland is not at a 'crossroads' as Terence O'Neill, Northern Ireland's Prime Minister in the late '60s when the Troubles began, described (Shirlow 2012). Nearly five decades later, Shirlow described the violence that erupts on the streets of Belfast, like that over the Union Flag over Belfast City Hall, is a symptom of cyclical disagreements that go around and around without direction as to how to get on a road leading straight ahead. Shirlow argues that political leaders have "opted out of solution seeking" that would offer directions off the roundabout (Shirlow 2012).

Politics has not been an answer to the violent disagreement in Northern Ireland. As will be discussed in the next chapter, community development has been more effective at solving local problems in Northern Ireland.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Guiding this research is the “assumption that convergent conflict resolution/ community development initiatives at the grassroots could contribute towards a more sustainable peace in post-settlement societies” (O'Brien 2009: 29).<sup>67</sup> Women’s contributions to peacebuilding are most commonly found at the community or local level and can be usefully categorized as community development efforts. In order to understand the role of women’s centres in Northern Ireland, it is necessary to first understand the role of community development.

In 1969, just as the tensions between the two communities were erupting into violence, two agencies were formed with almost the exact same title: the Ministry of Community Relations and, a few weeks later, the Community Relations Commission (CRCCommission).<sup>68</sup> These two agencies had nearly the same mandate as their titles imply, the primary difference being that the Ministry was given the responsibility of promoting government policy to improve community relations while the CRCCommission was given the task of promoting activities within communities directly. This distinction

---

<sup>67</sup> Lederach (1995), Uphoff (1996), Bloomfield (1997), and Gilchrist (1998), for example make this argument and offer research findings to support it.

<sup>68</sup> The Northern Ireland Community Relations Commission, commonly referred to in the literature as the CRC, can be easily confused with the Community Relations Council, formed in 1990 as a registered charity, which is also referred to as the CRC. To limit this confusion they will be referred to as the CRCCommission and the CRCCouncil.

between policy and activity was quickly blurred as the Ministry attempted field work while the CRCommission wrote policy based on its activities (Griffiths 1974). The contradiction that existed between the two agencies, between policy and action, mirrored the rivalries between representative and participative politics that persist today.

Niall Fitzduff, who was a development officer in the CRCommission in 1969 recalls the ‘energy of change’ that was permeating communities as grass roots community action first emerged. Because it was new to Northern Ireland, no one knew how to pursue it, how to manage it or how to encourage it. Change was at every level. The CRCommission spent a great deal of time developing relationships on the ground, finding out what communities needed and assisted them in accomplishing it. The impetus was on community development as a mechanism that would eventually lead to improved community relations but that community development, meeting people’s basic needs—more specifically assisting them to meet their own needs—had to happen first. In retrospect, the Review Group supported the approach of the CRCommission.

The benefits to local communities of community development are manifest. It creates a culture of self-confidence and inclusiveness which is so essential to the improved relations between various sectarian alignments in Northern Ireland. . . It further benefits individuals through increased confidence, higher levels of awareness, more effective channeling of expressions of grievance and more successful exercise of rights. (Community Development Review Group 1991: 2)

The CRCommission’s development officers pursued training for themselves as well as the communities they worked with greatly emphasizing shared learning. A sense of solidarity developed between the development workers and the community members. This process was constantly reflexive such that the developing voluntary and community

sector was self-critical, consistently sought improvement, and asked how things could be done better.<sup>69</sup>

The access that the CRCommission created within communities created jealousy within the Ministry, as Hywel Griffiths, director of the CRCommission for two years describes.

The position then in 1970 was that the Ministry had command over significant resources but had developed no strategy of its own. It was providing no direct service other than grants in aid to local authorities and voluntary agencies and was having difficulty in finding projects upon which to spend money. It had no professional expertise with regard to social intervention or social development and apparently saw no reason to acquire any. Moreover it had no system of intelligence, no direct contact with the field which would allow for a flow back of information ...which it could then use. (Griffiths 1974: 10)

The CRCommission, by comparison had built channels for intelligence and was receiving a constant flow back of information. These channels were delicate and dependent on individual relationships and therefore were inaccessible to the Ministry. Griffiths has suggested that the Ministry was frustrated by what was more and more obviously becoming its own impotence. The CRCommission, which was ultimately short-lived, has been condemned for its failure to improve community relations. The story could be told such that increasing levels of violence between communities was proof that the CRCommission's method of pursuing community development first had failed. Griffiths presents an alternative telling of the story in first quoting the Minister for Community Relations and then 'interpreting' his statement, calling for the CRCommission to be de-commissioned:

“In the circumstances of 1969 it was right that the independence of the Commission and its existence apart from Government should have been realised for there was an underlying assumption that in many areas a direct Government

---

<sup>69</sup> Niall Fitzduff (CRCommission), interview with author, July 30, 2012.

presence would not be acceptable . . . There is no longer any need for any section of the community to feel excluded from Government or to fear that Government may be unsympathetic to them. Power sharing is both a manifestation and a guarantee of the new spirit with the Government.” [Mr. Ivan Cooper, Minister for Community Relations, April 3, 1974 to the Assembly of Northern Ireland.]

This seemingly hopeful statement is in fact extremely revealing. Stripped of its parliamentary gloss what is here being said is that in 1969 the Commission was appointed by a Unionist Protestant Government to undertake work in catholic areas which mistrusted and rejected the Government. Taken further it means that the purpose of the Commission was not even to improve relationships between conflicting communities but to act as an intermediary in areas where the Government could not, or would not, act. From this premise the statement concludes that, now there is a power-sharing executive which includes representatives of the major Catholic political party, the need for an intermediary body has fallen away. (Griffiths 1974: 6)

It is interesting to note even though it was not publicly stated as such, it was commonly understood that a large section of the population of Northern Ireland had been alienated by the government. It is also interesting to note that this power-sharing executive was itself short-lived, suggesting that the ‘new spirit with the government’ that Mr. Cooper claimed would render a Community Relations Commission irrelevant, was perhaps more relevant than the impotent Ministry he represented.

Without knowledge of what in fact took place it would be easy to suppose that the fate of the Northern Ireland Community Relations Commission and its Community Development Programme was determined by the continuation of violence in the community and by the political changes which have occurred. . . In fact what destroyed the Commission and the community development programme was not the conflict on the ground but the conflict between the Commission and the Ministry of Community Relations. This conflict existed latently from the very foundation of the two agencies. (Griffiths 1974: 2)

In retrospect the wrong agency was concluded when it might have made a positive contribution. The conflict described here between agencies reflects the broader disjunction between policy and practice or as Niall Fitzduff more aptly sums up, between representative and participative forms of politics. For several decades of direct-rule from



Westminster and violence on the ground, this disjunction was irrelevant as there was no representative politics in Northern Ireland. Instead, participative politics, primarily directed by the community and voluntary sector served as the voice of the people. Robson suggests that the CRCommission

The problem was that the Commission did not carry out its primary function. It could not draw the Catholic community closer to the establishment. Instead, it gave an appearance of having actually created the potential for another layer of leadership between the elected representatives and the communities engaged in struggle. However limited the community development programme initiated by the Community Relations [Commission], it was such that in the context of an ensuing conflict, it was perceived by some civil servants as having the potential for a drawing together of those forces opposed to the state. Networks were being created, communities were beginning to assert themselves and government, however reluctantly, was furnishing some of the resources. (Robson 2000)

This tension between the state and the community was exacerbated by the fact, as will be addressed below, that CRN communities, those most actively engaged in community development, were also those most actively engaged in the struggle against the state.

Within these communities, you didn't have the structures of law and order but you had a very, very strong sense of belonging and a very strong sense of community and that was more enforced because you couldn't go out of your community and you weren't relying on the statutory structures that were normally there. So your sense of identity was very strong, your sense of community was extremely strong and that provides a sense of comfort, it provides a structure for you in life.<sup>70</sup>

Community provided the structure for public life and community development was the engagement that supported and rebuilt that structure.

### **A Framework**

Community development arose in Northern Ireland out of a desire to protect communities from several destructive processes that converged at this time. The first

---

<sup>70</sup> Michele Baird (CEO, Women's Information Northern Ireland), interview with author, October 4, 2012.

question posed in an interview with Jackie Redpath, Chief Executive of the Greater Shankill Partnership, was why community development has been so important in Northern Ireland. His answer framed a great deal of the research presented here.<sup>71</sup>

Speaking of the 1970s, Jackie says:

It wasn't a good time to be about here. You had three things happening at the same time here which is what made Belfast unique, you had wholesale redevelopment, you had economic collapse in the 1970s (shipbuilding, engineering, linen), then you had the Troubles as well. So in other British cities, you did have redevelopment and you did have the shipyards closing in the north of England and Glasgow, but what we had was the third element overlaid, which was the Troubles. And community development I suppose started because people needed to organize to resist that worst that was happening to their community.<sup>72</sup>

What Jackie has referred to in other places as a 'triple whammy' (Northern Visions 2009), the economic collapse, redevelopment and the Troubles, created a vicious cycle of distrust and alienation in Belfast and in Northern Ireland more broadly.

World War I and II were very good for the economy of Belfast, historically the island of Ireland's only real industrial city. The linen mills, shipyards and engineering firms were all war industries. However, these industries began a sharp decline, intensified by the oil shock of the 1970s.

[B]y the 1960s it was going into free-fall, and was essentially, all that economic base was wiped out during the 1970s and 1980s so that now, you know, there's no ships being built, now the largest engineering works, Mackie's International is closed. It employed 7,500 people, it was the largest engineering works in the world, is now closed, the shipyard at its peak employed 35,000, it doesn't exist anymore, and the linen industry disappeared, Irish linen.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> Extant literature, interviews across a wide range of actors, and other field work that followed this interview supported and were consistent with this assessment of the history and development of the Shankill, and of Belfast and Northern Ireland more broadly.

<sup>72</sup> Jackie Redpath (Chief Executive, Greater Shankill Partnership), interview with author, July 31, 2012.

<sup>73</sup> Jackie Redpath (Chief Executive, Greater Shankill Partnership), interview with author, July 31, 2012.

Fay, Morrissey and Smyth describe a process of re-industrialization in Northern Ireland during the 1960s that then reversed in the 1970s (Fay, Morrissey, and Smyth 1999: 106). In fact, chapter three of their book *Northern Ireland's Troubles: The Human Costs*, addresses the "Economic and Social Aspects of the Troubles", arguing that though it is difficult to separate the economic problems of Northern Ireland from the Troubles, it seems clear that the political violence in the region intensified pre-existing economic problems. For example:

In the period 1979-86 when manufacturing faced a severe squeeze, employment in the sector dropped by a quarter in the UK but by one-third in Northern Ireland. Moreover, when employment started to rise in the UK after 1983, Northern Ireland continued to experience a jobs decline... It was not until 1986 that Northern Ireland's employment decline was arrested and began to switch to a moderate reverse. (Fay, Morrissey, and Smyth 1999: 111)

Economic collapse contributed to the vulnerability of the working class and set the stage for the ongoing deprivation that is still seen in Belfast and around Northern Ireland today.

The second element of Jackie's triple whammy was redevelopment, a 'scheme' in the British sense, in which major structural changes were planned for communities of high deprivation. A housing report done in 1944 reported 87 percent of houses in Belfast were in need of repairs. "The Committee would like to point out . . . that the only way to get rid of slum property is to pull it down . . . it may be taken, therefore that in Belfast important central areas require clearance and redevelopment" (Weiner 1976: 42). Because of disputes over how this was to be handled, however, redevelopment did not begin until 1960.

Shankill was the largest redevelopment area in Belfast. Whole streets and collections of streets. . . people called them phrases, . . . seven thousand homes

were in eight different phases. Fifty thousand people forced to move out of the area. It happened in lots of cities but what was unique about Belfast was that not only had you this redevelopment program . . . But you had the Troubles overlaying it. (Northern Visions 2009)

Redevelopment cleared away entire neighborhoods making room for new housing, often flats that people describe as ‘Weetabix’ because of their resemblance to the block-shaped cereal. The Housing Executive began filling this new housing with those who were most in need and most at-risk. The result was that Weetabix flats became directly associated with anti-social behavior. Redevelopment also made way for the motorway. Plans were initiated to transform two green field sites into new towns, Craigavon and Antrim, to attract foreign firms to invest in industries new to Belfast. The families displaced by redevelopment were to be relocated to new housing development in the new towns and hopefully find employment in the new industries. The motorways were designed in such a way to bring goods from the new towns to Belfast harbor. On both sides of the M1 motorway that now separates the Falls Road area from the Village and Sandy Row, people reminisce about their families’ houses that were cleared away or the streets they walked when they were younger. Often times the stories told focus on riots and violence at interfaces that no longer exist. Today, the M1 is considered a peace line. Redevelopment did not accomplish the tasks it set out. New industry was not attracted as economies were suffering around the world. The result was of the scheme was mostly upheaval.

Converging with economic collapse and redevelopment, as discussed in the preceding chapter, was the violence of the Troubles. There were places in Northern Ireland that experienced only mild stress as a result of the economy, rural and small

towns were not targeted by redevelopment. Towns that were overwhelmingly PUL or CRN and did not have major interfaces experienced the Troubles primarily through stories seen in newspapers and television. There were other areas however, areas still characterized by high deprivation where entire communities lost employment almost at once. People were living in slum housing that was either cleared out or expected to be and they lived at an interface with another community who challenged, in one way or the other, whatever they had left and formed groups to get what they needed through violence. These three layered forces were ripping parts of Belfast and other regions of Northern Ireland apart. Areas of multiple deprivation, populated by the working—or more often work-*less*—class were disintegrating while middle class areas, like the Malone Road, remained peaceful. As discussed previously, lines were being drawn sometimes by roads and motorways, concrete walls and/or gates. People began forming into community groups to remedy the multitude of problems that were destabilizing their lives.

The setting in which these forces were operating on these communities, was the absence of formal politics. With Stormont disbanded in 1972 and Northern Ireland being ruled directly from Westminster, Northern Ireland existed in a very localized power vacuum. Asking the same question, “why is community development so important to Northern Ireland,” Mari Fitzduff answered:

Community development groups really became the equivalent of local politics from 1974 to 1998. So much so that the British administrators who functioned from Stormont, actually consulted the communities instead of consulting with politicians when something had to happen. By the ‘90s there actually was an order of the Secretary of State that every major public initiative had to consult the community with the result that all these community groups had consultation documents piled high on their desks, with the government wanting to know ‘what

do you think of this' or 'what do you think of that.' So it was a tremendously open time for community development and community organizers got very used to talking with the greatest in the land about what needed to happen. It was actually a bit of a shock when the politicians came on board in 1998 because they then decided that they didn't need the communities doing the representation for them. And by and large they were heard to say 'well you go back to sweeping the streets, we'll take over from here.'<sup>74</sup>

These are the overlapping forces that left communities in Belfast isolated. The economy was in a downward spiral and as a result of redevelopment, the unemployed, what people in Belfast disaffectedly refer to as the 'work-less class,' watched their homes be torn down. Frustration over these issues contributed to the fervor of the Troubles which were met with security forces but, because of the diminution of the state, no real authority, except for that from Westminster which has historically been dismissive of local issues in Northern Ireland. With no outward sources of assistance, communities turned inward.

Because of the preferential treatment of one group over the other, it is commonly understood that CRNs, or more specifically Catholics, regardless of republican or nationalist sympathies, were systematically discriminated against.<sup>75</sup> A report on "Disturbances in Northern Ireland" commissioned by the Governor of Northern Ireland in 1969, commonly known as the Cameron Report because it was chaired by John Cameron, documented discrimination against Catholics in government appointments, electoral boundaries, and policing—particularly the 'B' Specials. The commission adds in paragraph 232 of the conclusion that

---

<sup>74</sup> Mari Fitzduff (Conflict and Coexistence Programme at Brandeis University), interview with author, July 30, 2012.

<sup>75</sup> See for example Fay et al. (1999), McCall (1999), and O'Leary and McGarry (1997).

It was fortunate indeed that, for whatever cause, the disorders into which we have enquired over the past months, serious as they were, were not made even more grave by resort to the use of firearms - except on two isolated occasions happily accompanied by no injury to persons or property. Unhappily this can no longer be said of the events which have occurred so tragically during the preparation of this Report. (Cameron 1969)

This statement, published in 1969, would be a portent of things to come in the following decades.

Much of this discrimination came about during what O'Leary and McGarry call the second Protestant ascendancy from 1920-1962.

...Ulster Protestant motivations were determined by an identity which actually required hegemonic control for its preservation; i.e. Ulster Protestantism just is an ideology of hegemonic control, typical of settler colonial minorities threatened by democratization and modernization. (O'Leary and McGarry 1997: 141)

Unionists believed that what McCall terms "coercive controls were necessary for their own survival" (McCall 1999: 40). The results were "patterns of disadvantage" in housing, political representation and employment for Catholics in a social structure of discrimination (Fay, Morrissey, and Smyth 1999: 102). The CRN communities were treated and thought of themselves as second class citizens.

There were also PUL communities who experienced the same kinds of deprivation. This is less often discussed for three primary reasons. First, the PUL communities experiencing multiple levels of deprivation represent a much smaller proportion of the total PUL population. Second, on the CRN side, years of discrimination and oppression by the state and separation from PULs who were in similar situations of poverty and deprivation contributed to the firm belief that CRNs were worse off than PULs and therefore needed to fend for themselves. This kind of suffering was a part of the construct of the CRN communal identity. Finally, on the PUL side, people were

represented by the state, they were British and were cared for and obviously had it better than the CRN communities. People in PUL communities did not want to know that their lives were just as bad as their counterparts in *other* communities, that they were as poor, as disenfranchised. Unionist government actively worked to convince them that their lives were better. The divide between communities, across which few people crossed, contributed to this disinformation. CRNs were whipped up to organize and struggle for equality and recognition. PULs were kept in line by a sense of status and belonging, and the threat that a CRN uprising posed to that privilege. The truth of the matter is that a very different story could be told with a class analysis, rather than a religio-political analysis, in which the working class suffered across the board by these conditions of deprivation. This story was certainly not told in the early days of the Troubles, no one was united by a commonality of deprivation.

Instead, while PUL communities relied on a failing state to provide services, CRN communities turned inward to find solutions to the poverty and inequality that the state would not or could not rectify. “For example, the first wave of credit unions took off amongst Catholic communities in the early 1960’s as a community-based and volunteer-led alternative for people excluded from borrowing from banks” (Lewis 2006: 4). CRN communities recognized the need for local solution to local problems and articulated this as an extension of broader political questions about inequity and social injustice.

The emergence of a broad-based, grass-roots movement, which articulated the political demands of a substantial minority of the North’s population, provided an initial stimulus to those who recognised a need for a wider response to poverty and inequality. In the volatile atmosphere of politics in Northern Ireland, such demands were easily translated into an attack on the state by unionists, whereas many socialists and republicans quickly concluded that the state was irreformable. (Robson 2000)



Community development was not taken up in PUL communities initially because as the privileged majority in Northern Ireland, it was expected that the state would provide for them. Community development as a field of public engagement in Northern Ireland was tied to protests against inequity and poverty and the state's failure to provide for and assist deprived communities. As it was the CRN communities making these claims, community development was itself interpreted, as Robson suggests above, as an attack from this *other* community. As such, community development began largely as a CRN project. "To Republicans, 'community' was not simply a product of the collective imagination: *resistance communities* were battlefields between the state and an anti-state insurgency, between a dominant hegemony and an emerging counter-hegemony" (Bean 2007: 54). Bean similarly suggests that "the imperative for communal solidarity" has long been the "central arch of nationalist political culture" (Bean 2007: 57). The emerging CRN counter-hegemony fully engaged in community development and the PUL communities defined themselves in opposition to this engagement.

### **Community Building**

Community comes to mean something distinct and clearly defined. Cnaan, Milofsky and Hunter describe three 'distinct dimensions' of community: shared ecology, social organization, and shared cultural and symbolic meanings. "Cases where all three dimensions are strong fit our idealized notions of what makes something a strong community" (Cnaan, Milofsky, and Hunter 2007: 5-6). Communities in Northern Ireland began learning how to be strong. People came together within their communities to solve immediate and pressing problems. The irony is that social cohesion within these communities is celebrated and yet driven by poverty. No one acclaims the role of poverty

for its creative qualities but it was these dire circumstances that spurred the positive force of community development.

Everybody just got all together and a big pot of stew was made and people just came with their bowl. You woulda had a house peeling the potatoes, and a house peeling carrots, and it was all done on a big gas stove... you fed the whole street and there was a whole sense of community, everybody coming.<sup>76</sup>

A community is more than the people on the streets that it designated. A community is a group of people united through common need who helped each other meet their needs. Those who were employed shared what they had; those who were not employed did what they could to support those who were. Often children were cared for by a neighbor who came to be a second mother to any number of children who saw each other as siblings even if non-biological. There was a sense of solidarity in shared need and trust built between neighbors who bore each other's burdens.

The housing situation contributed a great deal to this shared experience. Most families in areas classified as deprived lived in two-up-two-down houses consisting of two bedrooms at the top of a narrow staircase and two rooms on the ground floor, neither of which was a bathroom. Stories are told and jokes shared by adults today who were the youngest members of their families and who thus washed last in the luke warm recycled water of a bath tub in the middle of the living room. One community worker recounted the excitement of the new school year because it would mean her older siblings would go back to boarding school and she, as the youngest child, would be able to claim a spot on the bed shared between the older siblings. Multiple generations would often live under one roof, eking out a life with the help of neighbors. Young married couples remained living in their separate parents' houses because they could neither find nor afford housing

---

<sup>76</sup> Eileen Weir (Shankill Women's Centre), interview with author, October 15, 2012.

for themselves. Another community worker remembers being sent to the neighbor's house with a pot of soup asking for help: 'my mother's made too much and she hopes you'll be able to use it so it won't go to waste.' There was a great deal of pride in these communities regarding asking for help and so neighbors did not offer help, they instead asked for the 'favor' that food be shared, or children be played with. Many people recount the slow process as they grew up of realizing that they were poor. Community workers today commonly discuss their gradual understanding that they were discriminated against, that they were deprived and living in poverty and that something needed to be done. This is the impetus for community development. Two-up-two-down houses with a toilet outside were the norm long after this type of housing fell into disrepair, however, leaving large swathes of the population living in slums.

Housing lists were created by the newly formed Northern Ireland Housing Executive identifying those in need, but a number of factors contributed to housing pressures being a key issue. First, social divisions dictated that people sought to stay within their own communities. Even if housing was available in an *other* area, few people chose to leave their community. Second, it is commonly understood that the housing authority gave preferential treatment to PULs.<sup>77</sup> Housing that could have held a CRN family of a dozen or so people was given to a newly-wed PUL couple, for example. More than once, people acknowledged in hindsight that they had benefitted from identity-based 'queue jumping.' Finally, the Troubles start with a series of civil rights marches calling for One Man, One Vote in reaction to the voting system at the time that gave votes

---

<sup>77</sup> The Northern Ireland Housing Executive was created in 1971 (NIHE 21013) to address this discrimination and it is generally seen as being fair but the solution came too late to quell housing frustrations.

according to property such that slum lords may have multiple votes but the handful of adults residing in any of those houses were completely disenfranchised.

Concerns over housing were exacerbated when communities lashed out and cleansed their streets of interloping *others* by burning houses. PULs burned out CRN families and vice versa. In some cases, families chose to leave mixed areas in search of more homogenous communities and chose to burn their own houses to prevent an *other* family from moving in. The CRCommission stated that

To give up a home where one has lived for years, and which is itself a symbol of security, for the insecurity of squatting, which many did, is an act of desperation: to damage one's home on leaving, or allow others to do so, is an act of despair. (NICRC 1971: 1)

Of course this did not always happen. There are instances of arranged and sometimes orderly house swaps in which families traded houses with those in communities that they would feel more welcome in. The new families in the community would legally have been considered squatters but they shared some comfort knowing that their homes would be cared for and that there was at least the possibility of a happy future in which they could return home. Numbers of those affected by house burning and similar forms of intimidation are difficult to state accurately. Research done by the CRCommission shows conclusively that at least 8,000 families moved during this time. However, taking into consideration the number of families that contacted relief agencies during this time, the number of affected families is more usefully estimated around 15,000 families. The CRCommission goes on to suggest that considering the fact that these numbers do not represent those who did not seek help and averaging the size of families to four people, it can be safely assumed that over 11 percent of Belfast's population was displaced (NICRC 1974: appendix K).

It should also be noted that not all displaced families moved to co-religionist areas of Belfast or even Northern Ireland. Border towns on the Irish side of the UK/Ireland border received large numbers of families who slowly assimilated to a new country when the violence in Northern Ireland persisted decade after decade. One woman recalled her family going on vacation. She describes her childhood memories of packing and loading into the family van and then driving slowly through a riot in progress in the streets, slumped down in their seats, quiet as mice as they headed away. It was only after they arrived at the home of family friends in Ireland that her parents informed her and her siblings that they would not be going back to Belfast. It was over twenty years later that she would see her family home again. Though she did not experience the physical violence of the Troubles to any greater extent than the tension of driving through a riot, she described a kind of emotional violence regarding the loss of her home and friends and way of life. In many instances, people fled across the border to escape security forces that carried their names on lists of supposed IRA members or sympathizers. Operation Demetrius discussed above caused the fragmenting of communities in a different way forcing young men to leave families and find a new life in a different community.

Like two-faced Janus, these forms of intimidation were both fragmenting and coalescing. Existing communities were fragmented while at the same time people found solidarity in areas that were being redefined by this mobilization. Even when neighbors trusted each other the larger communal forces broke them apart. PUL neighbors stood up for CRN neighbors that were threatened and vice versa but oftentimes those who stood up against their communities were burned out themselves. May Blood lived in a mixed area that became Protestant. She went to Protestant school and came home in the afternoon

and played with Catholic neighborhood children. When the mob came to burn out her Catholic neighbors, her father came out into the street to stop them: ‘get a grip, this woman's done no harm, she's only rearing a family.’ The mob went away that night but the Catholic family moved out anyway and a couple weeks later, May Blood’s family was burned out. She laughs now as she states clearly that she was burned out by her own Protestant community.<sup>78</sup>

Aside from neighbors who might be counted on to defend you, there was no one to ask for help when a family was being threatened. Police and fire brigades were localized and a fire brigade that made efforts to put out a fire that a community mob had set would themselves be targeted as traitors. Police forces were slowly made irrelevant as communities came to police their own areas. In many cases, the police were at risk in certain areas designated ‘no-go.’ As the numbers above suggest, once evacuated, many people sought the assistance of existing agencies but many more sought the assistance of extended families and social networks. Local communities were faced with the pressures of a population influx. New members of the community needed housing, education and childcare and in some cases basics like clothing, having left their homes with nothing but the clothes on their backs. At a time when the meaning of community was reaching its pinnacle, the betrayal of being forced out of one’s home reinforced the distrust and animosity that people felt toward the *other*.

The intensity of animosity was echoed by those who burned families out, though it is not often talked about now, there was a sense of pride at having rescued or saved a community from the corruption of an *other* family. These emotional responses only

---

<sup>78</sup> May Blood (Baroness of Blackwatertown MBE), interview with author, August 17, 2012.

served to validate the division of the society. Community building was not always a positive force. Within the group, conformity was strictly required and enforced. Those who stood up to or criticized mob leaders or the paramilitaries that began to surface to *protect* the community were forced out or sanctioned. Those who did not conform in other ways such as drug use, mixed marriages, promiscuity or anti-social behavior were also sanctioned. Punishment beatings, knee-capping (a debilitating but not fatal form of torture in which people are shot in the knee), tar and feathering (a form of torture where hot tar is poured over the individual and then feathers poured over the tar)<sup>79</sup> and the like were used to enforce solidarity in the group. The great paradox of nationalism—or any political identity—is how to tap into the creative processes of belonging while mitigating the violence of exclusion as well as the enforcement of inclusion. These forces pulled from the broader communes, the local community but operated even within families. Children of mixed marriages would come from school spouting slurs against the Fenians or the Huns without realizing that they were verbally assaulting one of their own parents. The betrayal of your community could not compare to the betrayal of watching your own child become infected by such bigotry. In one interview, a woman recounted her experiences as a young Catholic mother in a mixed marriage, living in a mostly Protestant community. One day her son, not yet a teen, came home after school complaining about ‘those fucking Fenians’ who had committed some act of vandalism or violence near his school and deserved to be ‘shot dead with the rest of them.’ The child simply did not know that his mother was one of ‘them.’ While communities were fragmented and

---

<sup>79</sup> Tar and feathering was used during the Troubles primarily to punish women who associated with British security forces. More recently, tar and feathering has been used by PUL communities to curb anti-social behavior such as robbery or drug use.

scorched in the flames of house fires, new communities melted into cohesion by the heat of a similar passion. 'Community building' as described here was not a pretty process. Nonetheless, through the poverty, violence and trauma, communities were built and bound by streets, peace lines and memory into the same patchwork that mostly exists today.

### **Community Development**

Community development began largely with organized protest. The state had lost control in most important ways by the early '70s. House burning and other forms of communal violence had granted a great deal of power to the paramilitaries and the communities. The reaction on all sides was to put up no-go areas which prevented police and security forces as well as non-residents from coming into a community. In 1972, the government was disbanded because it could not control the situation, and direct rule imposed from Westminster. What was left on the ground in Northern Ireland were clearly defined and, in important respects, autonomous communities. People on both sides of the working class came out onto the streets. "Community work since the late 1960s has constituted a political activity through which ordinary people assert control over their communities and lives" (Dominelli 1990: 1). Protests, such as the "Save the Shankill" campaign that was organized to stop the destruction of the Shankill by the processes of redevelopment, were an effort to assert control. People protested internment and imprisonment, house raids, curfews, and the food shortages that occurred as a result of curfews such as those discussed in the previous chapter. Women stood together to prevent the eviction of squatters. Committees were formed for relief and defense as well as residents' organizations. As a result of the 'triple whammy' of poverty, redevelopment



and violence, many people lacked basic services. Community work such as that described below by the Study Group on Training for Community Work, was the only recourse available to areas in deprivation.

Community work includes: (a) helping local people to decide, plan and take action to meet their own needs with the help of available outside resources; (b) helping local services to become more effective, usable and accessible to those needs they are trying to meet; (c) taking account of the interrelation between different services in planning for people; (d) forecasting necessary adaptations to meet new social needs in constantly changing circumstances. (Study Group on Training for Community Work 1968: 149)

This process was undertaken by CRN communities who protested the legitimacy of the state itself and recognized that their needs would have to be met locally: the onus was on the community itself. PUL communities identified with the state, at least in the early phases of community development and saw these efforts as anti-state. It would not be until years of violence contributed to the disillusionment of this community over the inability of the state to provide for them that PUL communities would engage in this process. As a result, the capacity of CRN community development was quite advanced. These differences in progress can still be seen today.

In the initial stages, many communities set to work building community centers and coordinating youth groups and activities that would keep their children occupied and out of the actual line of fire. Co-ops were formed to buy food in bulk and distribute it across the community. The practice of ride sharing in which neighbors commuted together developed into the People's Taxi system, more popularly 'black taxis.' Public transportation was often the target of communal violence, and eventually had to be shut down. Used black taxis from London were purchased and driven along bus routes. They were generally owned and driven by community members and maintained major routes

from city center out. In practice, this meant that there were PUL taxes, like those in the Shankill supported by the UVF, and CRN taxis, like those in the Falls supported by the IRA. A conversation between community workers from both the Falls and the Shankill revealed the differences in experiences of transportation issues. They laughed as they recalled spending weekends in Belfast City Center as teenagers, going to clubs and the like. At the end of the night, with no car and no public transportation they commiserated over feelings of vulnerability they had each experienced, regarding their ability to get home. However, their experiences of getting home were vastly different. Black taxis running up and down the Shankill were in much shorter supply and so the queue waiting for a 'Protestant taxi' was much longer. The PUL community worker instead chose to ask the nearby security forces and got a lift home in an army lorry. There were many more taxis up and down the Falls Road but there was still a long wait going that way. Still, a CRN teen would never contemplate speaking to the security forces, let alone taking a ride. When the CRN community worker returned home at the end of the night she had to repeatedly assure her anxiety-ridden mother that she had in fact gotten a ride from a Catholic taxi. Safe transport, meaning community specific transport, was a very basic though very big concern. These were the kinds of issues addressed by community organization; these were the goals of community action.

Community development in Northern Ireland is a process which embraces community action, community service, community work and other community endeavour—whether geographical or issue-based—with an emphasis towards the disadvantaged, impoverished and powerless within society. Its values include participation, empowerment and self-help. And while it is essentially about collective action, it helps to realise the potential of both individuals and groups within communities. In the interest of developing this potential, community development challenges prejudice, sectarianism and the unequal distribution of resources—both in terms of financial resources and of access to skills and

knowledge. Community development is the process which underpins collectivist approaches to education, economic development and the delivery of services in a situation in Northern Ireland where, for various reasons, there have been few opportunities for communities to participate in the democratic process. (Community Development Review Group 1991: 2)

This definition of community development by the Community Development Review Group, established in the late 1980s with the goal of extending community development in disadvantaged areas of Northern Ireland, acknowledges that community development is first and foremost about community action in problem solving but it also suggests that these tasks, this form of organization serves a longer term process; it is indeed about development rather than task-oriented problem solving. The Review Group called on the state to recognize the potential of community development both in terms of building relationships with community and voluntary organizations and in terms of financial commitments to support the endeavors of these groups.

Community development slowly shifted from the protests of the '70s to project development in the '80s. As the Review Group quoted above suggests, one of the benefits of community development is the development of self-confidence.

At the beginning when we started, what did we know about writing business plans or anything like that for our area, but you learned all that. We got people from business in the community, people who come in and taught us how to do those kinds of things, how to start a project. For instance this project here, was started in 1994, by a group of community people and we applied to Europe and we got 6.5 million pounds, and we never thought that anybody'd give us it. And we started this project and I was told by the powers that be that it wouldn't work because we were only community people, what did we know. Today, seventeen years later, this is one of the success stories but that's what I mean about community development, it's about giving people in their own area, a say about what goes on in their own area and then people take a bigger pride in their own area.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> May Blood (Baroness of Blackwatertown MBE), interview with author, August 17, 2012.

May Blood is speaking here specifically about the Early Years project that is now part of the Sure Start system which served children from naught to three and their families. It serves the purpose of childcare so that parents, in most cases mothers who were otherwise unable to find employment, could work. It focuses on child development offering a range of services from health checks to language development. More broadly, May is talking about the self-confidence created by these kinds of successes. Being spoken to, rather than spoken for, is incredibly empowering. Further May suggests community projects were accomplished through a great deal of learning. See a need, develop a project, and in the process, learn about business plans, applying for funding, managing a group and so on. Even on the CRN side of the divide, adults in the '70s and '80s were unlikely to have more than a high school education. For many people in the community development field, this was a time of learning that they could learn, of building up the personal self-confidence that they were intelligent and capable. Education came to be regarded in the voluntary and community sector as a value in and of itself. Today, it is uncommon to meet a member of this sector who does not have higher education. Whether they hold a degree or are currently enrolled in classes, that reflective culture of this sector has continued in which community development workers are striving to continue to develop themselves as a method of improving their own contribution to their community.

As stated above, community development was a process of development that occurred at all levels. This is exemplified by the role of community partnerships in the buildup to the peace process.

There used to be a huge factory in West Belfast on the peace line... called Mackie's International... located in a Catholic area at the peace line but it just employed Protestant men. And this place was always held up as the arch-typical of discrimination against Catholics. The people from the Shankill and East Belfast would walk through these streets [along the Falls] to [Mackie's] but there weren't any Catholic men, or very, very, very few that were employed in it... that started to change in the mid to late '80s, with fair employment legislation but... the world markets declined that Mackie's fed into and they decided to... close down a lot of the factory. That meant that a massive amount of acres became available on the peace line. So there was a British director at the time called Richard Needham and he said right if Mackie's are moving out... what we'll do is we'll do a consultation about what should take place, what should go in there. So the consultation involved, probably for the first time they'd ever consulted with communities, they consulted with the Catholic and Protestant communities along the peace line. The government put in the money to set up a development trust on the Catholic side and one on the Protestant side and that kind of reflected the amount of polarization at the time... So on the catholic side, it was Foundry Regeneration Trust and on the protestant side—it was a largely community driven development trust—and on the protestant side it was called Forthriver.<sup>81</sup>

Geraldine McAteer became the development officer for the Foundry Trust, the precursor of the West Belfast Partnership. The members of the two trusts met periodically to discuss the needs of their communities and the opportunities that could be pursued with the land. This in and of itself was extraordinary considering the tensions at this interface and the confrontation of expectations that both communities had for this controversial piece of land. Members of either trust would not have felt safe in each other's community but over the course of these interactions, built relationships that continue today. McAteer and Jackie Redpath, then development officer of Forthriver and now her counterpart at the Greater Shankill Partnership, continue to work amicably on shared issues. They considered job creation, new business, education, etc. They learned a great deal about each other's community and the issues they shared but often for different reasons. For example, on the issue of unemployment:

---

<sup>81</sup> Geraldine McAteer (CEO West Belfast Partnership), interview with author, October 11, 2012.

May Blood would say 'well you people think that we got all the jobs but you know our men worked hard, but nobody actually made a fortune. Our people struggle too. And now that the shipbuilding industry and the rope industry and the engineering have all declined, our Shankill population are now suffering from high levels of unemployment but they've no education. At least you people are all educated so you've got something you can slot into.'<sup>82</sup>

Unemployment was a problem for both communities but for people in the Falls this was a result of discrimination against Catholics; for people in the Shankill, it was a result of the declining economy and the departure of the major industries that had employed them. Those in the Shankill had had more to lose. The other side of this is that with employment more or less guaranteed through apprenticeships within the PUL network, the culture of PUL communities is widely recognized as not encouraging education. There was little purpose seen in educating boys who would leave school at thirteen or fourteen to join their father, uncle, brother at the shipyard and learn a trade. In CRN communities the culture regarding education was vastly different. Catholics were historically denied education to such a degree that hedgerow schools developed in which groups of children and a teacher would hide in the hedgerows for lessons. For Catholics, in the absence of guaranteed jobs that the apprenticeship system guaranteed to Protestants in greater number, education was considered the only means of escaping the conditions of deprivation they were born into. Catholics have valued education in a way completely unknown to Protestant communities. Today higher education enrolments favor Catholics 60/40 (Nolan 2012). This is not to suggest that Protestants never pursue education, however. The Protestants interviewed here have each suggested in their own way that they pursued higher education despite the culture they were raised in. As a result, as McAteer's rendering of May Blood suggests, each of these communities had assets

---

<sup>82</sup> Geraldine MacAteer (CEO West Belfast Partnership), interview with author, October 11, 2012.

shaped in the context of shared but disparate history. With a better understanding of these issues and assets, the two trusts began to develop a common agenda.

I'm not trying to paint it as something very glossy that emerged and that it was all hands across the peace line overnight or anything but bit, by bit, by bit, over a period of years we started to come to an understanding.<sup>83</sup>

So stable were the relationships built between the two trusts that when the US became involved in the area, U.S. representatives were connected to these trusts, these community partnerships as voices of authority in their community and sources of expertise regarding both the conflict and the potential for mitigating the violence.

And then along came the opportunity of the IRA ceasefire of August '94 and the whole American intervention. So what started to happen was the US government people started coming in... We were saying to Martha [Pope] at the time, because she actually was coming in ahead of George Mitchell who Clinton had appointed and first liaised as economic envoy. We were saying to her, we had it worked out by then. We were saying, now that we have a ceasefire, if you want to engender stability in the community, the best way you can do that, the best social program we can have here would be jobs. Because jobs get people something to work towards, they give them an income, they give them a stake in the country, a stake in peace, it's hugely stabilizing. If you have jobs and careers within a family, people feel rooted, better standard of living. So then we went one step further and what we said was, if America is serious about not only coming in to invest in Northern Ireland but using that investment as a means of developing and underpinning the peace, we would suggest that you locate in these districts. And also that you assist people from these districts access jobs elsewhere. So we actually come up with quite a sharp agenda, and we found that we got a lot of support for it. Because George Mitchell then, his very first day in Belfast, his first day in Ireland, he came here and I brought him up around West Belfast and got him to meet a lot of people in a local shopping centre and then brought him over to the peace line and handed him over to Jackie and Jackie brought him around the Shankill and George Mitchell even talks about that in his book and says that on his first day here he realized just how far working class people—just what their needs were, particularly in the Shankill where Jackie had said to him, unless we get jobs for all these young men, this is going to flare up and it's going to continue and so on. We were able to influence a lot of the thinking of key players like George Mitchell.<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> Geraldine MacAteer (CEO West Belfast Partnership), interview with author, October 11, 2012.

<sup>84</sup> Geraldine MacAteer (CEO West Belfast Partnership), interview with author, October 11, 2012.

Community development in Northern Ireland came to represent real power and an ability to handle much larger tasks than those it started with. Community groups were trusted as agents of change, as representatives of their community and as forces of stability. “In the Northern Ireland context, the community development process generates the primary level of development necessary for improved community relations and locally based initiatives” (Community Development Review Group 1991: 3). It is often said of Northern Ireland that the peace process was paved with the progress and demands of community organizations. As O’Brien (2009: 42) describes, community development “promotes a people-centred, people-driven approach” such that community member’s needs drove progress; “does not assume ‘professional external intervention’ as the only catalyst for development action” as people began to recognize their own abilities in meeting the needs of their community; “facilitates local leadership capable of encouraging participatory approaches” as exemplified by the numerous people who earned the respect of community members but have continued to pursue community development rather than to seek political power; “enables people of various persuasions to work together to achieve fundamental human needs” which itself has facilitated community relations in Northern Ireland; and “incorporates conflict resolution strategies to facilitate development.”

### **From Para-Military to Para-Community Worker**

In many cases the assertion of people taking control of their communities took the form of community security. Streets were closed off and blockaded. Major thoroughfares were guarded. In some cases, kitchens and dining rooms were turned into assembly lines for Molotov cocktails. As one previous ‘assembly line’ worker described, young girls



were often sent knocking on doors to track down supplies of sugar which acts as an adhesive for the gasoline and prolongs to burn. Dish soap, or ‘washing up powder,’ works too, but sugar is better because it ‘sticks to their uniforms.’ This comment was made by a PUL community member who wanted it made clear that it was both sides and not just the CRN that felt as though they would need to protect themselves against the security forces.

Protecting the community turned into a calling for some as a number of paramilitary organizations rose from this kind of community security. In many cases, paramilitary organizations provided legitimate community service. They are attributed with ensuring food delivery, providing or organizing care to pensioners, youth organizations, etc. With this in mind, it was in some ways unsurprising that post-conflict, demilitarized paramilitaries were transformed into community development organizations. Ex-prisoners were a key part of this process. The release of prisoners was an important part of the negotiations in the peace talks. Convicted prisoners from both communities with time left on their sentences were released.

In CRN communities led by Sinn Fein and the demilitarized structure of the IRA, ex-prisoners formed organizations. They provided services unique to the needs of ex-prisoners such as advice, training and finding jobs, etc. On the Falls, Coiste Republican ex-prisoners group provide political walking tours, a function that is uniquely served by this group of people. Ex-prisoners’ groups also provided a range of services within their communities. They returned to their neighborhoods as heroes in many cases and therefore had a kind of clout; they had earned the respect of their community and people listened to them and they transitioned into community development roles.

Community development was initially eschewed by PUL communities because of the assumption that, as community development was led by republican and nationalist anti-state forces, that community development itself was corrupted. Those links between community development and republican politics continue today.

Historically [community] centres were created by the neighbourhoods, staffed almost exclusively by volunteers, to compensate for the lack of services from the state. Later the peace process provided public funding that has been supplemented by the neighbourhoods' own fundraising efforts. While each of the community workers interviewed for this study is employed in one of the centres' programmes or in the overall administration of a centre, each interviewee also functions in a parallel but unofficial way on behalf of the republican movement. This means that the centres, while funded with public money and therefore part of the state apparatus, also function as sites for progressive resistance to the controlling institutions in the society. In sum, the community centres, through the work of these individuals, help to develop a counter-hegemonic consciousness among some residents and provide a political space where republican values can be fostered while simultaneously making available the social services funded by the state. (Cassidy 2005: 342)

Cassidy's study goes on to quote interviews with community workers representing several different CRN communities. These interviews link the value of strengthening the community as central to their republicanism. Several of these were also ex-prisoners and discussed the legitimacy that this status grants them. "If I wasn't involved in the community or concerned not just for my own well-being but for my community's well-being, I wouldn't have gone to prison" stated one ex-prisoner community worker (Cassidy 2005: 345).

In PUL communities, community development still lagged behind. UDA and UVF ex-prisoners came out of the Maze and started organizing, following the example of 'Provs'<sup>85</sup> who were already 'streets ahead' in terms of community development. They formed committees who identified needs and formed residents' groups, women's groups,

---

<sup>85</sup> Provisional IRA

youth groups, etc. following the Provia model. They also set to work managing the interfaces. In the wake of the Agreement, the security forces were drastically cut back such that eventually there were no more soldiers on the streets. Ex-prisoner groups in new community development roles took over some of these security functions. In PUL communities, ex-prisoners were not always as welcome as they tended to be in CRN communities. Being sent to prison was akin to having committed treason and even though Loyalist paramilitaries argued that they fought to defend their communities, they were not heralded as heroes but were often treated with embarrassment. Still however, as paramilitary structures lingered, these ex-prisoners, most often men, often returned home to take over their roles as the Big Lads.

One of the problems of decommissioning paramilitaries was that youth who had had political goals and an outlet for their energies and frustration were told to go home. A peace agreement meant neither that they had won or accomplished something, nor that were ready to stop fighting for the cause. Recreational rioting still goes on in Belfast today. However, it is commonly understood that behind these outbursts of violence are the Big Lads who impose boundaries on how far such outbursts are taken, where they are staged and when. These Big Lads also prevent destructive energies. Youth with no alternative outlet often turn to vandalism and other forms of anti-social behavior. In such cases, the police often have no impact; but the Big Lads, with their paramilitary and ex-prisoner reputations, have been known to resolve and channel this destruction toward other purposes.

Ironically, ex-prisoners have had great success in building community relations. It has been argued that ex-prisoners are the only ones who actually can work across

interfaces. They have established a reputation and have in fact done time in prison in the name of defending their community and it is this reputation which allows them to work on community relations without being questioned for their loyalty. Further, a large number of those imprisoned, spent their time educating themselves such that large numbers of men returned to their communities educated in fields such as political science, social work and communications. These new assets have contributed to returned community members playing roles vastly different from those that they left.

In another process, paramilitaries were asked during the peace process to decommission and stand down their military activities. Recognizing that this would render paramilitary members both jobless in some sense and, ultimately, powerless, agreements were made through which paramilitaries became ex-paramilitaries and transformed into community workers. There is moral dilemma involved in legitimizing the gatekeeper. Paramilitaries, which ironically are military organizations that are not state sanctioned, became community organizations that were state sanctioned. Because of the number of paramilitary organizations in Northern Ireland, they are often referred to en masse as 'paras.' With a little academically creative license, they are here referred to as "para-community workers" employing both the common term and the irony of their state sanction.

There are certainly examples of positive para-community workers, organizations that seem legitimately to be pursuing community development. There are also examples of para-community workers who operate under the guise of legitimated community development while pursuing what has devolved from political paramilitarism into organized crime or thug'ism. In some communities people still pay for 'protection' while

in others there is no question of who controls the illicit drug market. As CRN communities have been more engaged in the process of community development and CRN paramilitaries were more tightly controlled, this thug'ism much more common among PUL para-community workers. Though CRN communities have been extorted, it was much more likely that those moneys were put towards community use, rather than for individual gain as has been more common in PUL communities. Punishment beatings, tarring and feathering and other forms of intimidation still go on. Complaints are frequent, though not made public that the state is funding these operations merely to prevent these para-community groups from returning to broader forms of violence.

The presence of these community workers complicates the already complex work of community development and each of the three major paramilitaries active in Northern Ireland have handled this differently.<sup>86</sup> The IRA has a history of splintering. The IRA most active and powerful during the Troubles were actually the Provisional IRA or simply the Provos or Provies. Intimately tied to Sinn Fein, the IRA was structured and organized and actively sought to serve the CRN communities as an alternative to the state in service provision. They were also very controlled in their membership. IRA ex-prisoners talk about the process of being vetted to join the organization. Known trouble-makers, delinquents, drug-users were strictly unwelcome. The police force and security forces were almost entirely PUL and so as a young CRN man who had interest in that type of work, that type of life, joining the IRA was the best option and the IRA therefore could afford to be selective. For these reasons, the IRA was 'streets ahead' in developing a model for community development.

---

<sup>86</sup> For more on Northern Ireland paramilitaries, see for example Bruce (1992) on Protestant paramilitaries or English (2003) on the IRA.

By comparison:

In many ways the UVF is further down the line in terms of community development, they've learned a lot from Sinn Fein, some of their activists would know each other, they would have been in jail together... sometimes they're accused of being too close to Sinn Fein because they have this community development model—they're further along... also the UVF is structured differently, they're structured like an army, they're a hierarchy and they're legitimate that way, they came from 1916, they're UVF. Now, there's a perceived snobbery about their legitimacy in the way they operate... the UDA, which is a group of vigilantes, which organized as street vigilantes in the '70s, they don't operate that way, they operate in independent companies, they have brigadiers who are gangsters... there's all these kind of stereotypes and perceptions... they hate each other but there are differences in the organization.<sup>87</sup>

In the cases of both the UDA and the UVF, volunteers are known as 'back of the room boys', the members of the community who would not have done well in school, who would have been prone to anti-social behavior, and so forth (Bruce 1992: 268-273).

In the PUL communities, if a young man was bound to succeed, he would have been much more likely to join the police or security forces than to join a paramilitary. PUL paramilitaries got the 'leftovers' that were not accepted by the reputable state forces.

They were often seen by their own communities as criminal and corrupt. Competition and violence between the UVF and the UDA, like the 2000 Shankill Feud have contributed to the contemporary view of ex-paramilitaries as thugs. The UDA was even more likely to have this reputation, which has been exacerbated by the independent company structure of their organization and the infighting and jealousies that brigadiers have exhibited over issues of territory since the Agreement. This goes on today. Everyone knows who the UDA brigadiers are and they are not shy about claiming the title for themselves. With both the UVF and the UDA however, PUL paramilitaries have transitioned into community development with far less acuity than ex-IRA.

---

<sup>87</sup> Community worker, confidential interview with author, August-December 2012.

The UDA has been slower to do that well... it's also because the experiences in jail were very different... the UDA, it wasn't their ethos to [study while in jail]... a lot of people who in the IRA and UVF came out with degrees and education and new ways of thinking. The UDA didn't really have that, so they came out with big bodies and that is a bit of a stereotype but it's only really now that there's more and more of a push to educate and create leaders, good leaders that would be not wearing a mask...for an organization like that it would be easier to go into gangsterism when there's a gap now in controlling in different ways because they don't have the same discipline and leadership structures... also in terms of political process, they hadn't been as involved and stuff, remember the PUP had David Ervine and Billy Hutchison [both UVF], thinkers that were at the table... [the UDP] they're further behind that way, others are slicker now and they out talk them and out think them. ... there's emphasis on getting these people skilled up and on boards and lead their people in a different way but sometimes it is my experience that they forget who they are, they speak to me as the commander or the brigadier, which is completely inappropriate—or are you a community development worker?—you can't be both... so there is still this potential threat in power that is sometimes brought to the table... to come into a room, body language is important and four big guys who 'we're here for this meeting'... inarticulate, unable to participate, not understanding how these processes work... you have a code of engagement nearly,... when people have not been in that process they're coming in there and things outside the room and phone calls are made and it undermines the process because either they don't like the process, but instead of being able to deal with it at the table and participate—I think it's a skill thing, experience, they hadn't done that, they don't know how, there's disrupting from the side-lines and wildly inappropriate comments... we think we have things agreed, how to deal with the police, how to deal with the bonfires and the songs, it's all very choreographed... you get it all in place but we come out of there and somebody who was at this meeting comes and says, yeah well we were told... [and the process is] completely disrupted.<sup>88</sup>

Stories like this one, though specifically naming the UDA, have been told in numerous PUL communities about both the UVF and the UDA as well as other smaller paramilitaries. PUL ex-paramilitaries pursued community development out of personal gain more than a sincere desire to accomplish actual community development. A great deal of pressure was put on the IRA during the peace process, as it presented a much more coherent and organized opposition to the state, to decommission in a way that was visible and to transition into other forms of community politics, whether representative or

---

<sup>88</sup> Community worker, confidential interview with author, August-December, 2012.

participatory. Much more attention was paid to the organization that is still associated with terrorism and bombing during the Troubles. Today, splinter groups of the IRA like the Continuity IRA and the Real IRA are more likely to be associated with the kinds of gangsterism commonly laid at the feet of the UVF and UDA. This should not suggest that the IRA merely faded away. Sinn Fein acquired a great deal of IRA membership into its legitimate political activities. Communities on both sides question how they can trust a government that allows former terrorists to hold public office.

While some ex-paramilitary members have sought power through intimidation, violence and control, others legitimately seek to serve their communities even if this requires them to interact across the interface.

I remember a paramilitary leader saying to me, ‘because me deal with you the other side, does no dilute my politics, does not dilute who I am or what my aspiration’ ... that's right it does not dilute us... we are creating a better future, it's that level of leadership that is so important... I am not contaminated by you, by engagement.<sup>89</sup>

Sadly this lesson has not been learned by all para-community workers.

### **Representative vs. Participative Politics**

Well community development obviously is important and it's been the foundation of a lot of the work that's gone on here during the Troubles when we didn't have a political forum, there was no point in thinking about politics because there was no legislative avenues for that. The community and voluntary sector generally, not just women, have been extremely active and worked with policy makers, i.e. with civil servants in terms of instituting change so there's been this tension between the voluntary sector and politicians, because politicians now that we have a representative assembly, are very keen to bring back the focus on their electoral mandate rather than the voluntary sector who as they say we don't have an electoral mandate. So there's been a tension there.<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> Community worker, confidential interview with author, August-December 2012.

<sup>90</sup> Margaret Ward (Director, Women's Resource and Development Association), interview with author, August 10, 2012.



The peace process and the election of representatives to the peace talks represented something new in Northern Ireland as groups that had never previously been publicly recognized were legitimated by the democratic process. Their job was to broker a peace and agree on some resolution to the 'constitutional issue' and they did. However, as Mari Fitzduff suggested earlier in this chapter, when the Agreement re-established representative government in Northern Ireland, politicians who were no longer consumed by the constitutional issue and were able to address the needs of the people, were dismissive of community development declaring that 'we'll take over from here.' This opinion is supported by the failure to support the civic forum that was promoted by the Coalition. There continues to be tension between these two forms of politics today. On one hand, community workers often lament that 'we had it all worked out until the politicians arrived,' while, on the other hand, elected politicians claim the mandate of the electorate. Historically the state existed without the politicians, depending on the work of the voluntary and community sector and during the Troubles, community workers enjoyed the autonomy of being ruled directly from Westminster which in practice meant that 'there was no politics' as community workers often state. Today, an uneasy balance is being struck between the two forces.

There is the real danger of thinking that groups or communities can procure their own development without the State's involvement. This is a fallacy. There will always be a tension between the autonomous, justified, demands of the people to have their basic needs met and the capacity of the State to fulfill those needs. People can and should take hold of their own development and yet, at the same time, the State should be held accountable for the delivery of resources needed for such development to take place. (O'Brien 2009: 41)

From the point of view of the community and voluntary sector, community development for decades fulfilled the tasks that the state could not. They have a

participatory mandate that predates the current regime at Stormont. At the same time however, the protests that were the first forms of community organization called for the state to provide the services that would alleviate community deprivation. Community development has provided service autonomously but not because there was a shared feeling that it ought to be done that way. There has always been a sense that basic needs were being met in this way because of the absence of government. It follows then that community development today have certain expectations about the role of the state and as O'Brien states above, the state's accountability for the delivery of those services.

From the point of view of the state, public office holders have been elected and can therefore prove that they act with the will of the people. Community workers may claim to act with the will of the people but as suggested in the case of para-community workers, that many not always be the case. Assembly members interviewed for this project repeatedly acknowledged the difficult in identifying community groups that actively engage in positive progress and those that are power or control seeking. That being said, there is a certain amount of respect for the tasks that the voluntary and community sector accomplished in the absence of government. Community development was largely built on relationships. Organizations were built on the passions of a dedicated few and many of these have already faded into obscurity. Others have become in some important way institutionalized and stand a better chance of longevity. Still relationships fail, charisma dies, the state however, stands a greater chance of maintaining itself through the formal will of the people. Institutions of the state can continue to provide services long after those who created them have faded into the pages of history. The institutions of the state can also offer continuity through law. Further, the state, by

definition is representative of all of Northern Ireland and can therefore work to provide services to all communities, regardless of how successful individual community development has been. The value of the modern state should be obvious but to people in Northern Ireland who have watched as Stormont rise and fall and rise and fall again have little motivation to invest a great deal of faith in the ability of the government to provide stability the way community organizations have in recent history.

What exists then is a shared sense of need. Community organizations are still providing services that the state cannot replicate while the state has authority and requires the room to act to provide the services that it is accountable for. Making this room to act has ultimately pushed community organizations and the greater field of community development off the center stage.

I think that for a while, a lot of our politicians were so engaged in the peace process, which they should do because the big thing was to get a stable society, peaceful society. The big power games had to be played and so on and it was actually people in community development ... we all got on with that while the big power games were played. And now that you have an assembly, and a council that is obviously much less hostile, I mean the last sitting of the assembly actually, that was the first time the assembly survived for a full sitting without collapsing. So I'd be very positive about all of this because the way I look at it is, we are just on the cusp really of something that is brand new. We're coming out of an eight hundred year conflict here, we're trying to develop a democracy. You know an executive and all of that up at Stormont, that actually has never existed before because if you think of the old Stormont, it was like a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people, so you're looking at something totally different now. And I think people have to be patient. People do have to be patient with all that.<sup>91</sup>

The interviews both above and below were refreshing because of the application of the learning curve offered in excuse, if excuse is needed, of the politicians now actively engaged in the creative process of governing. As has been proven in numerous other cases, governing is highly contextualized, the structures of a functioning

---

<sup>91</sup> Community worker, confidential interview with author, August-December, 2012

government in one instance might not be successfully applied in another and in the Northern Ireland context, the precursor government was either 'Protestant' in the case of Stormont or British in the case of Westminster, neither of which were able to successfully govern the social and political forces in Northern Ireland. It should not be surprising that this process, the birth of something new, would come with growing pains.

You're looking at MLAs and government ministers, none of whom have had any former experience of running a government. I certainly wouldn't knock them for that. They've no experience of running a government, they are learning on their feet... What our government are doing is trying to get the reins of power. I have a great deal of patience for all of that and I wouldn't knock them. I don't think we can expect an all singing all dancing executive within four or five years after considering what we've been through... but remember these MLAs and city councilors, these are not directory ministers who fly in on a Monday and fly out again on Monday night. These are people who live here... I would respect where they come from. They would live in these districts, they live in these communities, shop in the same shopping centres, go to the same off-license, you see them out and about so they're from the community and they know what the community's issues are and what I respect about them as well, and what I think we need to be aware of as people involved... you must never ever lose touch with where real people are, and what the real issues are for people. You know, two-way traffic here because MLAs would say to me 'look I've had people coming into our clinic...they've lost their jobs, they're worried about where the benefit system is now, they might phone you up and say could point us in the direction of a health program or contact a school or whatever.' I think what's good about the current system is, the MLAs, they're there, they will be up for election again and so on, I think it's up to people in community development and the political system to try and work out the boundaries to try and see how collectively we can work to actually get a better deal for people here.<sup>92</sup>

The beauty in dealing with something new is the opportunity to contribute to its shape. Attitudes like those represented here can contribute to the functioning of healthy relationships between representative and participative politics because 'the distance between the ground level to Stormont is very small'. Further, there is a great potential to continue the momentum of both community development and peace building through

---

<sup>92</sup> Community worker, confidential interview with author, August-December, 2012.

these relationships. While it is clear that the institutions of state have come into competition with the community and voluntary sector, it has also been noted that this has been a response to the state not fulfilling its obligations. As the growing pains of a functioning democracy subside, there is an opportunity for community organizations to refocus their projects and indeed their agenda to goals that are better suited to the specialized skills of this sector. They can then serve the function that the Coalition intended with the Civic Forum of acting as a *via media* in identifying specific community needs, particularly those which could be systemic and require the attention of the state. As the tension between representative and participatory politics was framed by the triple whammy in Northern Ireland, so too should these tensions ease as these problems are managed. Healthy relationships between these two sectors suggest a stability that has long been absent and deeply needed. The development of trust with government is perhaps the next stage of community development, the building of vertical cohesion as Chan et al. describe it.

Representative politics is not always at odds with participatory politics. Many of the female politicians interviewed for this project described themselves as being recognized for their work in the community and selected for larger roles in their party because of that. Sinn Fein in particular is described as having an “activist quality in their approach” (Cassidy 2005: 352). Bean suggests that a number of influences contribute to this approach: the activism of the civil rights movement, the youth culture, the international protests of the late ‘60s and early ‘70s shaped Sinn Fein into a party that was focused on the base (Bean 2007: 54-60).

## **Conclusions**

Community development offered the people of Northern Ireland an alternative route to solve local problems of poverty and deprivation in the absence of a fully functional and stable government. In particular, CRN communities took the reins of this new field and used it not just to meet their local needs but to challenge the state. It served as a replacement to representative politics in these communities as well as a new form of participatory politics that added to the volume of CRN voices against an oppressive Protestant state. PUL communities slowly came to grasp the value of community development as the state continued to fail in meeting their needs. Community development has a legacy in Northern Ireland because these efforts and projects provided for people when the state could not. Community engagement has become a part of the culture in Northern Ireland. It is also a form of engagement in which women have flourished. This is the focus of the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: WEE WOMEN'S WORK**

### **Women's Groups and Community Development**

The story of community development told above is incomplete without considering the role that women have played in these organizations.

If the basic premises of community development are about helping people to identify needs and to organise collectively to meet those needs and participate in society, then work with women must be central to a community development strategy. (Abbott and McDonough 1989)

Community development was new to Northern Ireland and as a new field of activity; it was unclaimed territory in a gendered sense. The constitutional issue, the paramilitaries, the political parties were arenas dominated by men. Community development was a field that could be claimed by women.

In the beginning, you see, in the '70s, women started community development because on the Catholic side, a tremendous amount of the men had been lifted for internment and some had been taken away for three years and the Protestant side, the men were all joining the UDA and all the paramilitary groups, and women wanted to look after youth clubs, they wanted to look after children, they wanted to look after daycare and so women became involved. Now the men didn't object oddly enough because community development had always been seen as one of them wee soft issues and women can do it. But then it became very sophisticated. There was a lot of drive then to put on good programs like this... Basically, you got women doing all that, you got women doing the jobs that men thought was beneath them by and large, men was out on the street fighting. The women were carrying on with the daycare issues... So women got very sophisticated in what they done and we all supported one another. It was one of the values of it... But here in Northern Ireland, I think community development became almost a saviour of women because it gave them something to do that was having some

value in their area, and I've seen areas turn 'round in a marvellous way... And I'm on record as saying that if the true stories about the Troubles ever really come to be written, women will have to figure in very prominently because the men didn't care at that time, one or two but not a great value of them and even the trade union movement which I belonged to was very male dominated so they didn't want to know what the wee women were doing in their communities. Meantime, women were building up all that expertise. So they were.<sup>93</sup>

What has often been referred to as 'wee women's work' or 'bread and butter issues' in contrast to the 'constitutional issue' is the same set of issues and projects that are often described in Northern Ireland as 'politics with a small p.' Women, in much larger numbers than men, sought to address the 'soft' issues, the problems largely ignored or created by a tunnel-vision focus on the constitutional issue. Women have been central to community development in Northern Ireland. They were at the forefront of organizing services during the Troubles; forming groups to meet the needs of economically deprived and conflict-torn communities in the absence of government.

Women's life in the community is immersed in social relationships aimed at meeting the needs of others and mediating with state agencies on their behalf. Family life is central to these activities, so it is not surprising that women who undertake community action organise around issues such as day care facilities, housing, school closures, road-widening schemes, rights to incomes and rights to jobs, which facilitate fulfilling their obligations as grandmothers, mothers, wives and daughters. (Dominelli 1990: 3)

Women are acknowledged as carers and this took on vast new meaning during the Troubles. "At one level this could be seen as an extension of their traditional role as protectors of the family against hostile forces... Yet such actions help women to overcome the passivity, isolation and lack of trust common to modern society" (Abbott and McDonough 1989). These activities are empowering. Women taught themselves and then each other the steps required to form groups, strategize, seek funding and further

---

<sup>93</sup> May Blood (Baroness of Blackwatertown MBE), interview with author, August 17, 2012.



prove their success in order to acquire more funding. While these tasks were localized and focused on 'wee women's work' this empowerment served no threat. Issues such as childcare, education, health, and the like are addressed as public issues in and of themselves, but they are always under consideration within the 'women's sector.'

Definitions of community work activities have referred to 'hard' issues related to the economic infrastructure (for example, employment and housing) and 'soft' issues associated with servicing the growth of individuals or work performed by women in the community (usually in unpaid capacities, for example, playschemes and nursery places). (Dominelli 1990: 1)

In an environment constantly framed by a contest of power, women were given room to grow because they were growing in spaces that no one else wanted; they were not entering the arena as part of that contest. Instead, women sought out activities within the sphere of small "p," bread and butter issues that addressed problems in their daily lives and in the lives of their community members.

Yes, women have played a major role in sustaining community action through their domestic labour, their organising skills, their commitment to community values, and their capacity to innovate. Feminist definitions of community work have transcended traditional ones by drawing attention to women's needs for a form of community work which meets their specific needs as women, acknowledges women's contribution to their communities and community action, and demands the elimination of gender oppressions. (Dominelli 1990: 2)

The emphasis of care work in community development runs the risk of essentializing women, of suggesting that their contribution is limited to those attributes which identify them as women such that women's contribution is nothing short of natural, expected, and in that sense, rendered un-noteworthy. It is argued here that as gender roles are defined in context, women's roles in Northern Ireland have been structurally limited by the institutions of a patriarchal society in conflict. It is noteworthy, then, that women's contributions to community development, even if viewed as a

'natural' extension of maternal or care roles, extended women's activities further out into the public sphere than the dictates of gender roles. On the one hand it is expected for women to pursue childcare; on the other hand, it is a challenge to the status quo that they should achieve education, training and professional status, let alone the entrepreneurship of successfully maintaining and even growing this field as a business in order to do so. Women extended the reflexive model of community development to not only improve the community but to actively pursue improving themselves as individuals and as a group that has experienced deprivation in its own right.

### **Women's Centres**

Women's Centres began formally organizing in the 1980s as spaces for women to meet some basic needs of their own. "In practical terms, the mushrooming of women's centres gave a visible sign of changes for women in communities. Women's groups in community centres added to an emerging infrastructure" (McCready 2000: 65). They are sources of education and training, everything from Open College Network (OCN) courses for college credit to basic computer skills: 'many of our users wouldn't know how to turn a computer on, when they come to us.'<sup>94</sup> They are sources of socializing: bingo groups, crochet circles, holiday dinners and parties. They are sources of community relations as groups work with each other across distances (more often than across immediate interfaces) to go on weekend residentials and the like. They are sources of respite: most offer some combination of services such as massage, life coaching, counseling, yoga, stress management. They are also sources of practical services like childcare, resume building and job searching, housing and legal advice, and even

---

<sup>94</sup> Representatives from every women's centre researched in this project described the dearth of technical knowledge in this same way.

employment. A number of women's centres are duly proud of their social economy work in which their services are sustainable meeting the needs of the community while contributing to the economy through employment. Childcare centers such as Shankill Women's Centre's Small Wonders I and more recently Small Wonders II, began as a crèche in which women could safely leave their children while they were attending courses at the women's centre. They have developed into full-time, professional childcare and are economically self-sustaining, separate from community and voluntary sector funding.

It is a tribute to the energy and commitment of women engaged in collective action in some of the most deprived areas and to that network of feminists and community workers which support them, that working class women's groups are recognised as important catalysts in neighbourhoods, have gained a higher public profile and have demonstrated the strength and confidence that can come from collective action. Indeed the growth in women's activity has in many ways sustained community work in recent years. (Abbott and McDonough 1989)

Women's Centres operate on networks of regular communication, information sharing and joint projects. Umbrella groups such as the Women's Centres Regional Partnership (WCRP)<sup>95</sup> and its key partners the Women's Support Network (WSN), Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA), and Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN), facilitate this. This sharing also leads to a standardization of structures and services among women's centres. Women who visit one centre could walk into another and find comfort in the familiar services, course offerings and

---

<sup>95</sup> The Women's Centres Regional Partnership has fourteen members: Windsor Womens Centre, Footprints Women's Centre, Falls Women's Centre, Greenway Women's Centre, Shankill Women's Centre, Women's Centre Derry, Waterside Women's Centre, Strathfoyle Women's Activity Group, each represented in this project; and Ballybeen Women's Centre, Atlas Women's Centre, Chrysalis Women's Centre, First Steps Women's Centre, The Learning Lodge—Magherafelt Women's Centre, and Foyle Women's Information Network, not directly researched here.

commitment to a welcoming and safe space. That being said, each women's centre has its own identity, an individual personality embedded in a unique local history.

### **Falls Women's Centre**

Falls Women's Centre was born out of the Troubles, 1981, when the majority of the men on the road were in jail and the women were the breadwinners and they were the ones who were going to the prisons, they were being dual parents, both the mother and the father to the kids and it got born out of a group of women seeing the need for a space to come together to share, to talk, to see if they could get support in any financial or housing remit that may be presenting itself at the time. And therein, as in any society, when a group of women get together, things get done.<sup>96</sup>

The Falls Women's Centre (FWC) developed quickly as more and more women began to respond to the opportunity for women to come together. There was a process of recognizing strengths and skills, of getting formally constituted and of identifying goals. One issue of immediate importance was domestic abuse.

Because irrespective of all the Trouble and getting blindsided by the men getting harassed and arrested and killed, there was still a lot of domestic violence going on and it was put on the back burner. People were apathetic to the point of, 'he's under pressure but he didn't mean to give you two black eyes' things like that.<sup>97</sup>

FWC set out to provide services for women suffering from domestic abuse.

Women needed a safe space free of violence and so FWC developed as a space that is strictly women only, they needed someone to talk to about their options, someone who would support them as an individual with needs that might deviate from the needs of the men who were serving to 'protect' the community during the Troubles. FWC then added to these immediate issues to address the deeper self-esteem issues that coincide with domestic abuse. Courses on personal development were offered.

---

<sup>96</sup> Community worker, confidential interview with author, August-December, 2012

<sup>97</sup> Community worker, confidential interview with author, August-December, 2012

We believe you cannot empower a woman, you can give a woman knowledge to empower herself, you can give her the tools, you can give her the root, you can give her opportunities and you can be there.<sup>98</sup>

From informal meetings to a run-down flat to two side-by-side buildings and, finally in 2000, to the space that it operates in now, the FWC averages between 18-21 staff. It is a clearly recognizable pink and purple building on the Falls Road with crèche facilities, computer training room, administrative offices, and classrooms, as well as an advice centre, and a drop-in centre that is warm and cozy and designed to feel like a living room where women can come for a 'cuppa' tea and a chat. Informal meetings are held here regarding what women need, what courses should be offered, as well information sessions regarding the switch to digital television, for example, or the major changes in the welfare system. The walls display artwork from local artists, a quilt made by the women of the community and on the table is a floral arrangement that is itself an invitation to come to the floral arrangement class. Familiar faces come and go, old friends reminisce and new friends are introduced. This is a space designed for such exchanges.

We are a cross community women's centre, we have women coming across the barriers for education at all times. We do not ask religion, creed or color. We are all women together and we share life experiences and we learn from each other.<sup>99</sup>

There is some complexity here however. The FWC is structured to be open to all communities. In fact, in early September, there is an annual open day to sign up for the autumn course offerings. A wide range of courses are available, including various arts and crafts, health and fitness, technical training, personal development and OCN courses for college credit. The women who attended this open day were representative of diverse

---

<sup>98</sup> Community worker, confidential interview with author, August-December, 2012.

<sup>99</sup> Community worker, confidential interview with author, August-December, 2012.

groups: several migrant populations were represented in signing up for the English courses on offer, women across a wide range of ages signed up for OCN courses, perhaps most surprising were the Traveler women who have been coming to FWC for a couple years now. The population of women which is notoriously difficult to reach has come to trust the women at FWC. Open Day was a great success.

Absent from the variety of women who were signing up for courses, however, were PUL women from neighboring communities. The Falls Road is wedged between the Shankill and the Village and Sandy Row PUL areas. Women might not come down from the Shankill or up from the Village to take courses at FWC because they have their own courses at their own women's centre. However, women from Sandy Row would simply not consider visiting the FWC. They have no women's centre of their own and so simply consider themselves without access to such services. The women's centres addressed here all have similarly worded ethos regarding inclusivity, openness and welcome to women of any and all communities, backgrounds, races or religion. Inclusivity is required in fact for much of the grants and funding that women's centres can apply for today. This does not mean however, that women from other areas would feel welcome there, or at least feel comfortable. Women from neighboring Sandy Row recognize the good work being done for women and by women at FWC but state clearly: 'that's not for us.'

### **Shankill Women's Centre**

The Shankill Women's Centre (SWC) was developed a little later, in 1987, with the help of women from FWC. "Because women have the ability not to reinvent the wheel" suggested one community relations expert in discussing the sharing of lessons learned that went on in the early development of the women's sector and continues today.

As discussed above, even with the reproduction of basic structures and ideas, each centre has a personality of its own, shaped by the women involved and the forces at work in their community.

For SWC, one of those forces that had the biggest shaping effect on the centre and its place in the community was the 2000 Shankill Feud in which rivalrous paramilitaries, the UVF and UDA waged war on each other and tore the community of Shankill Road apart.

We're sitting on a border. Down that way is UDA and up that way is UVF. This was kind of the cutoff point...anybody who was perceived to be UVF down this direction was kept out of their homes and the same this direction. We had workers whose parents were put out of their houses. We went around and helped lift furniture into cars...at that time we actually opened—this is what I think is unique about this centre—even though we have all the job to do and we have various projects, when the goin' gets rough, we can get goin' because we literally opened these doors to anyone and all the staff walked in and we made tea and sandwiches. We had women comin' in here who were sisters that maybe one was married to UVF man, one was married to UDA man. So they were goin' at it and we kept them apart until we could do a bit of mediation. It was a terrible time.<sup>100</sup>

SWC was able to rise above the violence to serve the community of victims of this power struggle. Lines were drawn within the community but they did not cut through the centre, nor did the centre choose a side. In this way, SWC established itself as separate from the politics. It has largely been left to its own devices as a result.

### **Windsor Women's Centre**

Paramilitaries have been a problem for Windsor Women's Centre as well. The Village, a small PUL or perhaps more accurately, Loyalist community, has a very strong UVF presence. One community worker from a CRN area suggested that “the thing with Windsor women's centre, they can—paramilitaries—can dictate their piece because it's a

---

<sup>100</sup> Betty Carlisle (Manager, Shankill Women's Centre, Board Member Greater Shankill Partnership), interview with author, September 5, 2012.

smaller village and they don't sometimes have as much freedom as we would have.”<sup>101</sup>

There is a feeling in smaller communities of being watched. The UVF murals and graffiti tags in the Village only add to this paranoia. The Windsor Women’s Centre itself shows signs of some of these pressures. There are bullet holes in the front of the building, security fencing across windows, and stains on the sidewalk from a public tar-and-feathering that occurred only a handful of years ago. It seems to be commonly understood by the workers in the other women’s centres in the partnership that Windsor Women’s centre is under pressure.

Despite these pressures, the women who work at Windsor continue to provide services that garner them death threats and physical violence. They are committed to providing a safe environment for women and in doing so, demonstrate great courage and dedication to “develop and promote equality of opportunity and champion practices and policies to better the lives of women and their families” (Windsor Women's Centre 2012). There is a focus on advice, childcare, and education and as such, this centre is a structure of support in what looks on the surface to be a failing community. Row upon row of two-up-two-down houses here lie either derelict or landbanked,<sup>102</sup> isolated houses with warm lights on and manicured doorsteps only throw into contrast the dilapidation of the rest of the area. Redevelopment projects are scheduled here, rows of houses seem to be torn down almost overnight in order to rebuild the area. In August of 2012, Windsor stood next to an empty section of land that only recently held houses. Only two houses remained at one end of this land, these are under dispute because the gable end of these

---

<sup>101</sup> Community worker, confidential interview with author, August-December, 2012.

<sup>102</sup> Landbanking is the process of walling up a property’s doors and windows so that vandals cannot destroy the interior in the hopes that the property’s value will eventually rise.



houses boasts a mural and UVF remembrance site. Discussions within the community have successfully relocated similar murals but for whatever reason, no agreement has been made for this particular remembrance site. This is another sign of paramilitary presence and influence if not power in this area.

At the opposite end of this piece of land, ground was broken in October of 2012 for Windsor's new extension, the Therapeutic and Training Enterprise (TATE). Discussed informally by the women of Windsor as the 'trauma centre', this new development is yet another sign of Windsor's commitment to the health of its community and a symbol of their strength as an important actor within this community. It will be interesting to see how the Big Lads in the Village respond to the range of services that the Women of Windsor can offer in service to the community.

### **Greenway Women's Centre**

The Greenway Women's Centre was begun in 1985. It took over a community centre and snooker club that had not been managed well and had fallen into disuse. A local group of women decided they needed somewhere to meet:

They managed to get the council to sort of sign it over to them to maintain it and look after it... on a Wednesday morning we have a group of pensioners who come and ... they literally just come and sit ... and gossip and that's all they do and that's all they want to do. They want a place to come. That was the purpose for the women's centre in the first place. Just a place to come.<sup>103</sup>

Greenway is set in the heart of the Cregagh estate in East Belfast which is broadly categorized as PUL. Cregagh itself however is Loyalist though the women who describe themselves and their community in this way cannot identify specific reasons for choosing this nomenclature. The centre is constituted to be open to anyone from any community

---

<sup>103</sup> Kirsty Richardson (Director, Greenway Women's Centre), interview with author, September 26, 2012.

but it is geographically bound. There are no nearby interfaces and the Cregagh estate itself is self-contained. As representatives of the centre describe, it is 'Prod in any direction.' Most of the workers and volunteers all fit this classification. Since there are no records kept with this kind of information, it is difficult to say whether there are any users who are not PUL. In fact, the only examples that the women at Greenway could offer of CRN users that they were sure of was in their childcare facilities.

They would be coming more from Carryduff which is up the road the other way, these families would be more well-off, they wouldn't be on . . . [benefit]. These ones that are accessing the service would actually be quite well-off financially, you know families with two parents... that's really all.<sup>104</sup>

As in other areas that self-define as Loyalist, there is a clear paramilitary presence in Cregagh. Though there has been no direct involvement in the Greenway Women's Centre itself, the users of the centre talk about it. Women in the community have family members, friends or neighbors who are involved.

they would know who to go to if they needed help with something, they would know who the people were who have UVF connections... if they have a troublesome neighbor...that still happens.<sup>105</sup>

The environment feels very different from that of the Village however. Apartment buildings with manicured lawns and well-kept houses with regular traffic give a feeling of busyness that is absent in the Village. There is no sense of being watched here.

Greenway has experienced no threats, no pressure from the local UVF.

Without me making it sound more sinister than it is, or could be, the women would have connections in as far as people wouldn't touch the centre because they know... it has never been attacked or anything like that and I suppose that what my assumption is, is that just because the right people who would potentially

---

<sup>104</sup> Community worker, confidential interview with author, August-December, 2012.

<sup>105</sup> Community worker, confidential interview with author, August-December, 2012.

cause trouble are on the right side of the people who are involved here. So the UVF wouldn't have anything against us here. They know that we're no threat.<sup>106</sup>

Members of staff and users of these centres all identify their relationship to the community in similar ways. The language of threat suggests an acknowledged balance of power that is potentially easily upset. Women's centres all operate in a space that is precarious navigated such that services can be expanded, that women can grow, without encroaching on the power of others.

### **Footprints**

Footprints Women's Centre offers a physical example of negotiating that space. Footprints was also born in the '80s in what was then a new housing estate in CRN West Belfast. It was built as part of the redevelopment schemes of the '70s, to take some of the housing pressures off the Falls road. The estate was located at, what was then, the boundary of CRN West Belfast and neighboring city Lisburn, which has historically been PUL dominated. The Lisburn city council did not want CRN voters filling that gap and potentially moving into their district and there was a great deal of resentment towards the people who moved into the estate.

What happened was then that floods of people moved up here, a lot of them to get away from the Troubles that were starting in and around the Falls...for a bit of what they seen as a bit of peace and quiet. But what happened when this new area was built, there was no resources put in, so it was all houses, there was nothing else, there was no transport links, there was no shopping facilities, initially there was no health centre. There was very very poor infrastructure built so people were left really out in limbo. I remember when I came here, we would have described this area, I always called it a peripheral concern. It was always something that was on the edge, that nobody really wanted to pay attention to, yet it had a very big population.<sup>107</sup>

---

<sup>106</sup> Community worker, confidential interview with author, August-December, 2012.

<sup>107</sup> Gillian Gibson (Director, Footprints Women's Centre), interview with author, November 8, 2012.

A group of young women, with young families, came together and got organized to solve the shared problems of this isolation. The unique twist in this story, is that they organized with the help of the parish priest who was mindful not only of their needs but of his and the church's role as a structure of organized authority in the area. The priest started by offering the women a room at the church and the services of a nun. They eventually took over a bungalow that was once a home and then the community's first health centre but had since fallen into disuse. The women's group grew steadily and by the early '90s was becoming structured, competent and even employed its first worker. There began to be clashes between the nun and a series of employees who came and went as a result of differing views of what the groups should look like. It was a fragile period that could potentially have resulted in the dissolution of the group under the direction of the nun. However, the nun was moved on by the church in what seems from the outside like providence. The church could have reasserted its role, the priest could have stepped in again or another nun could have replaced the previous one but that is not what happened.

The priest wanted the centre not to be built as a project of the church but as a project that would meet the support needs of women and he understood that it needed to be independent. So in terms of his role, ... he was there when he was needed and he stood back when he knew that the women were strong enough to do the stuff themselves and he would have done that sooner than they would have wished. He would have disappeared sooner but they actually needed him in the background to give them the confidence in those early days but once the organization was held in trust by a group of male parishioners and he actually encouraged them to sign the trusteeship over to the women so the history was very unusual. It's not normal that the Catholic Church would hand over an asset, but that priest was the uncle of Monica McWilliams. So I believe.<sup>108</sup>

---

<sup>108</sup> Gillian Gibson (Director, Footprints Women's Centre), interview with author, November 8, 2012.

The trusteeship for the organization that became Footprints was held by a group of male parishioners but the priest, who happened to be the uncle of Monica McWilliams, encouraged the men to sign the trusteeship to the women themselves. It is not a common story for the Catholic Church to hand over an asset but the priest sincerely believed in the women and the importance of them being entrusted and thereby empowered to manage their own affairs. The women of Footprints talk of the priest fondly, 'you can tell that there was a different understanding.'<sup>109</sup> One woman suggested of both the priest and perhaps the family of Monica McWilliams.

Gillian Gibson, the centre's Director came in in the '90s from a background as a community development worker. In 1994, she sat in a room with around fifteen women trying to develop a strategic plan.

I was saying okay let's talk about the issues and they said no we don't want to talk about the issues, we live them every day, we know what they are, we now want to talk about what we're going to do about them. So it was nearly like, we don't want to talk, we want to do and that was very significant for me because it really gave me permission to actually start doing things.<sup>110</sup>

Five themes emerged from this talk that still guide the centre: childcare; catering which started out as a safe environment to have breakfast or just a cup of tea and has developed from a social economy into a focus on sustainable living; training and education; social economy as a stable source of employment, this has turned into a trading business; and family support.

As Footprints has expanded and grown so has its need for space. Today the centre is housed in a purpose-built structure.

---

<sup>109</sup> Gillian Gibson (Director, Footprints Women's Centre), interview with author, November 8, 2012.

<sup>110</sup> Gillian Gibson (Director, Footprints Women's Centre), interview with author, November 8, 2012.

When we built this building we had to consider how the community, particularly men, would view the growth of this women's activity. So we built down to keep our roof at the same level as local houses because physically if we had risen above the houses,... like people were shocked when we built this building because we were quietly working away and we had all our activities spread through the community, but we always had a plan. And the plan was the building but no one would have believed that the women here could have achieved this. So when it was built it was a shock to people and when you become powerful, there's always a bit of a backlash. We had to prepare for that. That was why we had to think very carefully about the height of the building, the shape of it. That we could step out but we couldn't step out too far.<sup>111</sup>

Ten years ago, the building sat in the middle of a car park, today it is securely situated behind a prison-grade gate and fencing. The sight would be intimidating anywhere else but in Belfast this kind of security is not unusual. Within the gates is an outdoor play area for the children in the childcare facilities as well as a lovely garden that supports their sustainable living focus as well as serving as a quiet place to just sit. Inside the centre is a lovely café and kitchen sized and organized for professional catering, the largest and most comprehensive childcare facility in the women's centres discussed here, as well as space for training and education and a series of administrative offices. The women here are warm, welcoming and professional. They are aware that they are a part of something powerful and know they must be careful. Each of these developments took small steps but, pun intended, it has left a big footprint.

### **GRACE (Ardoyne)**

North Belfast is more characterized by the patchwork of small communities than the rest of the city. Within that patchwork is the small CRN community of Ardoyne and the only women's group in North Belfast. The Ardoyne Women's Group has been operating for about twenty years and was started, in a familiar way, by a group of women

---

<sup>111</sup> Gillian Gibson (Director, Footprints Women's Centre), interview with author, November 8, 2012.

who wanted a place to meet. It is currently housed in the community centre and has several employed staff but it has outgrown its home. They are working on securing funding for a purpose built women's centre and so have transitioned from an unincorporated association, the Ardoyne Women's Group, into GRACE Women's Development Ltd.

We felt that Ardoyne sorta, I wouldn't say it put people off but women tended to think that this group is only for women from Ardoyne, so everybody said then that we needed to change our name to reflect the changing—basically the way we've changed as a group as well as opening our service up to everyone in North Belfast, you know Catholic, Protestant regardless of race, religion.... So we said at the end we'd try and come up with a new name rather than Ardoyne Women's Group. And I just happened to Google...and I came across Grania O'Malley, who was a female pirate, way back in the 1500s, she was a great leader of men, obviously I don't think she'd'a been a really great mother, cos she was a pirate, but ... she was a great leader. Rather than Grania, cos Grania is Irish obviously, it's an Irish name, we're afraid of that putting people off so we went with the English version of it which is Grace... the acronym, we come up with that ourselves, G is for growth, R is for respect, A is assertive, C is for caring, and E is for equality. We just thought that sorta summed up what we're trying to do as a local community organization.<sup>112</sup>

GRACE is a work in progress. Architectural designs hang on the wall of the administrative offices, the location has been identified and funding is being sought after. Still GRACE is providing services for the women of Ardoyne.

The women here are all CRN. Like other women's groups, GRACE is open to all women who would avail themselves of its services but that does not mean that women from outside this community would come in. The location of the new building would help with that. For now, the women of Ardoyne meet in the community centre for courses, information days, massages, crochet circle and a bit o' craic. Most of them are old friends who share stories of the Troubles: people being shot, going up to the prison to

---

<sup>112</sup> Sally Smyth (Director, GRACE), interview with author, October 9, 2012.

see male family members and such. Because of the patchwork, Ardoyne sits at a junction through which Unionist parades often cause trouble. These are not women who escaped the violence of the Troubles and sitting in the midst of their story-telling, it is difficult to imagine a woman from an *other* area feeling comfortable here.

### **Ballybeen Women's Group**

The remaining women's group in Belfast is in East Belfast, in Ballybeen. Though not researched directly, its story is worth mentioning here. Ballybeen Women's Group was organized as a result of continued pressure on the local District Council.

The process became a little soured when the local councilors began to feel threatened because the women were straying into unwarranted political territory by raising questions about the impact of the Council's boycott policy on local groups. The women were no longer custodians of a communal facility paternalistically supported by the Council, but intruders engaging in a debate whose rules and conditions had already been agreed in another (less avuncular) arena. The women were undaunted however when several councilors threatened to withdraw the Group's future funding if they made any adverse publicity. Instead the women went straight back to the local papers and reported this action. As one woman commented, three years before they would never have done this. (Abbott and McDonough 1989)

This story is representative of a number of overlapping tensions: tension between politicians and community organizations, tension between the broader community and a minority within it and tensions between gender roles. The women of Ballybeen challenged the local council on a number of levels. They resisted the authority of the council in an effort to support community development itself and in so doing, challenged the patriarchal nature of the threats being made against them. As the final line suggests, the process they had made as a women's group had empowered them to continue standing up for themselves in new ways.



## The Women's Centre

Northern Ireland's second largest city, Derry/Londonderry<sup>113</sup> is home to two women's centres: the Women's Centre, at the foot of the walled city; and Waterside Women's Centre, across the Foyle river. The Women's Centre was formed in the '80s and has a uniquely feminist beginning:

It was formed by a group of women who would have considered themselves feminists, so it was formed really out of the women's movement. there was a woman who worked in a book shop, in the city... so all the lit was coming out in that wave of feminism in the '70s, and a number of women who were coming into the bookshop were buying these books and buying magazines and all about the women's movement. So she had the forethought to ask about half a dozen, would they like to meet. She explained that's why she was asking them. They began to meet just anywhere...cafes and all to talk about the stuff that we were reading. I was one of the group. Then we decided to met every Wednesday... at an unemployed worker's centre, community based group, then we made a poster and said we would offer information services and all.<sup>114</sup>

The Women's Centre was, more than any of the others discussed here, born directly out of the women's movement. One of the key issues in the development of this centre was the issue of abortion. In 1967 the Abortion Act was passed in Westminster making abortion legal in the UK, but this act was not extended in Northern Ireland in an

---

<sup>113</sup> Nomenclature regarding Derry/Londonderry is divisive in Northern Ireland. As a visitor to the area, it is acceptable to use the two titles interchangeably as foreigners are not expected to know any better. The assumption is of course that someone using the shorter version, Derry, is betraying nationalist or republican sympathies. Londonderry then references unionist sympathies. This is certainly true of print media using one or the other. A local radio personality shortcuts the problem by jokingly referring to "Stroke City" referring to the "r" that is commonly used to divide the two words in print. This is received by residents of the city with mixed disapproval. The issue is slightly different in the city itself. Being overwhelmingly CRN, the city is commonly referred to simply as Derry. People from the isolated Fountain PUL community are less comfortable with this. Those on the Waterside of the city, the right bank, seem perfectly comfortable calling the city Derry, regardless of their politics or religion. It is shorter and commonplace. People in Waterside have a tendency to be in a slightly higher socioeconomic class and be much more mixed CRN/PUL than across the river as well. One community worker joked that "We'd be going up to Derry and I'd be going to Derry and she'd be going to Londonderry [laughs]." For this project, Derry/Londonderry will be used to express the views of the author. Where one or the other name is used exclusively, it is representative of the specific individual or group under discussion.

<sup>114</sup> Margaret Logue (Director, The Women's Centre, Derry), interview with author, November 19, 2012.

act of ‘salad bar’ politics in which the Unionist government in Stormont at the time selected only the British legislation that suited them.<sup>115</sup> The women that formed the Women’s Centre provided information sessions and advice to women seeking such services. It was several years later that it developed a curriculum of coursework that would encourage women to come together to learn.

### **Waterside Women’s Centre**

The Waterside Women’s Centre developed in 1994, several years after the Women’s Centre. There was a sense that services were being provided across the river that were not available to women in Waterside. The example was there. Many of the women who first started the organization are still on the management committee and still use the centre. Waterside is a mixed community, and at the women’s centre there is less a sense of single-identity. In the streets of the community itself there are fewer sign of segregation or communal markers.

Primarily what we're about—a lot of women who left school, no education at all or very little, bad experience of school, you know a lot of people have a lot of nightmares about school... For a lot of people, they just wouldn't be ready to go back into the like of the local colleges and that to do courses, they're just not at that stage. So this, I always look at this place as nearly a half-way house because it's a way of getting people in here to do courses that may or may not lead them on to do other things. What we do in here, we would do courses with qualifications, accredited courses that could—we have a lady in here at the minute and she started to come in here, she's now in her sixties, but she's at university now doing her degree. And she started off here coming in to do IT courses and whatever, then she went into local college to do an access course for university, she's now doing her third year of her degree. It's fantastic. And she's doing it purely for the enjoyment of it. Not for getting a job or anything but she's really, really—and she would herself say that it was coming here that gave her the confidence back and renewed—very smart woman, but she would never ever have done anything... and for the other thing, it's not even to gain qualifications and that, a lot of

---

<sup>115</sup> The debate on this issue is still being waged in Northern Ireland. A series of protests erupted following the opening of the Marie Stopes abortion clinic in Belfast in October of 2012. This clinic is the first of its kind in Northern Ireland.

women that come in here are just quite lonely and isolated. And they come in and with a lot of you know personal problems, family, relationships, whatever and they come here and they'll do... fit for life program, you know, learning to swim, aqua-aerobics, those kind of things , plus just hobby based courses and that. Just being with other women and enjoying the social aspect of it all and making friends.<sup>116</sup>

The women of Waterside, like most communities throughout Northern Ireland lacked any service provision that spoke to their needs as women. The creation of a women's centre offered practical services in the form of childcare and training, but more than that it offered women a stepping stone on the path out of isolation. As discussed before with other women's centres, women simply needed a space to come together.

The space that the Waterside Women's Centre occupies now is imperfect; it is a renovated house and as such not purpose-built. The crèche facilities do not have room for expansion and can take only a limited number of children. Most of the meeting spaces are on the first floor, up a narrow and winding staircase that is not handicap accessible. What they have been able to do with the space is create an environment and an opportunity in which they can provide access to mental health counseling in a way that protects privacy. Counseling is provided in a small but comfortable room upstairs by a professional counselor.

She would come in twice a week and she has the little room upstairs... as well as that there's an organization that uses her once a week. NEXUS, they would be specifically, their area of counseling would be for people who have been sexually abused... I think the reason why that has been successful is that people would know what NEXUS is, it's quite an emotive subjective, so coming in here, nobody knows what they're coming for, they just go up to see her and go on out again and that's it. So rather than, NEXUS would have their own premises over town but I think [you walk in their door] everybody know what you're there for but people come in here... we don't have to know people's names or anything.<sup>117</sup>

---

<sup>116</sup> Geraldine Compton (Director, Waterside Women's Centre), interview with author, November 18, 2012.

<sup>117</sup> Geraldine Compton (Director, Waterside Women's Centre), interview with author, November 18, 2012.

Organizations by women for women have the capacity to structure services in a way that are sensitive to those kinds of issues. The focus is more than just about service provision itself but about the process of providing and the experience of the users. Perhaps this is the organizational equivalent of suggesting that you wouldn't take your car to a mechanic who does not own a car. Waterside Women's Centre focuses on the needs of women.

### **Strathfoyle Women's Activity Group (SWAG)**

The Strathfoyle Women's Activity Group stands slightly apart from the other groups discussed here because it is not in a major city. Strathfoyle is a small estate situated as its Irish name Straith Na Feabhil, implies in a Meadow on the Foyle River, approximately five miles northeast of Derry/Londonderry. As there is no urban sprawl around Derry/Londonderry, the city quickly disappears around the road to the estate. Once housing nearly 600 families and supplying the labor force for the nearby Maydown Industrial Estate, Strathfoyle prospered post-WWII until the industrial collapse in the mid-'70s. As the estate housed families who had moved to the area for work, it was left nearly desolate when that labor force left in search of new employ. One of the group of women who founded SWAG describes how the estate took on a new look then, as apathy spread.

The local park where children used to play was now used as a dumping ground. Houses which were once occupied were now vacant and through lack of maintenance and vandalism these properties became an eyesore. At a time when housing was at a shortage in the North West, those wanting a home were reluctant to choose Strathfoyle as a place to live.<sup>118</sup>

---

<sup>118</sup> This quote comes from a history of SWAG written originally as a speech for an event celebrating the women's group some years ago. The author herself was contacted for the copy from which this quote was taken. As it is not publicly available and difficult to locate it is here treated as a confidential interview.

A couple of community groups, though exactly which is unclear, came together to support the offering of courses for women on health and assertiveness, thus creating the Strathfoyle Women's Activity Group. Soon, the desires of the group's members for themselves began to emerge.

Within the region, pupils attending four high schools and four grammar schools and a local primary school all needed uniforms. We found an area where we could help ourselves and other parents with the cost of school jumpers by knitting them ourselves. We applied for a grant from the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust (NIVT) and got awarded £500. With this money we purchased a knitting machine and began classes in machine knitting.<sup>119</sup>

The group experienced a great deal of anxiety as it moved into its first building and realized they would have to find funding for overhead expenses that would continue beyond the initial grant of the building itself. The speaker and another woman conquered their own self-doubt and pursued college courses in community development. Eventually, as the first women's group in that area, these women were invited to give presentations to other women's groups regarding how to pursue formal organization of this sort. The tasks of the group expanded, they took on much wider course offerings, set up a co-op to continue knitting the school jumpers and even produced a booklet on *Eating Well on a Budget*.

The first steps were scary; the next steps were wary and then came hope and realization that our vision was beginning to take shape. As you can see by the centre today, our dreams have come true.<sup>120</sup>

Today SWAG offers health promotion programs, recreational programs, a positive aging program, careers advice service, life coaching service, listening ear service, counseling, learner access and engagement programme (in coordination with

---

<sup>119</sup> Community worker, confidential interview with author, August-December, 2012.

<sup>120</sup> Community worker, confidential interview with author, August-December, 2012.

Waterside Women's Centre and The Women's Centre in Derry), a childminding network as well as community based childcare for almost a hundred children.

### **Umbrellas**

The women's groups discussed here, as well as the others throughout the region are supported by a number of umbrella organizations that together form what is loosely referred to as the Women's Sector. The Women's Sector provides numerous services, both to women's centres and a variety of women's groups ranging from the very formal and organized, for examples church-based women's auxiliaries, to the unstructured bingo groups and crochet circles. They provide sign-posting, advice, mentoring, courses and advocacy. They are a collection of home-grown organizations that have identified a need and work towards solutions. They are also products not only of their environment but of the driven and determined women who lead them. As such, they produce rivalries and bickering and the only examples encountered by the researcher of navigating personal conflicts. The Women's Sector as I would be reminded on several occasions is deeply 'fractured if not broken' claims one community worker.

Like any other sector, the Women's Sector represents a variety of interests, united loosely by the same general interest of women's needs. Some are characterized as 'academic' while others take pride in being 'grassroots' though in practice this distinction is neither accurate nor useful and has instead been used to perpetuate rivalries. Like any other sector, some groups succeed where others fail. Groups fail for any number of reasons. For some interest simply wanes. Donegal Pass used to have a women's group that eventually could not generate enough interest to continue. Other groups fail for lack of funding. Women Into Politics (WIP) is an organization that focused on training,

encouraging and mentoring women into political life and it was initially considered a key source for this project. However, WIP could not maintain its funding and is currently defunct, though it is hoped by many in the sector that it will find a way to return. There are also a number of organizations that are mismanaged and actually fail outright.

On the other side, groups succeed for any combination of reasons: strong management, goal achievement, community support, etc. One of the key variables in this process is personality and networking. Some groups have the right connections while others do not. Several accounts collected for this project describe interactions with funders, city councils, and other public figures in which consultations for new projects, new organizational structures, etc. are put forward only to have proposals scrapped and a different version of the project offered to a different group. These instances result in overlapping boundaries, conflicts of interest and a Women's Sector in which some services are duplicated while other needs are not met. Some organizations work together by planning, networking and supporting each other; others have closed virtual doors in the virtual faces of other groups. From the outside looking in, it seems as though there is an in-group and an out-group among women's sector organizations that has nothing at all to do with the sectarian divide in the broader society. The result is sector fragmentation and though services are in theory available to all women of Northern Ireland—and even to those who are simply visiting—choosing which organizations to align oneself with can mean the difference between getting the best services available and being left in the dark.

Rivalries over funding, market share and influence within the sector often coincide with individual personalities and therefore wax and wane as directorship and management change hands. Often special groups get funding as a result of networking in

what has been described as an incestuous relationship through which group members sit on each other's boards and make tacit agreements not to compete for similar pots of funding. This typically results in backscratching, but little actual partnering between groups. Funding came pouring in following the Agreement such that the community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland grew at a rate that is simply not sustainable now that peace monies are waning. One community worker argued that an organization's ability to get funding ought to be contingent on its relevance such that organizations ought to make way for new thinking and be willing to become obsolete rather than constantly redefining themselves in order to 'chase money,' stating 'if we can't get the money then we're not needed.' It should be noted however that this same community worker later described a new project that her organization was pursuing in relationship to a new pot of money they had been awarded. It is clear that the issue of funding has contributed to the rivalries in the sector.

The section that follows looks more deeply at a handful of women's sector organizations offering varied services. They are discussed in the non-strategic order in which they were researched and interviewed, based on a growing network and access in scheduling. Thus, as may be clear, the issues and themes discussed within each organization's section build as the expertise of the researcher in this topic grew. Taken individually, the work of these organizations is applauded but the broader critique is that a coherent and cooperative sector could better achieve the purpose of meeting the needs of women.



## **WRDA**

The Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) celebrates its thirtieth birthday this year. It was born in 1983 as the Women's Education Project with a "mission to advance women's equality and participation in society by working to bring about social, political and economic change" through campaigning and lobbying on key issues and providing training and support to women's organizations across Northern Ireland (WRDA 2013). The organization focuses on women in severely disadvantaged communities working to empower them to articulate their needs.

If there is an in-group within the women's sector, then the WRDA is at its heart. Members of women's groups and even other umbrella organizations often start discussions about how their organization got started with some mention of the role of the WRDA:

Because I think when I came into it, the WRDA were seen as the lynch pin for all the women's organizations, that was my impression of it and it was, they had been established a fair while, if you need any help contact them.<sup>121</sup>

Very often there is a disconnect between the work done by umbrella organizations and organizations at the local level because of assumptions made, and oftentimes accurate, that umbrella organizations are managed by women from other classes. Women from upper classes who simply have not been disadvantaged cannot accurately understand the local issues and needs of women within disadvantaged communities. It is also suggested that some organizations are 'academic' rather than 'grassroots,' implying that they cannot be both. The director of the WRDA Margaret Ward, for example holds a

---

<sup>121</sup> Community worker, confidential interview with author, August-December, 2012.

PhD and refers to herself as a women's historian. WRDA works conscientiously to address this disconnect, however, by training women to become Community Facilitators.

We get women who don't have a qualification, but they're very active in their communities and we train them. It's the best part of the year, the training, it's on how to facilitate groups. And then we've got sort of a large range of health programs and then once these facilitators have graduated, I mean we don't obviously take all of them, some of them go get jobs afterward but ones that we think will be good for us, we then train them in a whole range of our programs so we would have sexual health for parents or drug and alcohol awareness, women's health, a big range and we're adding to them now... So we would get funding from health bodies to deliver these programs to what they would call hard to reach groups. So we then develop a pool of women facilitators and we've set up a social economy business, Community Direct, so we pay them, so we've got maybe twenty women at any one time who would be our facilitators and they would get paid, so a lot of the work that we do is done through our facilitators, quite a lot of our political work cross community contact when women talk about what we call 'good relations' is peer education, so it wouldn't be people like me coming along and delivering anything, it's not like that. It's women who come from the same background and have the same issues so it's really effective education. So that for example twelve women finished our community facilitator program so that we just done women in Cookstown, in the West of the province, this year we've got funding to do Ballymena and Belfast. So that's what we're doing there, that's a large part of our operational side and then they do health information, breast screening awareness to women with special needs; that might be women with learning disabilities or that might be ethnic minority women who wouldn't have English particularly. So women who wouldn't necessarily be part of the health screening or wouldn't avail of it.<sup>122</sup>

Community Facilitators then bridge the gap between outsiders and insiders within their communities by bringing the programs of WRDA into their own neighborhoods and applying them, sharing the information in a way that arguably only an insider could, by targeting women who would otherwise not have access to these programs.

WRDA also works to bridge the gap between women a 'big P' politics.

And sort of historically women haven't engaged with the 'big P,' except that actually they do on a local level you know, you think of any of the women's centres, all have very strong relationships with their local elected representatives

---

<sup>122</sup> Margaret Ward (Director, Women's Resource and Development Association), interview with author, August 10, 2012.

who will come in and give prize givings and they'll lobby them when they need to in terms of fundraising, they have very strong relationships there so they don't ignore politics at all, but they do it in terms of how it suits the local area and it is a very important thing not to ignore that it goes on. They would all have very strong relationships across the parties. But what we've done is to try and make the women's sector itself look at policy changes in a way that they wouldn't because it is very localized and they would only be looking at political parties and politicians, how it affects them. Rather than having an understanding that actually you can lobby them for change and you can try and link your local issues to the wider issues but that was why I got funding for us to have a women's sector lobbyist and so she's been in post now for four years and has done an awful lot to try and bridge that gap so that for example she would brief politicians on key issues if there was debates happening and they would use our briefings cos they really don't have a lot of knowledge right, on issues. She monitors all the assembly issues and debates and has an e-news list women's sector assembly update that's very wide now, doesn't just go to women's organizations but trade unionists and all sorts of people would take that... and then we've organized gender agenda events so that we've had things in the assembly whereby we would bring together politicians and women's organizations or other organizations in the sector to discuss issues—like we've done childcare, we've done women and pensions, older women, she did one up in Derry as well on economic regeneration and then we also, not just because of having our women's sector lobbyist we've done this since the assembly was started, women's organizations, we've developed a women's election Manifesto every time... And so we've launched our Assembly Manifesto and invited the electoral candidates to come so that they can see what the issues are that are important to us. But what we used to do was just launch it at the time of elections but now that we have a lobbyist, what we've done has been much more constructive, we've actually met the political parties before they've drawn up their manifestos in order to suggest things that they should put in, and then we've monitored to what extent they've taken our issues. And so childcare and various things across the board have been put into manifestos now. And we've had a much better relationship with the political parties since Lynn Carvill has devoted her time to building up those relationships.<sup>123</sup>

It is interesting to note, as Margaret does, that women at the local level are very engaged in politics. They maintain relationships with their politicians and work to keep their place in the conversation. As Margaret points out, however, these efforts are localized to such a degree that there has not been a consistent voice in the discussion at the broader, regional level. WRDA is one of many organizations that work to rectify this

---

<sup>123</sup> Margaret Ward (Director, Women's Resource and Development Association), interview with author, August 10, 2012.

problem. The Women's Manifesto that Margaret discussed in the quote above, is put together by the Women's ad hoc Policy Group (2011) and draws attention to several issues, further calling on politicians to act on specific solutions to these issues. For example on the issue of Women and the Economy, the Manifesto draws attention to the fact that 38 percent of female employees work part-time compared to only 8 percent of male employees and calls on politicians to "guarantee that budget decisions made in Northern Ireland will not affect women disproportionately" as well as to "promote flexible working arrangements for men and women" among other things. On the issue of Women in Decision Making, the Manifesto makes it clear that "the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 allows political parties to take special measures to tackle the deficit in women's representation within their party" and then calls on them to do so with a target of 40 percent women candidates. The Manifesto also addresses issues of Violence Against Women, Women and Education and Reproductive Health, which is a particularly heated conversation in Northern Ireland. The Manifesto represents the views of a number of women's sector organizations that make up the Women's ad hoc Policy Group,<sup>124</sup> a clear example of the work that can be done within the sector but among those organizations are some who have only inconsistently been willing or able to work together productively. Still, the Manifesto represents the work of WRDA and others to provide feedback from the community level up into the institutions of big P politics.

---

<sup>124</sup> The Women's ad hoc Policy Group in 2011 was made up of NI Rural Women's Network, Women into Politics, WRDA, Women's Support Network, Training for Women Network, DemocraShe, Women's Information Group, NIWEP, FWIN, Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland, Stronger Together Congress, Your Money Garden Financial Education Project, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, and Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement.

## WINI

Women's Information Northern Ireland, formerly the Women's Information Group,

So, Women's Information Group itself has been going for 32yrs, and it was grounded in community relations where ordinary women got together across the sectarian divide and kept up links with each other. It developed on the basis that they shared information and believe information informed people and gave them the opportunity to empower them and give them choice. Without that information everything becomes absolutely blurred.<sup>125</sup>

WINI, as the name 'Women's Information' suggests, focuses on their task of signposting, the provision of information ultimately delivered by WINI's Champions.

We have around fifty-four women across five disadvantaged areas of Belfast [Upper Springfield, Shankill, North Belfast, East Belfast and South Belfast] and their remit is, they meet once a month, they receive information from a range of agencies and they go back with that information and they bring it back into the community and they share it on a one to one peer level. Rather than talking to women and trying to educate them about where you go to, for example, various types of cancer, help with debt, help with housing, help with benefits, rather than somebody from that sector standing on a platform and trying to tell them, their peer their friend down the street has been given that information and she can stand on the corner, outside the door, at the school gate and say, oh, you know what I heard today? ... and inevitably somebody turns around and says, oh you know what? I have a problem with that or my friend, can you give me details... and it works brilliantly. And you're working with people who understand each other and who relate to each other and that's far more effective than all the posters and all the flyers and everything else put together. And that roles into a number of other roles including an advocacy role whereby, if necessary we will literally take a woman by the hand and we will either bring her directly to the service she needs or we will act as her agent on her behalf to coordinate and access the assistance she needs because sometimes it's more than one department so we would do that for and on behalf and with the woman.<sup>126</sup>

Of particular interest to WINI on the topic of health is the issue of mental health.

As will be discussed in more depth, mental health is a problem in Northern Ireland which

---

<sup>125</sup> Michele Baird (CEO, Women's Information Northern Ireland), interview with author, October 4, 2012.

<sup>126</sup> Michele Baird (CEO, Women's Information Northern Ireland), interview with author, October 4, 2012.

in turn has developed into a drug problem in the form of prescription anti-depressants. There is also a systemic problem with suicide in the region. The transition away from violence and constant vigilance throws into stark contrast the emotional damage that the decades of the Troubles caused. Decommissioned paramilitaries struggle to find direction, men return from prison often with increased frustrations over the Agreement and the perceived failure of their side to attain their goals.

All of which are impacting back on women and feeling more and more powerless. So they've gone from that position of strength within the community to now a position of nothing. Now obviously that impacts even more on their mental health because they have lost everything in their minds and they've lost control, sense of identity, sense of purpose and the ability then to control what's going on around them and that is very, very much the heart of where we are today with community relations and where from our perspective, community relations continues to provide that input in terms of saying, okay that might be the case but here is information that you need to help you address the issues that are relevant to you without the need to rely on some organization within the community that may or may not have the relevant information.<sup>127</sup>

The concern is that as communities struggle to redefine themselves in a way that is consistent with the Agreement and the new political and social structures, they may be unprepared, untrained or misinformed about how to solve the particular issues of mental health. WINI prides itself as a port of information through which accurate and up-to-date information can be passed to what it calls its 'Champions,' much like the facilitators that WRDA trains. WINI advertises for Champions for particular topics such that women come forward themselves to be a part of this process based on their interest on a specific issue like diabetes or mental health.

They would come forward, we would interview them first and foremost to find out whether or not they are suitable. We don't expect anybody with massive skills but we still have to make sure that that person is the right person who can go back into the community and be listened to. That's the important thing. Then obviously

---

<sup>127</sup> Michele Baird (CEO, Women's Information Northern Ireland), interview with author, October 4, 2012.

depending on the type of role they'll be doing, there's the vetting checks that you would normally have to do, if they're going out and working directly in the community. Then we would have a contract and ongoing training and the training would be around communication, recordkeeping, or within the area of health that they're interested in.<sup>128</sup>

WINI also works to train PSNI senior officers about how to work and communicate with these Champions.

WINI is working to roll these programs out to a wider area of Northern Ireland such as a base outside of Ballymeena and one in Omagh. It also offers resources to other organizations that lack their own facilities. They host the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform, an African women's organization which targets issues unique to immigrant African women such as legal help and language services in addition to the issues faced more widely by women in disadvantaged areas.

In November, WINI took nearly twenty women representing a handful of different local women's groups up to Stormont to meet with Paula Bradford and the All Party Working Group on UNSCR 1325. They stated in no uncertain terms that they were tired of being talked for or talked about and that it was time that women be talked to, that they be consulted not only about the issues they were concerned about but about solutions. There is a great untapped source of creativity in women. While the meeting was attended by fewer MLAs than was hoped for, this still provided the women in attendance the opportunity to speak to and see that they were heard by Assembly members. MLA Paula Bradford took a moment to speak to her own experiences acknowledging that they were different than the other women but centered around the same themes such as benefits, education, support for single parents and so forth. On the

---

<sup>128</sup> Michele Baird (CEO, Women's Information Northern Ireland), interview with author, October 4, 2012.

shuttle ride home from Stormont, many of the women shared astonishment that Ms. Bradley had so much in common with them. This interaction dispelled the belief that MLAs and perhaps politicians in general are a 'different sort of people' for those in their communities. WINI has shown that information is an important step towards change, whether it is at the level of the individual or the community.

## **NIRWN**

The Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) is a much younger organization than some of the other considered here, born in 2006. It started as most organizations do, through the recognition of need; specifically that rural women's groups shared unique concerns and needs and could better address them through the support of a network:

So I got involved in the women's group, accessed whatever training I could through the women's group who were accessing their funding through the Rural Development program monies to start with...then we moved on to the PEACE monies...so we broadened out from twelve women to start with—we ended up delivering training to about four hundred women across South Armagh, primarily in getting used to the internet...how to use a computer, how to switch it on... in the midst of all that, there was an ethos amongst the women who set it up and the ethos was that they were building peace and that was coming primarily from the women themselves and the main group, was a women's group ... Women in Rural Development. And they were determined to build peace for their children and they were very forward thinking, they really were. I ended up then, when I finished up all this training up and I did my qualifications and got my degree in rural development I went to work for that group and set up the South Armagh Rural Women's network through them in the area, so it really was, it was a great journey... We never publicized a lot of the work we were doing unless we had to for the funder but we had small conferences, get-togethers, and we had them in different areas 'round South Armagh just to bring women together to talk about their networks, talk about their groups be it a sewing class, be it an education class, whatever it was and it was wee baby steps. Building friendships. Building relationships. South Armagh would be primarily seen as nationalist. Primarily but even within that with any communities, people are people, they're not labeled, the green people, there's many shades of green there. And the other community, there's many shades of orange as well you know. There's so many shades and



what was different for us was a women's organization, a women's group that was a safe space to have a conversation—those conversations were not repeated outside the sessions. That didn't happen, that never happened the whole time I was involved. And it still doesn't happen... at this stage they don't like calling it cross-community because they're all one, they're just women. So they really fight against that and neither do they want to be called victims, they're not victims now, they're survivors. They're moving forward. It is amazing the work they've done. So I moved on then, worked to start up Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network, because we thought it was going so well in South Armagh and then we started to work with other networks across Northern Ireland. And we were linked with other women's rural networks through natural connections through the Women's Resource and Development Agency in Belfast and through the Rural Community Network here in Cookstown. So we had those regional organizations assisting us to link. So we started then to look at how we could sustain the work of the women's networks. Out of that work, which took about three years, came Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network, 2006. we managed to get funding through the Rural Development Program through the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and again was supported by the WRDA and the RCN to set up.<sup>129</sup>

Few women's organizations engage directly on the topic of peace building. The fact that their efforts contribute to peace building without seeking it is one of the reasons for this project. NIRWN has consistently kept peace building as a concept in their approach.

We were very concerned about the peace building element of it, even though it wasn't one of our targets. But we kept building it in. We just kept saying we're doing this. Our funders were funding us to work within the Rural Development Program. The Rural Development Program only works if there's good relations on the ground. If you can build the capacity of a group and build the capacity of the women in that group and then build their ability to work with other people, it's good for rural development, it's good for the infrastructure of the area cos if they're working together, it's partnership working and it's extra value for money.<sup>130</sup>

Building the capacity of the community, which is done by working with any group within the community but in this case women, increases their capacity to work with

---

<sup>129</sup> Majella Murphy (Project Coordinator, Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network), interview with author, October 24, 2012.

<sup>130</sup> Majella Murphy (Project Coordinator, Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network), interview with author, October 24, 2012.

others. This is indirect peace building. As people build their capacity and contribute to the capacity of their community, they increase their stake in maintaining the stability of that community. As they familiarize themselves with people in other communities and come to understand their needs and their comparable desire to maintain stability, they can commit to furthering the project of peace together. One of the networking activities that NIRWN sponsored was to introduce women from different areas to each other for socialization and cultural exchange. They exchanged ideas about who they were, the work they were doing and their goals. These exchanges were so successful that the women began meeting together without the help of NIRWN.

And there were women from so many backgrounds but none of that, when they came together, it wasn't their backgrounds, it was who they were, what they were doing, what their communities were like, what their community centre was like, what they needed to improve life in their area, how did you do it, maybe we could try the same. That's what it turned out to be, it was about life. And it was about the infrastructure of their area, how they could provide for the families in their area. What they could provide for their families. That's what the discussion was about, the real life.<sup>131</sup>

The women in these exchanges represent groups that would not interact otherwise. They expressed fear and anxiety about going into each other's areas. These exchanges were initially made possible because of the trust between the women of NIRWN and the women's groups themselves. In fact, in one instance only three of four years ago, women on the way to an exchange were diverted to avoid a route with a bomb and an illegal dissident checkpoint. The women found themselves away from home, out of their element and on an unrecognizable path to a community they already had anxiety

---

<sup>131</sup> Majella Murphy (Project Coordinator, Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network), interview with author, October 24, 2012.

about visiting. Still their faith in their chaperones strengthened their resolve and the exchange was otherwise a great event despite an inauspicious beginning.

NIRWN is focused on rural women's needs and two primary issues sit at the top of that list and have for decades: child care and transportation.

They always come out on top because you can't just hop on a bus and go where you want to go. Cos there's no buses from village to village in most places so—and it's a huge economic burden on a family. The transport issue is. Two cars in a rural family is not a luxury. It's a necessity. If you're trying to transport parents to work, children to school, after schools clubs, wherever, two cars are a necessity and that leads on to an extra economic burden that people can't afford. Really can't afford. Childcare is huge. Very little childcare in rural areas. Fermanagh there's hardly any. South Armagh—there was only two registered childminders in South Armagh. Now we've worked to change that. There was lots of childminders but they weren't registered, they weren't in the system so we're working to change that, there's a South Armagh childcare consortium which is doing really good work there. They're the two main issues. The transport affects so much because you can't get to services. It affects access to information. It affects access to services, including your health services. That is a whole economic thing too, if you haven't got a car, you have to pay for the buses and trains and ugh, it's a nightmare.<sup>132</sup>

Even when asked about other concerns, such as access to health care, the discussion was brought back around to transportation because people generally have to travel a distance to see a doctor. Transportation even affects privacy because visiting the hospital is a public affair if you have to coordinate a ride with neighbors.

The nature of community development work is such that new projects are always coming down the pipe. Organizations are constantly fighting the battle to stay ahead of the funding applications and so generally, one of the last questions asked during an interview with someone who works within community development is “What is coming up that you are excited about?” The answer for NIRWN was not upbeat.

---

<sup>132</sup> Majella Murphy (Project Coordinator, Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network), interview with author, October 24, 2012.

NIRWN have been going through a difficult time this last six months, into eight months now. We lost most of our funding, through no fault of NIRWN's, no statement on our work, it's just happened with the downturn. So NIRWN have been struggling to survive for the last while. Now I think we've reached baseline. So hopefully we're going to start coming up again... We have a funding app in to look at a rural women's forum, to look at going round with the new situation with the councils... to see how delivery of services, to see how this new structure can have less impact and do less damage and try and get the women involved in their new community planning.<sup>133</sup>

Time will tell whether NIRWN will survive. For now there is work to be done.

### **Newry and Mourne Women Ltd.**

One of the rural networks that falls under the auspices of NIRWN is Newry and Mourne Women Ltd which serves women's groups, as their name suggests, in Newry and Mourne. Established in 1999, this organization serves 23 Affiliated Member Groups and two hundred individual members (Newry and Mourne Women Ltd. 2012).

I started here on the fourth of December, 2001. I have been here ever since... [loves it] when I come into it, it had been lottery funded, the management committee had applied for the funding to establish women's groups throughout the Newry and Mourne area and to give women a voice. Our leaflets actually say 'advocated for women' but it was for to develop women, with their confidence, to give them committee skills, if there was training there to let them have the opportunity if they wanted to do it... lottery funding is for five years and at the end of that five years, I had established eight to ten groups.<sup>134</sup>

As important as it is to acknowledge the work done by Kathleen Smith and this organization, it is also important to recognize that there is a need for this kind of work, that there are women across Northern Ireland organizing groups, coming together and looking for support and structure. Women's groups may form for any number of reasons but they share similar needs as organizations. They need access to funding and support in

---

<sup>133</sup> Majella Murphy (Project Coordinator, Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network), interview with author, October 24, 2012.

<sup>134</sup> Kathleen Smith (Newry and Mourne Women's Ltd), interview with author, November 7, 2012.

applying for it; they need access to wider networks of training and education, guest speakers, assistance formalizing, writing constitutions and becoming incorporated. For rural women's groups, they often need not only transportation but a place to come together. Men have access to public space. They meet at GAA or Orange Halls, pubs, Town Halls, etc. Women's spaces have been traditionally in the home. At the outset of this research, the image of women meeting around a kitchen table seemed acceptable, at least as a place to start. It has been pointed out that this might have been appropriate thirty years ago when public space was violently contested, but the women's sector has professionalized and women not only deserve the opportunity to come out of their homes, they need a space to meet that is empowering and equal to the task representing the work that their organizations are doing. A misstep in any of these challenges can set a group back minimally; or, can be their demise. Newry and Mourne Women, and other sub-regional networks like them, act as a safety net to ensure that growing women's groups have the support they need to succeed.

### **Specialized Women's Organizations**

In addition to the umbrella organizations and networks that support women's groups, there are a large number of issue specific organizations for women. Though they are not the focus of this project they are full of dedicated women and men whose work contributes to the same small steps toward peace.

### **The Work of the Women's Sector**

Physical space is what brought women together initially in many of the women's centres stories discussed above. Women need a space to come together. They could meet in each other's homes but at home there is always work to be done. As has been

discussed, women deserve a public space. Women's centres developed to serve that purpose. They started meeting in community centres, churches, back rooms and snooker clubs. They took over abandoned houses, spent hours scrubbing grimy floors and painting over graffiti. The Falls Women's Centre renovated an existing building to become the pink and purple landmark it is today, complete with elevator. The Waterside Women's Centre also took over an existing building but with less funding. They have only a narrow staircase for their women to get up to the first floor classrooms. Shankill Women's Centre renovated a space behind a retirement home and has expanded to take over other local spaces as they become available. Windsor Women's Centre and Footprints are in purpose built spaces and their ethos seems built into the very foundation of these buildings. Windsor for example, is built in the round with the first-story offices visible from the ground floor to represent transparency and accountability. Footprints, as discussed above was built down into the ground, rather than up so that they could work from within the community, rather than being seen as an outward and physical challenge to the status quo.

For other women's groups, space continues to be an issue. Ardoyne, as discussed above is working to build their own space. For women in rural areas, space is a problem of a different kind. One of the primary issues in rural areas is that of transportation. Families often have only one car and public transportation is not ideal. Small villages are not connected by bus route and people often travel miles out of their way to the nearest town because that is where the buses travel. Services are irregular in rural areas. Ambulances are stationed in bigger towns so stories are often told of family members dying of heart attack or strokes that might have lived had they been able to get to health

care soon enough. Other stories are told of communities pulling together, neighbors caring for each other driving each other to doctors' appointments, etc., but this is problematic for a number of reasons, chief among them is the sacrifice in privacy. In rural areas, access to space for women takes on a different meaning. One of the services provided by Newry and Mourne Women is assisting women's groups locate and secure space though often only as a temporary measure. WINI has been able to secure large enough space for themselves that they are able to host other women's organizations. The debate over private and public space has long been controversial as the two often bleed into each other (whether figuratively or literally). In Northern Ireland, women's groups and centres have ensured that women have a place in the public space.

Another consideration for women's organizations is participation. Sometimes this is easy, established organizations have great word of mouth advertising from their users without having to strategize much beyond that. For newer groups this is more complicated. Women's organizations have come up with very creative ways of inspiring their members to continue being involved:

So I was lucky enough to connect with a group of women who were involved in setting up a women's group in our village... well they started trying to get women involved through social outings and swimming lessons was one of the first things they did. So we went swimming and we learned to swim but what we didn't know was it was part of a bigger program which was getting us to IT training. So you couldn't go swimming if you didn't do the IT. It was well thought out. You went swimming one week and went to an IT the next week. Now the reason it worked so well was they actually laid out on a bus. The bus come into the village and you were committed to going on the bus. If you didn't get on the bus, they would actually land down at the house and sit outside the house and wait for you. So if there was an exam or anything going on in the IT

one that night, and you were feeling ‘no I don't want to go’ well somebody wrapped your door and said come on, you’re going. So that’s how I started out.<sup>135</sup>

The linking of activities like this challenges women to overcome anxieties and self-confidence issues by tying activities they may be apprehensive about, such as information technology (IT) to leisure activities that promote health and socialization.

Much of the work of the women’s sector focuses on bringing women together to identify issues in common, to share experiences and brainstorm solutions. Often in these exchanges or residentials, the environment of mixing and mingling teaches women from heterogeneous communities that they have more in common than they would have guessed. The factor of religion and the orange and green political divide fades in comparison to the concerns they share in common as a result of being mothers or working class or any number of other traits they share. In one example a mixed group of women was taken to Stormont for a WRDA hosted even. The bus ride to the city was spent in small groups as women clustered with women they knew and were close to. At Stormont, these women were introduced to a number of women from different areas of Belfast. On the bus ride home, the organizers asked how these women felt the event had gone. They had positive things to say at first and then began to confer over the differences between themselves on the bus and the urban women from Belfast. The women from the rural towns were going for a day out, they had dressed for the occasion in ‘wee pants suits’ and pearls and looked their best. The women from Belfast were in track suits and trainers and had likely left Stormont and gone back to work or errands. This was just a normal day for them. The women on the bus could not even find anything to talk about with these urban

---

<sup>135</sup> Majella Murphy (Project Coordinator, Northern Ireland Rural Women’s Network), interview with author, October 24, 2012.



women. For the first time, the rural women were united; they began to recognize the things they had in common. An unintended consequence of this event was that this mixed orange and green group of women moved forward with the understanding that they were a collective.

These kinds of activities require funding. This is a near-constant battle for community development organizations. The search for funding is ongoing for most of the organizations considered here. Many of them are funded by government grants like those of the Department of Social Development or the Big Lottery Fund. Many also receive EU Peace monies funding but these pots, as they are generally called, are not consistent. Most organizations persevere with the knowledge that next year they may not exist. In addition, funding cycles often take a great deal of time such that funding can run out while they wait. This happened at one point to Newry and Mourne women when Kathleen Smith went on holiday thinking she would return and start looking for a new job. Instead she returned to find that the organization gained new pot of money and she was still employed.

Chasing money can be a full time job leaving little time to pursue the activities that are being funded in the first place. Several women's centres have pursued social economy projects to aid in the pressures of this cycle. Childcare enterprises are created that offer less expensive childcare to families while feeding money back into the community work of the organizations. The Shankill Women's Centre is looking into opening a coffee shop.

The reason that we would have embarked on social enterprise was to increase our autonomy. If you look at how we're funded, it's largely through Department of Social Development and all of the women's organizations would get substantial

funding from Department of Social Development. Now if you have a funder—when a woman is powerless in this area, she's on benefits, so she's basically—her spending is controlled by the government because they pay her benefits. So when we created employment here, that was about a woman having the freedom to actually earn an income and be able to decide herself and to be free. If you look at the women's centres, women's centres are funded by government so women's centres are also controlled by government in terms of what they do and how they do it. So our push was to create and generate our own income so that we would always have a critical voice and so that we would always have a level of autonomy... in the '90s, women's centres would have been critical of us going down the route—to us this was natural because we started off self-help. Self-help then brings you to creating your own jobs, creating your own jobs brings you to creating your own income, creating your own income gives you increased autonomy. So both on a personal and on a public, both for the women in the centre it was about increasing their personal autonomy but it was also paralleled with increasing the autonomy of the organizations. Now, what women's centres would have said in the past about social enterprise was you're letting the government off the hook. If you're generating your own income, you're letting them off the hook. It's their role to fund us and what we were saying is yeah, and they always will fund us, but if they fund us 100% we won't be able to criticize them, or challenge them. I don't know if that has penetrated, that's our assessment, that's where we come from. So we're sitting now, where for the first year since we were born, we have more money being generated through our own income than we do through DSD.<sup>136</sup>

Gillian of Footprints is clear about the relationship between money and control and draws an interesting parallel between individual women and the organization seeking economic autonomy. A majority of centre users would be on benefit, receiving welfare from the state for one reason or another. They have to meet certain criteria and their lives are continuously made public in a sense in the process of proving that they qualify for their benefit. Women's centres work in much the same way. They are given funds for specific needs and they work persistently to prove both the need for this and more money, and that they are accomplishing the goals they set for the money they have been given.

But we continue off funding from year to year, sometimes we're lucky to get a three year trench in the funding for different posts. So you're always ongoing, reinventing, applying for applications, just to keep the wheel going 'round and

---

<sup>136</sup> Gillian Gibson (Director, Footprints Women's Centre), interview with author, November 8, 2012.

round. We're never sitting pretty to the point of having continuous jobs, and we're here 'til we want to retire... It's always, well we've got another year's post and another year's post... it's the nature of community... you're always subject to funding and funding is subject to meeting criteria.<sup>137</sup>

Positions are created and lost from one funding cycle to the next which can cause inconsistencies in service delivery. Often times positions are creatively redefined such that losses are absorbed without disruptions to the organizations. The chase for funding can cause rivalries and competitions. There are instances in which solidarity, like that described in Chapter Three, have helped to secure funds across the social divide. In other instances working together has only intensified rivalries. A proposal for funding across several organizations fell apart recently as a result of personality conflicts.

So there's two ways of doing it. Either you could have a pot of money that everybody's applying for the same thing and some get it and some won't, or we can have a strategic approach and if there's a big pot of money to try and put in a joint bid so that everyone can benefit from it and people won't compete. So there's a bit of both still going on. And some areas, because of the way funding streams work, some women's centres would be eligible to apply for certain pieces of funding that others wouldn't just because of the [community] that you're in. So there's a thing called neighborhood renewal and there's funds for women's centres that would be in neighborhood renewal areas. So that's a piece of funding that they can apply for but we're not in a neighborhood renewal area so we can't apply for that money. So there's lots of different sort of criteria and reasons.<sup>138</sup>

Criteria comes in many forms. Women's organizations must show the number of women they serving, they must show the level of need in their communities, etc. Many pots of money are more specifically targeted to certain endeavors, for example for peace building or community relations. Community relations work, also referred to as cross-community work, those projects that seek specifically to bring people together from *other* areas or to bring the communities themselves together has been a popular criteria for

---

<sup>137</sup> Community worker, confidential interview with author, August-December 2012.

<sup>138</sup> Community worker, confidential interview with author, August-December 2012.

fundings. Organizations come together across the social divide to work on joint projects to build relationships across interfaces. This kind of work is often cited as one of the signs that Northern Ireland is entering into an era of social capital building and perhaps on the path to a sincere peace. The reality is much more often that single members of these organizations contact each other to submit a funding application for 'joint projects' that is then carved up such that each organization gets its chunk and no further interaction takes place, at least no interactions among group members.

This is not the case among women's centres however, which have shown a greater willingness to work together. A pot of money came through at the close of 2012 for cross-community work among five women's centres.

The five that are in the consortium are... Footprints Women's Centre, another women's centre that is called Atlas which is in Lisburn, ... Ballybeen Women's Centre, Loyalist as well, it's probably the closest one to here... Scoil na Fuiseoige [an Irish language school] which is based in Twinbrook... this is the cross community element that comes into it because us five organizations are going into this project together. We'll all have independent workers based in each of our centres and we'll be doing work with women in each centre but part of the element of the project is that we'll bring the women together so we will take some of the women from here across to Footprints, or to the other centres which is quite a big thing in itself: for the women to go to these areas. A lot of the people who live on this estate never really leave the estate... I live 17 miles outside of Belfast in Drummore, and they all think that I might as well live 3 hours away, they just think that I'm out in the sticks just miles and miles away. So there wouldn't be much need for the women to be going, they would certainly never go across, or very seldom go to Lisburn or across to Footprints. They wouldn't even nearly go to Ballybeen which is not even that far, unless they had family or somebody there that they were going to visit. So that's quite a bit element of the project that we'll actually be physically taking women and doing some work with them in the different areas.<sup>139</sup>

---

<sup>139</sup> Kirsty Richardson (Director, Greenway Women's Centre), interview with author, September 26, 2012.

Funding, space and participation are three important considerations for the women's centres as organizations but it is important also to consider a range of issues relevant to the lives of women in these communities.

Suicide is a big problem in Belfast. Most of the women interviewed for this project related the tragedy of a close friend or family member committing suicide. Community workers at various women's centres tell stories, many shockingly similar, about families that they serve in the community that have been touched by suicide. In one community a whole family had died, two of poor health, one of a car accident and several others as a result of suicide. One community worker talked about three or four family members and friends who one by one hung themselves from the same tree. Where once Loyalist or Republican murals were painted on gable ends, it is now common to see Suicide Helplines advertised in these spaces. A report by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency on demography shows that of the 289 suicides in Northern Ireland in 2011, those who live in areas of higher deprivation are much more likely to take their own lives.<sup>140</sup> British Health Minister Edwin Poots says more specifically that "People in deprived areas in Northern Ireland are three times more likely to take their lives" (2012). A study by Mike Tomlinson of Queen's University has found that suicide rates have soared since the end of the Troubles. According to Professor Tomlinson's research, suicide is most likely among men and particularly those who were children during the

---

<sup>140</sup> "The Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure comprises seven domains, each measuring different aspects or 'forms' of deprivation; income, employment, health, education, proximity to services, living environment and crime and disorder. The domains are combined with varying weights to form the overall multiple deprivation measure. This overall measure is then used to allocate which deprivation decile group a spacial area falls within, allowing Northern Ireland to be divided into 10 degrees of deprivation from most deprived (bottom 10%) to least deprived (top 10%). Details on the composition and calculation of the Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010, are available at: [www.nisra.gov.uk/deprivation/nimdm\\_2010.htm](http://www.nisra.gov.uk/deprivation/nimdm_2010.htm)" (NISRA 2012).

worst of the violence during the Troubles, men who are today between the ages of thirty-five and forty-four (2013a). “Social upheaval was said to have caused ‘mass medication’ through anti-depressants, alcohol and illegal drug use, while aggression that was once widespread in the divided society has become more internalized” (2013a). According to Professor Tomlinson:

The rise in suicide rates in the decade from 1998 to 2008 coincide with the move from conflict to peace in Northern Ireland... The increase in suicide rates can be attributed to a complex range of social and psychological factors. These include the growth in social isolation, poor mental health arising from the experience of conflict, and the greater political stability of the past decade... The transition to peace means that cultures of externalised aggression are no longer socially approved or politically acceptable. Violence and aggression have become more internalised instead... We seem to have adjusted to peace by means of mass medication with anti-depressants, alcohol and non-prescription drugs, the consumption of which has risen dramatically in the period of peace. (2013a)

More broadly speaking, mental health is also a big issue in areas of deprivation.

Women across the divide and across Northern Ireland laughed when asked about counseling or therapy. These things were simply not available during the Troubles, or if they were, they were not accessible in these communities. ‘Besides, who coulda had time?’ asked one focus group member. Instead there is awareness that these women share emotional damage, even if they do not call it post-traumatic stress. As Professor Tomlinson describes, mass medication is prevalent. Women’s centre workers share stories about the commonality of anti-depressants in particular. It is not uncommon for women to show signs of anxiety, to be twitchy and nervous as they come down from their medications. One worker described a meeting in which a young woman became nervous and almost frantic and asked to be excused. Other women in the group refused to excuse her and instead opened their purses asking her ‘Oh what are you on? I might have one of those.’ Women in other groups agreed that this is common. Everyone is on something.

‘The real drug problem in Northern Ireland is prescribed’ explained another women’s centre worker. Women share stories about their reactions to different medications, their tricks to ‘come off’ different medications, and how they feel about being medicated, many of them, for at least two decades.

There’s no therapy, that’s why we come here. See men don’t talk, but women do, that’s why we come here, that’s why we know that even though this isn’t normal, it’s normal for us, so it is.<sup>141</sup>

This is met with a round of ‘Oh aye’ and ‘Och, yes.’ Women’s centres today often offer counseling or therapy and life coaching to their users but women who are likely suffering from PTSD but see this as normal among their social circle do not take advantage of counseling seeing these services as better employed for women suffering from domestic abuse or considering suicide. If all of the women at the centres sought counseling for the after effects of the Troubles, society and the economy of Northern Ireland would grind to a halt while waiting rooms filled up. Aside from these services, women’s centres offer the solace of socialization and the knowledge as stated above that even though these experiences as not normal, the women who suffer with them are not isolated.

Many of these problems, prescription drugs, suicide, multiple levels of deprivation, etc., are common to working class communities around the world. There is a feeling in Northern Ireland, however, that the Troubles protected these communities from these problems. Now that the Troubles are over, now that people are not united for a common cause, it is falling apart and problems that people had been protected from are now moving in with a vengeance.

---

<sup>141</sup> Women’s centre focus group with author, August-December 2012.

There is also a problem with ongoing violence. There are stains on the sidewalk in front of Windsor Women's Centre for example where a young man was tarred and feathered just five years ago. In a separate conversation, two community workers acknowledged this event remembering that it took place right outside their work place but it turned out that they were talking about a different tar and feathering event. People acknowledge that there are groups who still used this as a technique of intimidation, some even hint that the behavior of these two young men, one accused of robbery, the other of illegal drug use, likely deserved the punishment and that the communities were better off for the reminder to avoid such anti-social behavior. One CRN focus group of women remembered that during the Troubles, women in their community could be tarred and feathered for socializing with the British security forces. One joked and the others laughed: 'that's why we all have short hair, it's terrible work getting feathers out.' There is no choice but to laugh with them but my laughter was far more uneasy than theirs. In another community the technique of knee-capping as a punishment for anti-social behavior is still employed. It is sanctioned within the community to such a degree that parents will walk their sons up the road to have this punishment carried out. It is hard to discern whether this is accurate, based on limited information, or merely rumor based on limited information. The presence of the rumor alone, however, is enough to constrain community behavior and intimidate people into conformity. Marching season is also a source of violence, or at least the potential for it. Marching season in 2012 was relatively free of violence and a lot of coordinated policing, both by the PSNI and by the communities themselves, and negotiation went into ensuring that it would be. Of course several months later the issue of the Union flag flown over Belfast City Hall sparked



weeks' worth of rioting. One community worker describes this as the 'normalization of violence' adding that the Good Friday Agreement 'appeased violent people not communities,' suggesting that communities in Northern Ireland, particularly perhaps those already suffering through multiple forms of deprivation, will continue to suffer. When those involved in the violence are the only ones involved in the post-conflict governing, the conflict is continued even through peaceful means. This is true even if it is only perceived to be the case.

### **Feminism**

The concept of feminism itself is an issue when researching women's organizations in Northern Ireland. There is an almost systemic misconception about what the term means and as it is with language in any context, once the understanding of a word becomes popular, the literal definition of the word becomes irrelevant. If popular understanding in Northern Ireland is that 'feminism' means the privileging of women over men, then that is what it means here. Some organizations, such as the Women's Centre in Derry, the Fall Road Women's Centre and WRDA are overtly feminist in an academic sense. As Margaret Ward explains about feminism:

It stems from an understanding of the structural position of women in society and the disadvantages caused by those structures and wanting to change those and as a woman in a women's organization that's very practically focused, we would be looking at policy changes in terms of issues like childcare as one of the main barriers to women's participation. But we'd also be working with politicians and political parties to look at the issue of women's representation and the unequal nature of that. So we would be lobbying for policy changes and lobbying for kind of wider changes as well.<sup>142</sup>

For others, such as WINI, feminism is not treated as a value.

---

<sup>142</sup> Margaret Ward (Director, Women's Resource and Development Association), interview with author, August 10, 2012.

WINI is not feminist, they do not deal with women as entities in their own right, we see women rather as the gateway to the family, to the men, to the community because every single issue that affects the wider community and every single sector within the community, from the male sector to even the ethnic minority sector to the gay sector are all issues which affect women because whether you separate them or not they are all connected to women. There's always a strand that brings it back to women. So we see women as the natural—not just the natural leaders within the community, they're not standing on the platform or shouting about it, but in terms of the information, in terms of the power that that information if given properly and precisely and relevantly can do for those women is absolutely enormous and has a wider impact on how the communities can change and embrace change and develop peace. I think that in my personal interpretation of the feminist element is that seeing women as a sole and only gender and as a sole and only power base and it's about fighting for the right of women for the sake of the woman as a woman... whereas in our case we're not fighting for the woman because she's a woman per se it's because of the very fact that she has a specific role within her family and community. And from the very outset of the establishment of women's information, that's what it was about. It wasn't about we are women. We've been isolated as women. The establishment of Women's Information was about women who said we're not going to get cut off here, we're not going to lose touch with our friends across the divide, we're not going to lose touch with those people we feel we should be connected to and more importantly, we want the right information so that we can pass that info on to our children, our sons and daughters alike so that they in turn can make informed choices throughout their life. Now that's not feminism, that's I suppose activism and that's the difference, that's how I would see the distinction between the two... I think a lot of people in policy making positions seem to think that if you have a title women attached to it that you're out for the sake of 'we are women, let's chain ourselves to the railings and that's us on our own treated as an entity. One woman at our conference on last Saturday stood up and actually turned round and said 'but why should women be singled out, why should we have more equality than men, why should we be treated differently to men?' and the answer was, nobody's asking for that. What we're asking for is that because we are not treated equally that we are treated equally. All we want to do is catch up. We don't want to get past it. It's not about that, it's about allowing women and recognizing women's role and position within communities.<sup>143</sup>

Admittedly, fieldwork can be frustrating; particularly because the goal is to collect information about what people think and feel. The goal is not to inform or correct what the researcher views as misperception. It is not for the researcher to point out for example that feminism is not about 'more equality' but, as Michele Baird claims in

---

<sup>143</sup> Michele Baird (CEO, Women's Information Northern Ireland), interview with author, October 4, 2012.

making the argument against feminism, that feminism is about seeking equality. On the one hand, it is problematic to view women as ‘gateways’ to the community. This conception treats them objectively as a thoroughfare to the recipient community at large rather than as an agent of change in this process. It is common in Northern Ireland not to step too far outside the patriarchy of the dominant religious structures, though. Identity based conflict has a way of sidelining political claims that detract from those of the nation. In Northern Ireland the Troubles occurred at a time when the women’s movement was having a great impact in the developed world and in some important ways, the women’s movement merely brushed across the surface of Northern Ireland, rather than settling here for a deep impact. “One could say that Northern Ireland was shielded from the women’s liberation revolution that had begun in the 1960s in Britain and the United States. The ‘Troubles’ were an obsession...” (McCready 2000: 64). As such, it has been pointed out that

They're not driven by a wider agenda of feminism or women's movement. I don't think it is that... [teaching a course at Queen's University, girls have never been in a class with boys or with students from the *other* community] right, what about this word [feminism] no identification with it, absolutely not, it means this, it means that, and you know what, if it means that here, it does. It doesn't matter what I say... there's real alienation towards that... you're living that way, I see these young women who are strong and confident, they don't need my endorsement that they are equal to, they're just doing it.<sup>144</sup>

What Callie, an American who has lived in Belfast for nearly twenty-five years as an academic, researcher and community worker usefully points out is that terminology is less important than the value of the work being done. Women are empowering themselves through training, education and speaking for themselves. Whether this is done

---

<sup>144</sup> Callie Persic (Urban Development Officer Belfast City Council), interview with author, September 6, 2012.

under the auspices of community activism or feminism, the results are the same: empowered women working toward peace.

### **Conclusions**

Women's community development continues to serve the communities of Northern Ireland in a broad range of services that improve health, education, access to information, self-confidence and childcare. Women's centres in particular have grown out of local women's needs in context and culturally specific ways. Yet it is clear that women across working class Northern Ireland have much in common as women's centres that are locally driven offer so many of the same services and offer so many of the same solutions to local problems. They serve as bastions of women's voices and professionals in the community and voluntary sector. Yet they are constrained by the limits of their post-conflict society.

[Community projects] tend to follow a pattern to be seen in many other movements—religious, political, industrial and military. During the early, heroic years they operate in open, informal, highly participative ways. Women often play leading parts. But hierarchies reassert themselves, formality and secrecy creep back, men take over, the organisation comes to exist increasingly for its own sake and for the benefit of the dominant groups within it. (Abbott and McDonough 1989)

This is exemplified in one case by a woman hired as director of a local organization with a specific mandate for development. She succeeded, met her targets in less time than the mandate stipulated and exceeded the expectations for the organization. When it was clear that the organization was growing successfully, she was informed by the board that her services were appreciated but that it was time to professionalize the organization. They hired a man as the new director. The woman brought the case before the equality commission and it was decided in her favor. Equality measures are in place

and function to halt this kind of bias but there is a question as to how many women would seek redress for this kind of treatment, how many women see this kind of injustice and stand up for their own behalf.

This is one of the reasons that women's centres and women's groups are so important. The focus on women encourages the empowerment required for such action as well as the access to the system that women in focus groups explain they were not aware they had. Further, the advocacy of women by women prevents the patronizing 'let a man handle it' kind of attitude described above. Women standing together cannot be pushed from their own organizations. Further, 'when women come together, things get done.'

This does not suggest that women working for women is always a good in and of itself. Some women's centres report the value of domestic abuse services and the importance of relationships between women's centres such that a woman who is being abused and may not be safe in her own community can be networked into a safe space in an *other* community. At the same time, a very public case of rape in the past couple years in Northern Ireland has shed light on the fact that these values are perhaps not evenly employed. Included in the allegations of sexual violence are allegations that violence of a different kind were enacted on the victim when women community workers held her under house arrest while the community, or specific groups within the community, investigated the crime as the accused was a group member. Rather than being assisted to seek proper care and file legal charges, the victim was revictimized by being brought face to face with her attacker so that members of the group could determine by their interaction if her accusations were true. Considering the implications of this story are difficult for many reasons. First, no legal decisions have been made. Second, because the

case is very public but the sources of information for this project are confidential, the story must be told in as generic a way as possible. Third, sexual violence of any kind is private and difficult to address. However, the sources from which this story is pieced together, all suggest in their own way that women's work continues to be subjugated to the needs of higher order group identities.

The role of identity in divided societies is still strong in post-conflict societies and a women's identity within that is of lesser import. It is for this reason that the women's movement did not have the kind of impact in Northern Ireland that it did in the '70s and '80s in other places. Women interviewed for this project will argue otherwise, women who proudly describe the women's movement and their investment in that but the mobilization of the CRN and PUL identities made alternative claims either irrelevant or treacherous.

Women in Northern Ireland are working against structures of patriarchy, they seek empowerment, they seek equal employment, they seek a better life for their children; but they also work within the structures of patriarchy. Women's centres are successful because of their focus on women, a group that have been willingly subjugated to answer the call of the higher order identity group. When the community needed women to come out and take on leadership roles during the Troubles they did. When stability was created and men came out of hiding, out of prisons and back into public positions, women's participation faded.

One of the things that worries me is that since the GFA women have seem to go into the background again. It seems to be all men coming forward. I'm trying to push women to take places on boards, to sit as directors. They won't take that responsibility and yet they took it during the troubles. In an odd way women seem to have disappeared off the scene... It's very hard to get women to actually take

that next step of power for some reason here in Northern Ireland women don't see that as something they should be doing. And I've never fully understood that because... I've been asked many many times 'do men make better leaders?' No. Do women make better leaders? No. But they make equal leaders.<sup>145</sup>

The next chapter addresses these concerns and looks at the Big Lads and the barriers and constraints to fuller public participation for women.

---

<sup>145</sup> May Blood (Baroness of Blackwatertown MBE), interview with author, August 17, 2012.

## CHAPTER SIX: THE BIG LADS

“Wee women’s work” is structurally limited to issues that are not competitive for power. Issues that are directly linked to power, such as the ‘constitutional issue’, are seen to by the big lads. Big lads are those who are in charge in a community and they are generally, though not always, men. In some areas of Northern Ireland, the big lads are paramilitary. Everyone in the community knows who they are. Some paramilitaries have retained their political goals and even a modicum of political relevance. Others were stripped of their political relevance by the Agreement and have become involved in the functional equivalent of organized crime. In some communities, the local heroes of the Troubles, often ex-prisoners, become a locus of authority. The concept of the big lads has morphed since the Agreement through a series of legitimization processes such that they are not necessarily paramilitary. One of these processes demilitarized certain paramilitary groups whose leaders became properly elected political leaders and party elite. In another process, the government co-opted paramilitaries through community engagement. These ‘community workers’ in some cases legitimately took to the task of community development. In numerous other cases, ex-paramilitary community workers are legitimated by title though they continue in deed to operate like a paramilitary, to influence and intimidate their communities. In other communities, community workers



who have never been anything else, who have served their communities autonomous of the paramilitaries, are recognized community leaders. In some communities the locus of authority still rests in the churches. This has been less true for Protestant churches since they are many and uncoordinated. One remedy to this has been the Orange Order which seeks to bring Protestants together, united by the simple fact of being not Catholic. The Orange Order has worked to become the umbrella for Protestants. For the Catholic Church, this has been waning in the wake of antipathy over the sexual abuse scandal. In whatever capacity, the big lads are those who possess recognized, if not institutional or publicly sanctioned, authority. They are the ones that community members call if they are having problems with housing or water, a troublesome neighbor or anti-social behavior. They are the ones with power and they are generally men.

Historically speaking, another form of the Big Lad has been the police. Bringing equity into the institution of policing was a key point of the Agreement. While equity has been more or less achieved in the new Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) along the Catholic/Protestant divide, the process of building gender equity is still a work in progress. Judith Gillespie, who is the current Deputy Chief Constable of the PSNI, describes the slow progress being made toward gender equity in the police. When she first applied to join what was then the Royal Ulster Constabulary, she was denied twice on the grounds that she was a woman. When she was finally hired, she had to formally request that she be allowed to wear trousers instead of a skirt, an issue of function as much as equity. Further, it was not until 1994 that female officers be allowed to carry firearms (Gillespie 2012). In addition to her role as Deputy Chief Constable, Gillespie also serves as the PSNI Gender Action champion and chair of the Committee which seeks

to implement a series of recommendations as part of the PSNI Gender Action Plan which include addressing issues of work life balance, mentoring, and cultural change. She acknowledged the difference that has been seen in Northern Ireland by having female officers on the street. In an environment in which the police were historically Protestant or Unionist and often part of the problem during the Troubles, women in the new uniform of the PSNI, a police force that is actively rectifying issues of equality both in terms of gender and in terms of divided society, are met with increasing trust. Still, as Gillespie herself points out, there is a great deal of work still to be done to increase women's representation in the higher ranks. Policing is only one example of the institutions in which women are still under-represented. It is still mostly made up of big lads.

### **Women in Politics**

Women in Northern Ireland do not participate in public politics in large numbers. As multiple interview participants are quick to remind, this is not unique to Northern Ireland. Politics requires and generates a lifestyle in terms of publicity and flexibility in daily schedule that many people find distasteful. To suggest that women ought to be better represented in these roles is not the same as suggesting that individual woman ought to seek these roles. People in public life find their lives made public, their actions questioned, their daily lives constantly interrupted by meetings, etc. After multiple interviews with people who hold or have held these positions, it seems the better question is not why do women *not* seek public politics but rather *anyone* would seek public politics.

This is an even more important question when it comes to women living with social structures that more often assign traditional roles of maintaining the household and

rearing children to women. One community worker who organizes workshops to bring women from different communities together finds that a handful of reasons dominate the list of reasons women give for not formally engaging in politics: lack of self-confidence, position in the family, trying to balance work with rearing a family, and attitudes regarding women in the work place.<sup>146</sup> How do you manage a household while being called to last minute meetings at all hours of the day? How do you manage a family or a marriage when having a meeting with a male colleague inspires rumors of infidelity? There are plenty of stories about lives and relationships that have not been able to stand up to these pressures, politicians who do not seek a second term, marriages that do not last, etc., both within and outside of Northern Ireland. The simple answer given by several female office holders was that a person comes to politics because they believe they can accomplish something and there are ways to make this lifestyle work.

In Northern Ireland where politics disappeared for several decades, this requires a bit of uncommon faith in a system of governance that has failed more than once since the Good Friday Agreement. Politics historically meant violence; since there was no local government, problem solving was dealt with through warfare. Stakeholders gained power either by organizing to protect and serve their community or by holding their community hostage, not by electoral process. This also meant that politics was generally accepted as the domain of men. Women who were involved in parties were there to serve tea, not to contribute ideas or make decisions. The theme of ‘making tea’ continues to be a joke told by many female office holders today, relating one or two experiences in which the men in the room teased them about making tea. A number of women describe willingness at first,

---

<sup>146</sup> Confidential interview with author, November 27, 2012.

making tea almost automatically; but more common are witty retorts like ‘I will if you will’ or ‘why are your arms broken?’ showing not only a resilience but a resistance to these gendered expectations. However, the presence of these kinds of taunts suggests a resistance on the part of men to this changing gender dynamic.

Many women believe that politics and the government that house it serve the primary purpose of addressing the constitutional issue and carrying on the battle through less violent means. In other words, if something needs doing, the solution is to work within the community to do it, not to seek redress with a government that is primarily concerned with holding the balance. For many decades there was no government to have faith in, so there is little impetus to put effort into solving problems using this mechanism, especially not when the costs are so high. Women in large number seem more willing to pursue community and local activities. The Northern Ireland Community and Voluntary Association reports that seventy-eight percent of the paid staff in the sector are female (NICVA 2012).<sup>147</sup> When asked why they did not pursue public politics, women in the sector echoed the sentiment that they could accomplish more, that they could see results through community work that they would not be able to achieve in government.

Not all women feel this way. Of the hundred and eight Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) sitting in Stormont today, twenty-one are women (NI Assembly 2012).<sup>148</sup> In Belfast City Council, sixteen Councillors of fifty-one are women

---

<sup>147</sup> This statistic does not communicate the breakdown of women in lower level or administrative positions versus number of women in leadership positions which are still predominantly men.

<sup>148</sup> Less than twenty percent of sitting MLAs are women.

(Belfast City 2013).<sup>149</sup> Four of the fifteen Northern Ireland Executive Ministers are women (Northern Ireland Executive 2013). Two of the three sitting Members of European Parliament are women (Paliament 2013). Not all of the women in these positions were interviewed for this project, however, the ones that were, as well as women who have previously held positions like these told stories regarding their paths into politics that were incredibly similar. For example, Dawn Purvis, who led the PUP for a short time after its founder, David Ervine died in 2007 and was an MLA for several years describes getting into politics by accident. “Politics for me was gray men and gray suits and big booming voices that added to the conflict as opposed to helping with the conflict.”<sup>150</sup> She was convinced over a period of time by David Ervine, who sought her out because of her deep commitment and involvement in community development, to come to the first meeting of the South Belfast Branch of the PUP. She attended with caveats that she would be part of the support structure of the party, that her name would never be put on a piece of paper. She was elected as branch secretary at that very first meeting.

MLA Paula Bradley, who is the Chair of the All Party Group on UNSCR 1325, describes a similar path on which she went to the occasional DUP party meeting while working as a social worker. She was asked directly to run for city council and replied that she would do it only if they put her third on the list, thus, she thought, assuring that she

---

<sup>149</sup> Thirty-one percent.

<sup>150</sup> Dawn Purvis (former MLA and former leader of the Progressive Unionist Party), interview with author, September 24, 2012.

would not win a seat. It was “kinda more thru chance than thru ambition I got here.”<sup>151</sup>

Bradley spent five years as a Councillor and then Deputy Mayor of Newtonabbey before getting elected to the Assembly in 2011.

Member of Parliament (MP) Naomi Long of the Alliance Party also recounts what she termed a ‘slightly non-traditional route.’ As a student at Queen’s University Belfast, she found herself in a dispute over her grant and when she received no help through the university, she was directed by a friend to then Councillor John Alderdice of the Alliance who helped her remedy her dispute. “That would have been the first time I thought politics was anything other than just a lot of men arguing with each other on television.”<sup>152</sup> She began participating in the party in support roles and it was not until 2001, seven or eight years later that she was asked to run for City Council in Belfast, a position she held, including her role as Lord Mayor in 2009-2010, until she stood down in 2010 following her election as MP in Westminster.

Belfast City Councilor Bernie Kelly of the SDLP got involved in the party initially to support a friend who had moved to Belfast from Ireland and wanted to join. Ironically, it was Kelly who got invested while her friend left the party. Like the stories related above, it was not a personal ambition that drove her to run for office, but the request of another party member, Carmel Hanna to run on her ticket that first got Kelly elected to Belfast City Council in 2005. She is now in her second term and Chair of the SDLP’s Women’s Group.<sup>153</sup>

---

<sup>151</sup> Paula Bradley (MLA Northern Ireland, DUP, Chair All Party Group on UNSCR 1325), interview with author, October 8, 2012.

<sup>152</sup> Naomi Long (Member of Parliament, Alliance Party), interview with author, November 13, 2012.

<sup>153</sup> Bernie Kelly (Councillor, Belfast City Council, SDLP), interview with author, October 17, 2012.

Deputy Lord Mayor of Belfast Tierna Cunningham of Sinn Fein was also approached by her party to run. She was heavily involved in her community and did not want to run for politics. It was only after being convinced that she could not win the seat in an SDLP stronghold that she agreed. Sinn Fein was clear that they wanted to run a young female candidate in a ward that had no female candidates and in yet another example that people will vote for women, she got elected. “The next day I woke up and went right, people have put the tick box against my name, I have to deliver here.”<sup>154</sup> She spent the following months going street by street, door to door learning about the people in her ward and the issues they were dealing with.

It is a common theme among women politicians in Northern Ireland not to pursue office for themselves but in response to someone else. As Long claims, this may not be a traditional route but it may prove to be an alternative approach to politics that is more women friendly. As Monica McWilliams discussed, the acts associated with election, putting face to poster and making one’s name part of the public discourse can make a person incredibly vulnerable. It was for this reason that the Coalition argued against the return to a system in which candidates run as individuals in their wards, rather than the umbrella of consolidating votes over the whole of Northern Ireland for particular parties which would alleviate the pressure on individual candidates. Women repeatedly point to the contentious nature of elections, the name calling and rivalry that goes on in local elections as reasons why they have no interest in running for office themselves. Perhaps running at the behest of the party helps to both alleviate some of those pressures and to

---

<sup>154</sup> Tierna Cunningham (Deputy Lord Mayor, Sinn Fein), interview with author, September 26, 2012.

lend self-confidence to candidates that the party has faith in them. Self-confidence is also cited as a barrier to women's participation in public politics.

Building self-confidence has been a conscious goal for a number of these women politicians. Naomi Long for example has made a concerted effort to groom women in the party to play bigger roles, run for office, and take part in the process. Bernie Kelly through her leadership in the SDLP Women's Group is working toward increasing women's roles in the SDLP itself as well as mentoring women in the party to be more involved. Paula Bradley, as mentioned above, chairs the All Party Group on UNSCR 1325 and meets regularly with members of the Women's Sector discussing ways of increasing women's inclusion and participation.

The concern associated with paying greater attention to recruiting women for office, is the assumption that women politicians will necessarily be drawn to women's issues. There is a danger in gendering politics from the inside. Men in the party relegate women to tasks that are seen as wee women's work so that they can focus on the 'bigger' issues.

When I first came in I used to think, I am more than that, I have much more to give than that. And now... I actually enjoy those debates because I can speak about that from the heart, I can say yeah, I've been there, I've done that. I come from a normal family who have normal problems that any other family have... I think that women do get pigeonholed, 'that's a female issue'... [but now] I want to be fighting for female issues, I want to be the one who's going women should have this or that, or we should be doing this for our children or whatever. Why should I not grasp that... if it's been given to you, take it and go and run with it and make a name for yourself with it. Sometimes as females we can become a little bit militant and think why should I be doing that, I can do X, Y, Z about the economy or whatever. I just think, we're the best people that know about these issues, we're the ones that know the most...so why should we not be championing



them. So I've come to accept that... well I'm the best one to speak about that, why would I not?<sup>155</sup>

Bradley is proud to take on women's issues as an expert, because she is a woman but she also plays other roles in the Assembly and finding that balance helps prevent her from being dismissed as a woman doing woman's work. On the other side of the coin, Bradley is also quick to point out that she has male counterparts who have volunteered to sit on the 1325 All Party Group, as well as others taking on issues regularly deemed women's issues. The challenge against gendered assumptions regarding what is deemed women's work, even within the supposed male domain of politics, is being taken on by men and women. On the one hand, it is important to recognize that women have a voice that ought to be heard; on the other hand, if women's issues are to be taken seriously, they have to be seen to be important to everyone, by men and women in office rather than merely pet issues of women politicians.

Women office holders have met with a variety of forms of resistance from their male counterparts. As mentioned in regards to the Coalition, the contentious and verbally abusive mode of politics being practiced at the peace talks was representative of a kind of politics that may have been normal to Northern Ireland then, but is not normal otherwise. Things have changed dramatically since then. Clearly a much greater effort has been invested in including women in parties, in encouraging their participation, and more broadly to reframe politics in a way that seeks to problem-solve rather than *problem-make*. This does not mean however that women do not face challenges and sexism in

---

<sup>155</sup> Paula Bradley (MLA Northern Ireland, DUP, Chair All Party Group on UNSCR 1325), interview with author, October 8, 2012.

office. There is the long standing joke about making tea, of course, but that is one symptom of a larger structure.

One woman reported her entry into politics as a teenager. She joined her father's party and when she first walked into the room to be introduced, there was only one other woman, Mrs. So-and-so who put out tea and biscuits and did not sit at the big table. The men in the room, most of them her father's age or older welcomed her and commented how happy they were to have a nice young pair of legs join their ranks. The young woman looked to her father in distress. She thought they were 'perving on her' and she expected her father to do something about it. The truth of the matter was that they were actually glad to have her young strong legs, regardless of the fact that they were female, to do the literal legwork of the party. She was quickly put to work delivering leaflets and such door to door. It is admittedly a danger in this kind of gendered research not to find or imagine sexism where it does not exist. That being said, even though the men in the room were not 'perving', the absence of women at the table contributes to a sense of vulnerability or at very least a sense of uncertainty regarding what roles a woman can play.

Women in office often have to work harder to forge a path for themselves. Each of the women discussed above mentioned in their own way a process of proving themselves. Bernie Kelly suggests that "sometimes you have to try a bit harder, there's less of you and you have to prove that you're not just a token woman."<sup>156</sup> As women fill the ranks in greater numbers this will be less of an issue. More women in City Council and the Assembly will also help spread the women's issues out. If a party has only one

---

<sup>156</sup> Bernie Kelly (Councillor, Belfast City Council, SDLP), interview with author, October 17, 2012.

woman elected, she is almost certain to be given women's issues. The more women there are representing a given party, the more evenly issues, tasks, and committees of all kinds can be spread around. Proving oneself in politics stands to become un-gendered.

Officeholders could potentially prove themselves through political action rather than through succeeding as women in a gendered environment. As Paula Bradley noted,

You have to be part of something, you can't just sit on the sidelines and go I don't find that funny. You have to be part of it and the only way you can change it is by being part of it. You can't change it from the outside, you can only change it from the inside.<sup>157</sup>

Naomi Long adds

I think ultimately if you prove yourself as capable as individuals doing the job that kind of overcomes that but in terms of public perception I don't think it is an issue... our female candidates have been very successful candidates traditionally so I think there is an appetite there for women in politics.<sup>158</sup>

As discussed briefly above, there are often additional variables that make choosing a career in politics more complicated or more work for women. Running as a candidate for election puts stress not only on the candidate but on the whole family. The traditional image of politicians are of men waving to crowds, standing next to lovely wives who put their children to bed at the end of the day and then stuff envelopes or write constituent letters. The reverse of this relationship certainly can happen, women waving to crowds with husbands at home putting children to bed and then doing constituent work. More of the stories collected for this project however, relate women who are single and for whom social expectations are different or women who pursued politics at the expense of their relationships. In more than one case, kept confidential, women became

---

<sup>157</sup> Paula Bradley (MLA Northern Ireland, DUP, Chair All Party Group on UNSCR 1325), interview with author, October 8, 2012.

<sup>158</sup> Naomi Long (Member of Parliament, Alliance Party), interview with author, November 13, 2012.

more confident and ambitious as a result of their political activities and the nature of their relationships with their husbands was so dramatically altered that the relationships failed. Challenges to gendered social structures occur in more places than the public realm.

A variety of family obligations are only one of several barriers to women's participation in politics. Another critical barrier is education. As Lynda Edgerton suggests, nearly all women who run for public office have been college educated. This contributes not only to a woman's sense of self-confidence and her ability to articulate but to the community's confidence in them as having proven competence. When Dawn Purvis first considered getting involved with the PUP, she read the party manifesto, but only with the help of a dictionary as she had little education. Over the course of her career she attained a degree in Women's Studies, Social Policy and Social Anthropology.<sup>159</sup> As in other places, working class women in particular but women in general have not had access to higher education. This is changing. A survey of School Leavers across Northern Ireland in the 2010-2011 school year suggests that: "After leaving school 80% of girls progressed to further or higher education compared to 69% of boys" and "59% of all students enrolled at the NI universities are women" (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2012). The same report summarized that "[f]emales leaving school tend to be better qualified than males and are more likely to progress to higher education" (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2012). Though women have not historically been well-educated, particularly during and in the after-math of the Troubles, the current state of higher education for women seems quite positive. These numbers do not however address the areas that these high numbers of

---

<sup>159</sup> Dawn Purvis (former MLA and former leader of the Progressive Unionist Party), interview with author, September 24, 2012.

women come from. Areas of multiple deprivation are still far less likely to produce female school leavers who are continuing their education. Women's centres are important actors in addressing this issue and making college courses more accessible for their users.

It is important to keep in mind however that the level of education achieved is not the only consideration. Education in Northern Ireland is still mostly segregated. Public schools, those run by the state are still considered Protestant and overwhelmingly educate members of PUL communities. CRN children are in turn overwhelmingly educated in private Catholic schools. School uniforms still denote community membership. Education within the school system is generally limited to a history that seems to end after World War II. Young women, who could be mentored into public politics, are not educated about the conflict in Northern Ireland beyond the familial or community storytelling they would have been raised with. It is unlikely that this education is well-balanced and likely encourages the us/them dynamics of divided society. Adult education curriculum rarely rectifies this problem. For example in a class on Women in Leadership offered free through a local community centre, curriculum cites examples of women from Northern Ireland involved with the suffragist movement but no one more recent. The class does not, for example, discuss Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, the twenty-one year old republican woman who was then the youngest MP ever elected. This is to be expected perhaps since the course was being taught in a PUL neighborhood but the course could have included Baroness May Blood who is a unionist or even Dawn Purvis who was born and raised nearby. The narrative conveyed here suggests that women have simply not shown any great leadership in the last century. The real story is that examples that could be cited in the half century following WWII are extremely divisive themselves. They

were leaders within either the CRN or PUL communities rather than leaders of the women's movement. The example of the Coalition suggests that this cannot be entirely true but even the women of the Coalition were seen by many as interlopers. In fighting the cause of women in the peace talks, they were regarded as a 'distraction' from the more important issue.

The education young women receive contributes to the patriarchy of the conflict. Women across the different communities in a number of roles suggest that the only way forward, the only way to knit the communities together is to educate the children together. There are a handful of integrated schools but it is difficult for children in these schools to fit in outside of school. People do not know how to interpret the new school uniforms; there is simply not a category for integration in the us/them dichotomy. The high numbers of young women excelling in education is only one part of the issue of education. Increased education alone may increase the number of women involved in public politics but the process of increasing cohesion in this divided society will depend on an education that is representative of less biased local history and interaction with an Other in a productive environment rather than through destructive interactions or 'benign apartheid.'

### **Parties**

Another barrier to women's participation is the political parties themselves. When people discuss political parties in Northern Ireland, they describe it as a carve-up. This is obvious perhaps, political parties are constantly fighting for a bigger piece of the electorate pie but over time it becomes clear that this first obvious interpretation is not all that is intended by 'carve-up.' Instead, the chess-board of communities in Belfast for

example is carved up into blocks that are more or less permanently assigned to the green or orange camps. Many working class voters describe feeling that the government does nothing to help them but they have to vote. “Well I always voted Unionist you know but they're not in the government and the only reason I started votin' for DUP was cos I thought a unionist vote would be a lost vote and we're afraid of Sinn Fein” (Focus group with author). The real carve up between parties is not between large ideological blocks, but within them. As the speaker above suggests, she has historically voted UUP but since its decline she has only one real choice: she must vote DUP in order to maintain the balance against Sinn Fein. Currently, the DUP hold thirty-eight of the hundred and eight Assembly seats. Sinn Fein (29) and the SDLP (14) make up the block of republican/nationalist seats with a combined thirty-three seats (Northern Ireland Assembly 2012). The real drama of election time is not with parties arguing across the social divide but between parties within either the Orange or Green camps broadly speaking. For example, West Belfast which is broken into clusters of CRN communities, the elected MLAs represent Sinn Fein (five MLAs) and SDLP (one MLA) (Northern Ireland Assembly 2012). “Parties don't want the lines blurred” explained one taxi driver. There is a stability that is comforting to people in knowing who and where you are in a society in which identity is so important and party lines are more than just rhetorical.

As was echoed time and again in fieldwork, ‘there are shades of green and orange.’ The social divide in Northern Ireland is not between two cohesive camps but rather between ranges of political views within two broad based camps. The constitutional question may define the divide but within each side of the divide are a range of ideologies that have been described as shades. On the CRN or Green side, there

are basically two parties, Sinn Fein, the darker green and more vehemently republican, and the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), the lighter green.<sup>160</sup>

Sinn Fein, 'Ourselves Alone' in Irish, traces its roots to the early twentieth century. It historically fought for an independent and united Ireland. The party has split several times over debates regarding Northern Ireland and the Troubles. Today Sinn Fein is recognized as the political wing of the now defunct IRA. As such, the party has historically and is still today, known for being well-organized and structured and tightly controlled. Interviews with party members rarely result in anything other than the party line and time and again, community workers alluded to Sinn Fein members being tight-lipped and even secretive. This seemingly persistent behavior is exacerbated by a recent controversy involving a series of oral histories given for a project at Boston College. The US Justice Department, on behalf of the British authorities, has demanded these tapes that would implicate Sinn Fein leader in the Republic of Ireland Gerry Adams in IRA violence (Cullin 2013). The reality of a confidential interview being confidential seems to have party members hesitant to be open in discussing anything beyond the party line. Sinn Fein has been fairly successful at putting forward female candidates and, as previously mentioned, has led the way in being egalitarian in including women in their leadership structures in recent history. That said, the control within the organization suggests that women's inclusion does not necessarily translate into women's agenda setting.

---

<sup>160</sup> There is also a 'Green Party' in the ecological sense of the word with one elected MLA who is male.



The SDLP has its roots in the democratic process. As a party they believe in a united Ireland but that the process of achieving that goal must be done peacefully through winning the hearts and minds of the people.

We're a social democratic and labour party, so we believe in social democracy, the whole equality and social justice stuff but you can't do that if you're bombing and killing Protestants and Unionists because they believe in link with Britain.<sup>161</sup>

The SDLP have been less aggressive about including women in the party. Only two of their fourteen MLAs are women (Northern Ireland Assembly 2012). As Chair of the SDLP Women's Group, Bernie Kelly acknowledges the value of positive discrimination. In the party conference held in November, Kelly proposed a change to the party's constitution to provide this:

There should be gender balance... that's really what I'm bringing in is when anybody's going up for election, when there's two or more candidates, there should be gender balance... because people go on 'oh the merit principle' and all. I've looked at it, I've looked at countries all over the world where there is good gender representation, that's how they've done it. Positive discrimination. There's a legislation here to allow for it. There's an act that allows for it, sexual discrimination act, elections act, and there was a sunset clause in that legislation but it's been extended because it's been so bad progress. So that nobody can say 'oh that's discrimination'. There's actually legislation that allows for it. And I have looked all over the world and we're lagging behind here. We've tried to encourage people and that but it hasn't worked. I mean they just pay lip service to it. We need women and we need them put in winnable seats. So that's what I'm trying to do. I think overall, membership like all political parties is going down... women have always been at least half. But in keeping with most parties it would tend to be going down... we're way behind... we set up a working group and I brought Lynn Carville from WRDA onto it so she was giving expert advice... the general secretary was in that group and so was the party chief executive who was a male... what I'm trying to do is lobby for it.<sup>162</sup>

The motion was voted down in the November conference but Kelly is undeterred suggesting that the gender balance element was buried under a number of other changes

---

<sup>161</sup> Bernie Kelly (Councillor, Belfast City Council, SDLP), interview with author, October 17, 2012.

<sup>162</sup> Bernie Kelly (Councillor, Belfast City Council, SDLP), interview with author, October 17, 2012.

that would never pass. In the future, the motion for gender balance will be put forward in a different way. For now, Kelly argues, it is at least being discussed; it is an issue that party members acknowledge is worth addressing.

Kelly also points out the four Cs that act as barriers to women in politics: cash, confidence, caring and culture.<sup>163</sup> Taken in reverse, by culture, what is meant is more than the patriarchy of Northern Ireland but the culture of politics itself, the aggression, the antagonism, etc. Caring refers not just to childcare but issues of caring for families more broadly as well as the tendency for women to act as carers for sick or elderly family, friends and neighbors as well. Confidence is an issue that has already been discussed here but women across the parties have acknowledged the importance in their own careers of having someone believe and support if not push them to pursue public office. They in turn have discussed mechanisms, as does Kelly, of paying this forward, of mentoring the next generation of female politicians as well as encouraging women in other party roles to come forward for office. Finally, cash is always an issue in politics but party support can make the difference in terms of financial support in running a campaign. This brings the discussion back to gender balance and the importance of party policies that support women.

On the Orange side of the divide, there are three parties that are generally discussed as being relevant. The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), and the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP). The UUP is the oldest of these and often when people describe themselves as being Unionist, they are referring to party preference rather than being broadly aligned to the UK. The UUP has historically

---

<sup>163</sup> These barriers and those listed above can be found in numerous cases, not just Northern Ireland. Limited participation in politics by women is not unique to this case.

captured the lion's share of the PUL vote in Northern Ireland, from the days when it was considered and Protestant government for a Protestant people. However, the UUP was the leading unionist party in the Good Friday Agreement and it is common to hear people describe how the UUP 'betrayed the Protestants' in their role in the peace talks. One issue in particular that often comes up is the agreement to release prisoners, people considered terrorists and murderers who then joined political parties and many of whom have become legitimate politicians. The UUP currently has thirteen MLAs in Stormont but people most often talk about them as if they were defunct.

The PUP has similarly become defunct. A small party which had its base in working class areas, the PUP is tied to the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Red Hand Commando. When Dawn Purvis was recruited into the party she describes that:

For me the PUP was like a breath of fresh air in Northern Ireland politics because you had people like David Ervine and Gusto Spence came from the community that I came from, they didn't say that Northern Ireland was a wonderful place if all the bad people went away, they actually said Northern Ireland was a bloody awful place and we need to make it right. And they came from a background where they were involved in violence and they knew that there was a better way forward and I found that refreshing and it also fitted with my childlike sentiment of the men with the guns need to sit down and sort out the Troubles. In a long and protracted conflict, is anyone blameless? So I threw myself into it, I came from a community that was scarred by violence, but also scarred by neglect and poverty and disadvantage and that's what appealed to me most about the PUP were their policies in relation to women and equality and trying to address poverty and neglect.<sup>164</sup>

The PUP followed through on their claims to promote equality. There was a Women's Commission which allowed women to join without having to join a branch of the party. They offered educational course as well as those on assertiveness and confidence building. In addition, the PUP always offered a crèche at party meetings and

---

<sup>164</sup> Dawn Purvis (former MLA and former leader of the Progressive Unionist Party), interview with author, September 24, 2012.

so forth so as to improve as much as possible women's opportunities for attendance and participation.

The broader goals of the PUP were twofold: first, to end paramilitarism and second to transform the Loyalist communities that they represented after years of violence and neglect. Purvis rose quickly through the ranks of the party and took over its leadership when David Ervine died. Unfortunately, the party did not succeed in ending paramilitarism and in 2010, when links to the UVF tied the party to a murder, she resigned. In that same year, the party agreed to maintain links to the UVF and the Red Hand Commando. Today, the PUP has no elected MLAs.

The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) is the strongest party, not only among unionists but in Stormont overall with thirty-eight sitting MLAs. Sinn Fein comes in second with twenty-nine (Northern Ireland Assembly 2012). They have fewer women than Sinn Fein however, only five compared to Sinn Fein's ten. The DUP's female representatives, like Arlene Foster who is the Enterprise Minister, Dianne Dodds who is an MEP, or Paula Bradley, an MLA who chairs the All Party Group on 1325 are well-known and well-respected. The DUP seems to be working toward better representation of women.

Then I received the phone call several weeks later saying the party have decided that they want you to run will you do it. That's what our party did, we saw seats that were possible seats of taking and they chose women for the majority of those seats, they put women in to run as candidates in those areas. We would have a women's part of the party where we would... party conference last year we held a women's afternoon which was excellent and we have some very strong women in our party... there's some good role models... women within the party, we are heard, we can speak, we can do whatever it is, I think as women in general ourselves, we don't. I firmly believe it's something built within us, we put everybody else first. We take a back seat, we encourage other people... yet we

forget to look at ourselves and say well we're capable, why are we not doing that.<sup>165</sup>

Another issue the women face in formal politics is a rarely brought up but often agreed to assumption that women who are in office are merely puppets to their party. This is fed perhaps by traditional views on politics being the realm of men but women at the local level have argued that involvement in politics would further constrain them to someone else's whims. Paula Bradley scoffed at the idea that she would be a puppet of the DUP.

I don't believe there's anybody in any political party that agrees 100% with what their party line is and if there are I'd like to meet those people who think, yes I'll just nod my head and agree with that. Within our party, we are able to say, well actually no, now it's within a closed group, and within a closed room, you know, can we look at other options here, I don't actually agree with that. Can we look at how we do that? ... cos we do have people within the party with very different views on many things and it wouldn't be a party if we didn't have that. It would be dreadful, politics would be awful if everybody agreed with the same thing... but we do have a mechanism where we can speak out and we can say and I'll do it... even if it's just using more moderate language... there's a few things I don't agree wholeheartedly with... you're allowed an opinion. It's maybe not allowed to voice that opinion in public but amongst ourselves. In an official capacity, we don't have a free vote. I haven't known a free vote since I've been in here, so I haven't.<sup>166</sup>

The distinction that is made by Bradley is between blindly following the party and agreeing to a particular course of action behind closed doors that is then presented in public as a cohesive party line. The carve-up between the parties also reinforces the need for a cohesive party membership. Straying off course by one or two key members could fracture a party. Opinions surrounding what it means for a woman to be in office and what that looks like change dramatically when women's groups meet politicians and talk

---

<sup>165</sup> Paula Bradley (MLA Northern Ireland, DUP, Chair All Party Group on UNSCR 1325), interview with author, October 8, 2012.

<sup>166</sup> Paula Bradley (MLA Northern Ireland, DUP, Chair All Party Group on UNSCR 1325), interview with author, October 8, 2012.

‘as women.’ In her capacity as chair of the 1325 All Party Group, Bradley has hosted a number of women’s groups to discuss change and empowerment for women. On several different occasions, women have noted how real Bradley is, they see that she is ‘one of us’ and that she has struggled as a single working parent and that she not only understands the concerns that they express but that she shares them. This in and of itself is empowering to local women who understand that they have a relationship with the state and gain confidence in navigating that relationship. Bradley herself acknowledges their frustration at how slowly things move and how easy it is to feel disconnected when progress is not immediately forthcoming.

It seems disingenuous to now discuss the role of a centrist party in Northern Ireland. To talk about shades of green and orange and the divide between them often leaves no space to talk about the Alliance party which is often, whether to be ironic or not, depicted in yellow. The Alliance is a middle ground party that is focused on reconciliation and addressing segregation. “The core values of Alliance, are about treating each individual with respect and with dignity, about respecting political differences but at the same time trying to find a coherent, cohesive way forward.”<sup>167</sup> It is a small but growing party with only eight MLAs, two of them women, and Naomi Long an MP at Westminster. The ironic thing about the position of this party is that as it sits between the two major blocks, it is often responsible for the deciding votes on contentious issues.

We hold a balance of power and that's been the case now for about sixteen years. So when unionism and nationalism is split, the Alliance can make the difference in terms of what we decide to do. That brings with it all sorts of challenges in that

---

<sup>167</sup> Naomi Long (Member of Parliament, Alliance Party), interview with author, November 13, 2012.

you end up getting the blame for every decision and half the people will inevitably not like the decision. So there's always a lot of flak when decisions are taken.<sup>168</sup>

Most recently, the decision regarding the Union flag over Belfast City Hall resulted in a wave of violence that included picketing outside Long's office as well as intimidation and death threats against Long herself that has continued months after the decision was taken (McKittrick 2013). On its own, the Alliance is not big enough to get any legislation passed, yet it is often blamed by whichever side loses an important vote. Long described numerous votes she has taken in her career that has made her enemies of one side or the other. Looking forward, it will be interesting to see how this affects future elections for the Alliance party in general and for Naomi Long in particular. What is interesting now is that blaming the Alliance for unsatisfactory votes, PUL is avoiding blaming CRN politicians from either party. This is common. People riot over the issue of the flag and attack the centrist party but they do not attack the other side. There is a feeling that a direct attack is more than this fragile peace will be able to withstand.

### **Conclusions**

Well Northern Ireland is still a society coming out of conflict, so it's not the same as saying to a woman in other places: why would you not choose politics with a big P, it's been dangerous here, people have—a lot of women have been killed because of their political profile and there's definitely a legacy in that that hasn't been entirely overcome and that will take time, but also political parties here, political life has been extremely adversarial, male dominated, not very welcoming to women and that would, you know, cross all the parties I would say. And it's only now that the political parties are really addressing some of those issues and trying to make an effort to appeal to women and they do see it. And I think when the Coalition was there it was very clear to see that when the Coalition stood candidates, political parties put up women in those constituencies in order to try and attract the women voters, they saw the Coalition as a threat in that sense. And I think that indirectly in that sense the Coalition was responsible for the start of

---

<sup>168</sup> Naomi Long (Member of Parliament, Alliance Party), interview with author, November 13, 2012.

parties having to look at attracting more women and getting women candidates doing that but we've also been engaging with parties to say that you need to be doing more and you need to look at things like quotas etc. because we do need special measures in order to increase the numbers of women but you know, having said that, lots of us don't actually want ourselves to be involved in politics with a big P, you know, we want others to take up the gauntlet you know, since the demise of the Coalition, I wouldn't have found any of the parties that attracted myself to be part of, but I'm interested in getting some kind of critical mass of women but also to raise issues of reproductive rights would be a huge area that needs to be looked at in terms of our lack of abortion rights.

I really think very seriously as well, and South Africa showed as well, the importance of maintaining women outside as the ones pushing and making the demands because South Africa after the transition, women who were all active then went over and were active in the ANC and then you suddenly have this gap, you didn't have anyone left in terms of the women's organizations pushing and you really saw that, there was a gap, I think it's like a generation almost that kind of moved, and you need both.<sup>169</sup>

The personal is political. This is a common phrase that suggesting that asks people to think seriously about how politics deal with issues of a personal and private nature such as sexuality, rape and abortion to name just a few poignant issues in Northern Ireland, and how those issues are in fact political. The phrase 'the political is personal' suggests something very different. Stereotypes suggest that politicians are liars, that they make promises they cannot deliver and that they will say anything to get elected. Examples can easily be found in Northern Ireland to support these stereotypes. The Northern Ireland Life and Times survey data from 2010 suggests that only twenty-three percent of people are at all satisfied with their MLAs while fifty-one percent are either fairly or very dissatisfied (NILT 2013). However, numerous examples can also be found of sincere and passionate people who believe deeply in the cause that they are fighting for; people for whom politics is deeply personal. Northern Ireland politics is still

---

<sup>169</sup> Margaret Ward (Director, Women's Resource and Development Association), interview with author, August 10, 2012.



transitioning from the ‘bear pit’ politics that characterized the *abnormal* behaviours described by the Coalition members. The name calling, the nastiness of political rivalries has persisted and is cited as one reason that women resist involvement in public politics. There have been recent cases in which women have been verbally assaulted in the assembly, city councils and other public meetings, called a ‘feminist’ in a way that was clearly meant to be a slur when presenting proposals that challenged the status quo.<sup>170</sup> Women have been attacked by other women in this way, though it has been suggested that these attacks were at the behest of specific male party members who have made the political personal by attacking the people involved, rather than the issue itself. This is not new to the political arena. However, using women’s empowerment against women and turning ‘feminism’ into a dirty word is a clear discouragement against women’s participation.

---

<sup>170</sup> These are not cited because of confidentiality.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: OVERT PEACEBUILDING

The work of community development and in particular of women's groups mediates the balance of this ever-changing environment daily. No one who survived the violence of the Troubles wants to see their communities devolve into a persistent state of tension and violence again. No one wants to negotiate around armed military on the streets or worry about being caught in a bomb blast or worse to be informed that a family member has been killed. No one wants that.

Of course, if literally *no one* wanted this kind of violence, then it would not persist. Ongoing recreational rioting or sporadic violence by IRA dissenter groups or supposedly decommissioned paramilitary intimidation suggests that there are people who do still want violence. Perhaps this is why time after time women in interviews, focus groups and other informal meetings cling to the idea that no one wants a return to persistent violence: the threat of it is all too real. Northern Ireland is still working to build peace because people do not feel that they have it now. A lot of work is still to be done.

Women are engaged in the post-conflict process of attaining some kind of normalcy for their communities. The women of Northern Ireland have frequently described what they do as focusing on "bread and butter issues", what Marshall (2000) described above as a concern for subsistence and survival, issues that are not formally

political. Women seem willing to work across the communal divide on these social issues because they do not directly address the Political issues that divide the society, they do not participate in the kinds of activities that would invoke the social divide. Belloni (2010) describes this as a strategy of avoidance that ignores divisive issues in an effort to provide assistance without discrimination and without antagonism. The use of the word “avoidance” suggests an unwillingness to confront the complex issues that divide the community, almost a submission to the problem. Instead, it is useful to consider this strategy one of change without challenge. The activities pursued by women’s groups in Northern Ireland seek change without generating a counter response by the existing power structures. They seek change that is not readily recognized as a threat to the status quo. By operating within the sphere of “women’s work” or “bread and butter issues”, women are allowed space for success. Belloni specifically identifies women’s groups as being capable of creating a sense of solidarity across the social divide as a result of this avoidance (2010: 125).

This is often accomplished through community development work that women do not self-identify as peacebuilding. They reserve that word for projects that conscientiously work cross-community to build community relations.<sup>171</sup> Women’s groups and centres do engage in conscientious peacebuilding though it is not their primary goal. Residentials, cross-community events and bridge building groups exemplify these overt efforts.

Residentials, mentioned briefly above, are weekend trips organized to bring women from two communities together. They introduce the women to each other, find

---

<sup>171</sup> This is interesting in light of the fact that most if not all women’s centres have benefited from funding from the EU’s PEACE I, II and III monies that are directed toward peacebuilding efforts.

commonalities, and discuss points of view on topics of contention. WINI is only one organization that sponsors this kind of peacebuilding engagement.

We have residentials once a year for the women from across the areas and the residentials are used every year to take women to a neutral venue and at that neutral venue, they focus on controversial issues they feel they couldn't deal with within their own areas. One example of that is actually quite frustrating, is that two years ago, ... what came up was the issue around controversial parades... two things came out of that, one was that the lack of knowledge about the Other community's history and ethos and secondly the fact that these parades were as contentious as they were. We then had a further residential where we got in Dr. Johnson McMaster, who is a facilitator from the ecumenical society and we invited the women from the first residential who lived in those areas, along with their Protestant counterparts to come for the weekend to come up with a solution. At the end of the weekend, they had had an agreed resolution. And the agreed solution was actually the pre-runner of what we have today, it was we will accept the Orange Orders marching through, we don't have any problem with that, we know what the Orange Order is because prior to that was the perception that the bands were the orders, as opposed to the bands being hired in, so once that was understood they then said okay, we will accept the Orange Orders marching through, we don't mind a band as long as it plays a hymn and we don't want the followers on, the ones that create all the rabble... now the problem was, the women first and foremost they agreed to this and had no difficulty whatsoever honoring that agreement. That was over a year and a half ago. The problem was, when they came back into their own community, politicians weren't interested, the people who make the decisions weren't interested, and the local men weren't interested so the women's voice never got heard. So they had the solution a year and a half ago and nobody listened. That was all recorded,<sup>172</sup>

The frustration described here has been echoed in numerous other examples first of women's voices not being taken seriously as a source of authority in their own communities, but also of the disconnect between political authority and community development. In the end, there is a great deal of relief that the parades issue has been managed, at least in the 2012 season, to a satisfactory degree. The residentials, even though not producing change within the broader issue, did produce a change in attitude and understanding for the women involved. Through residentials, WINI has also

---

<sup>172</sup> Michele Baird (CEO, Women's Information Northern Ireland), interview with author, October 4, 2012.

facilitated productive conversation acknowledging that the social divide between Catholics and Protestants renders insignificant the experiences of sizable Indian and Chinese populations as well as the Jewish community in Northern Ireland which as not often acknowledged but who experienced the violence of the Troubles nonetheless and often in a distinctive way as outsiders despite having lived in Northern Ireland perhaps for a generation or more. Discussions also took place on external influences such as allegiances that Catholics have with Palestinians in comparison to Protestants' support of Israelis despite the fact that the history and context of that conflict was poorly understood.

And the women were even more convinced 'well, you know, why should we be tapping onto that, that's got nothing to do with us.' and it doesn't necessarily mean that every Protestant or every Catholic would choose that particular side or even should they choose a side.<sup>173</sup>

Residential offer women the opportunity to grow comfortable interacting with women across the divide on issues that have been contentious and even caused violence in the past. Women who participated in these residential reported a rise in self-esteem as a result of conquering their own fears regarding meeting women from the *other* community. They gain confidence in their ability to vocalize their concerns and engage in discussions over contentious issues such as the marching issue described above. Further they report their surprise to discover that the women from the *other* community were so much like them. Kathleen Smith of Newry and Mourne Women related similar experiences concluding that the only complaint she received was the women demanded to know when they could go on another residential.

---

<sup>173</sup> Michele Baird (CEO, Women's Information Northern Ireland), interview with author, October 4, 2012.

This is actually a limitation of this form of peacebuilding. Residentials are carefully organized interactions that are often dependent on the individual organizers for follow through. Organizers contact women from one group and connect them with women from another group. Majella Murphy of NIRWN specifically related one case in which the women of one community were only willing to participate in the event because of the trust they had developed with Majella herself. Women go into an unknown environment to interact with women they have likely considered to be adversaries. They need to trust in the organizers to be willing to make themselves vulnerable in such a way. However, the problem of funding makes employment in community development organizations unstable. The result is that organizers may not be employed in the same organization from one year to the next. Further, women who participate one year may not be available or willing to participate again. The engagement of residentials is often not sustainable for these reasons.

Another limitation of residentials is that women are brought together from *other* communities but not necessarily those in close proximity. They are most likely brought together from disparate areas and unlikely to have met each other in any other situation. These are not women who might bump into each other at the grocery store or in a shop. The women involved do not represent groups from either side of an interface. This is done conscientiously. Women from either side of an interface may already know each other or each others' names. They may share a history of violence from opposing sides. Residentials could not be productive if the issues discussed were not only contentious but immediately personal and accusatory. Organizers cannot lead productive discussions around accusations that "your husband" or "your brother" did such and such to my

family. At the same time, choosing to bring women together from different areas often prohibits the participants from pursuing these relationships once the residentials are concluded. Groups selected for residentials tend to be from working class communities and simply do not travel out of their communities regularly. To travel even ten or fifteen miles away from home to have lunch with a friend is virtually unheard of. One community worker laughed that her coworkers thought she might as well live on Mars as her home was over seven miles away from the centre she worked in. Residentials build confidence in women participants, they foster the sharing of commonality, and women take these experiences home and are encouraged to share them but they are rarely effective in building sustained interaction across the divide or relationships between women from *other* communities.

Cross-community events are another form of overt peacebuilding. Belfast specifically is a city that reflects its industrial working class history. There is little greenspace and even small community parks and playgrounds often have more rubber surfacing than grass. Communities organize a number of parties, festivals and events to bring people together in safe, family friendly ways. If families were willing to visit *other* areas, children could spend nearly every weekend getting their faces painted and jumping on a bouncy castle. In small communities such as Donegall Pass or Short Strand, visitors would be noticed and marked out at such events. At broader community events such as West Belfast's annual Féile an Phobail, the weeklong Community's Festival, members of any community could come and participate and are encouraged to. Community events held in neutral places such as Belfast City Hall and the Botanic Gardens are also designed to draw in members of all communities. The Halloween Metro Monster Mash fireworks

held at the Odyssey car park are another example of events organized for the wider population of Belfast.

More specific to the purpose of this research however, are events that are designed to conscientiously bring together members of the *other* community for social engagement. The Townsend Street Festival, for example, that took place on International Peace Day 2012 was organized for this purpose. Townsend Street historically connected the Falls Road to the Shankill Road directly. It has since been rerouted and an interface gate installed. The Townsend Street Festival was planned as a memorial of the ‘good old days’ when the road accommodated industrial employers and a shopping center and both communities regularly came into contact. The festival was organized by Marion Weir, the Shankill Women’s Centre’s Community Relations Outreach Officer and Aisling Ní Labhraí, Cultúrlann’s<sup>174</sup> Good Relations Officer and was supported by major organizations and community groups on both sides. An art installation engaged children from schools and daycares in both communities ensuring that families on both sides would come to see their children’s work. Performers from both communities were brought in to juggle, sing and do acrobatics. Bouncy castles and facepainting were set up for children. A cross community women’s choir performed some local favorites including “Tell Me Ma (Belle of Belfast City)” that both communities could identify with. Tea dances were taught to anyone wanting to learn and street games played by children in the street with no greenspaces to play in. Historical photographs (copies) were displayed with descriptions of what Townsend Street has looked like through the years. It was a well-

---

<sup>174</sup> Cultúrlann is an Irish language and arts centre located in the heart of the Gaeltacht Quarter on Falls Road.



planned, well-organized and comprehensive event designed to bring people together to reminisce about a shared past.

Attendance at the festival however was sparse. Children came in groups to see their art and then left without interaction between families. People at the tea dance already knew one another. A large group gathered to hear the choir sing and the introduction by the Lord Mayor but most of these people dispersed soon afterwards. Events such as these make great news stories, reporters interviewed the organizers, film footage was shot of the cross-community choir, but there is little proof that this kind of event can affect any kind of change. Perhaps the individual members of the two communities' willingness to attend an event with the *other* is a first step to more positive interaction. The organizers of the event were pleased with its success and looked forward to future endeavors together. Though the event was not organized by women's centres on both sides, the women who organized it did joke about how men could not have worked together to throw a party.

In addition, it was the women's centres who recruited for the cross-community women's choir and it was the Shankill Women's Centre who hosted the choir for practice. Some of the women from the Falls Road who sang just shrugged when asked if it was difficult for them to come up to the Shankill. "It's just a women's centre" they replied. Though they did not linger after practice ended.

Bridge-building groups are much more sustained and intense engagement in community relations. For example, Bridge of Hope is an organization that sponsors repeated dialogue sessions between groups focused on exploring the past. Women from a well-known interface came together over the course of several weeks to engage in this

process. The first session of this project was in-group only and a single question put forward to the women: who am I? This focus on identity, both of the women and of their group gave them an opportunity to seriously consider not only what they thought of themselves but of how the *other* might perceive them and what those differences were. In following sessions, the groups were brought together to discuss the legacy of the Troubles to “make sense of the past in the present.” The women involved described the interaction as intense and emotional and felt that they were actively “working” to get past the past.

This bridge building process is not the work of women’s centres themselves. Instead, it is a coordinated effort between Bridge of Hope and the women’s centres to recruit a group of women who are willing to participate in what can be a painful process. The content of these interactions can be very sensitive and as a result those involved often did not want their names or their community mentioned in the research. What a number of the women involved did report was that it was a measure of their accomplishments at the women’s centres in personal development courses and such that they felt prepared to take part in the bridge building dialogue. “Before I started coming [...] I would never have considered doing this.”<sup>175</sup> The women standing with her nodded their agreement.

Women’s groups and centres provide a number of services, chief among them perhaps are the opportunities to engage in these kinds of peacebuilding projects. More important, if the claims of their users are to be believed, are the skills and self-confidence that are crucial to women’s engagement. Capacity building in this sense occurs not only

---

<sup>175</sup> Women’s centre user, interview with author, August-December 2012.

at the level of the individual benefitting from these services but the community that stands to benefit from the potential peacebuilding efforts of these women.

## CONCLUSION

This dissertation examines the role of women in peacebuilding in post-Agreement Northern Ireland. Focusing on women's groups and women's centres as a focused form of women's engagement, this research traced the development of the field of community development as a field open to women and analyzed women's contribution to their communities through this engagement. This project makes two overriding and linked arguments. First, that women's community development is an active form of bottom-up peacebuilding. Second, that this peacebuilding takes place in an environment that is still gendered and constructed by competing forms of Christian patriarchy. Groups engaged in protracted social conflicts in which society is divided along the lines of identity have a tendency to define themselves not only in opposition to the *other*, but also according to a fairly strict cultural ideal. In Northern Ireland, the ideal took the form of Catholicism in one community and Protestantism in the other. The construct of this ideal relegates members of the society to roles. Women in both communities were relegated to traditional roles of wife and mother. Both communities were ordered according to Christian patriarchies in which men were the privileged actor and women were expected to play support roles. These gendered constructs are changing slowly, helped by equity measures in the Agreement but Northern Ireland is still very patriarchal today. Women's

peacebuilding operates within this structure. Intrinsic to this project is the argument that these kinds of peacebuilding are often overlooked and underappreciated. They are eclipsed by formal peacebuilding at elite levels that takes place in formal political institutions.

### **Findings**

The principal findings of this research are centered on the predominance of women in the community and voluntary sector. Women make up a preponderance of this field, choosing to seek change at the local level rather than pursuing formal politics. Women initiate, organize and engage with community organizations with specific goals and projects in which progress can be seen. One of the complaints against politics and formal institutions is that ‘they don’t do anything.’ It is a common conception in both communities that politics makes no progress, no development, no change. It accomplishes nothing aside from maintaining the balance of the status quo, the benign apartheid that characterizes communities in Northern Ireland. Change at the community level is perceived to be faster: those working to solve a problem can see the effects of their efforts. After schools programs immediately reduce graffiti and anti-social behavior among local youth. Training programs connect people in their communities alleviating isolation and teach new skills building self-confidence. Problems, once identified, are not necessarily solved, but progress toward solution can be seen and measured by the people immediate to the problem. Of course not all problems are solved quickly, if at all at this level. Community development produces mixed results contributing some solutions while creating others such as the fiefdoms of para-community workers.

Localized as community work is, progress is personal, both because those working for it are more quickly rewarded and because those affected by change are friends, neighbors, loved ones of the community workers themselves. For example, in women's centres, one of the primary objectives is to educate and train women. Women who work in these centres take great pride in the provision of service but they take greater pride in telling stories of specific women whose lives have been changed, women they care about. In many of these stories, the women working in the centres tell their own stories in which the services of the centre provided them with the opportunity to grow and earn self-confidence and learn the skills that they would eventually use in their jobs at the centre. The employees of women's centres are deeply committed to providing those opportunities to the users of the centres today. A large number of the employees of women's centres are users themselves. They are invested in capacity building of the women in their community and in achieving this goal, they are constantly building their own capacity in this field as well as the overall capacity of their communities. The users of the centres also take great pride in the work they do at the centre. Women describe earning certificates in specific courses that they had believed they were not smart enough to complete. For many of these women, the achievements made at women's centres represent the first time in their lives that they had received any kind of recognition.

One finding of this research is that capacity building is the primary contribution of women's peacebuilding in Northern Ireland. The skills and self-confidence built at women's centres contribute to stronger communities, more educated and better trained workforce. These investments in a more developed community combat the dissatisfaction and frustrations of deprivation that contributed to the upheaval in the late '60s. There are

more overt or explicit peacebuilding activities. Residentials, cross-community socializing, bridge-building groups are all examples of overt peacebuilding, activities that are organized with the goal of contributing to peacebuilding. Residentials bring groups of women from each side of the divide together for a weekend full of activities designed to encourage interaction. Reports from organizers as well as participants of these programs are positive. Women learn that the *other* is not so different and that they can work together. These experiences are often not sustainable however. The groups are often from disparate areas and would not casually run into each other. Long-term relationships are not built. Cross-community social events are another overt form of peacebuilding through explicit 'community relations' work. Representatives from each community, usually community development workers such as those at women's centres, come together to plan an event that will bring both communities together. The Townsend Street Festival, for example, that took place on International Peace Day. This festival was planned as a memorial of the 'good old days' when the road openly connected two communities across what is now an interface gate. It was a lovely event and made the news but there was little interaction between members of the different communities. Perhaps the individual attendees' willingness to attend an event with the *other* is a first step to more positive interaction. Bridge-building groups are a much more intensive form of community relations engagement. For example, the Bridge of Hope project brings groups together for repeated meetings designed to explore the legacy of the conflict. The project is designed such that these women would then reconnect with their communities in an attempt to communicate the lessons learned from their experience. To follow through the metaphor of the bridge, the women involved served as the foundation for the bridge but

the project was also designed such that these women served as signposts to inform their community that the bridge was being built and perhaps to encourage its use. These overt forms of peacebuilding are designed around explicit community relations work. They are described as peacebuilding because they strive to bring the two communities together. Community development organizations are often at the helm of such projects for two reasons: first, because they are well placed in their communities to support such projects; second, because community development organizations are funded in such a way that community relations projects are required to be undertaken even when they are not part of the mandate of community development organization. However, single-identity community development work may or may not contribute to meaningful community relations development.

The women who represent women's centres and women's groups do not identify their community development as peacebuilding because their work is internally focused within their community. They associate the term peacebuilding with bigger, specialized activities that target the division between the CRN and PUL communities, those that seek to strengthen horizontal cohesion, rather than the work they do to foster the stability of their own communities. Peacebuilding has become synonymous with community relations and this is viewed differently from community development. These overt forms of peacebuilding are important in that they are evidence of willingness and a desire to build relationships and reduce enmity across the divide. They cultivate a knowledge of sameness, that members of both communities have the same concerns, the same problems in common and that they are not so different from one another, at least within the bounds of socio-economic class. The impact of these forms of peacebuilding are, however,



limited. Residentials are concentrated and powerful interactions but there is often no follow up or sustained interactions between groups. Bridge building activities are usually more structured, a series of organized interactions with topical focus between groups that are geographically linked such as those between women of the Falls and the Shankill roads. However, the impact of these interactions is limited by virtue of the size of the groups that meet. Efforts are made to expand its effects but these efforts are diluted the further they are removed from direct contact. Larger community interactions such as the Townsend Street Festival are also limited in terms of their geographical impact as well as the difficulty in facilitating members of the different communities to interact with one another at the event. These peacebuilding measures do not have wide or even consistent, sustainable effects but they show intention, a willingness to try, both on the part of the attendees and organizers. It is unclear however, how much these efforts actually contribute to community relations and to the broader project of peacebuilding.

Women who participate in these activities report a boost in confidence as a result of their interaction with women of the *other* community as well as pride in their attendance. Simply agreeing to take part in an interaction that is so far out of their comfort range is brave. Time after time, these women attribute their bravery, their self-confidence in engaging in these activities, to the personal growth they have achieved through participating in women's centres. Capacity building at the individual level strengthens the community and is then contributing to explicitly peacebuilding activities.

Local capacity building has also contributed to vertical cohesion. Women's groups also facilitate engagement with political institutions, particularly the Legislative Assembly at Stormont. Women who participated in these trips to meet their MLAs

similarly reported the growth in their self-confidence that comes from education, training and participation in women's groups and centres. Repeatedly women stated that the "could never have done this [go to Stormont and speak for themselves to an MLA], without having done that." Women's groups encourage engagement and trust in political institutions. They build capacity that they then employ to enhance vertical cohesion. Capacity building contributes to peacebuilding at many levels.

The implications of this research to the broader field of peacebuilding in protracted social conflicts reinforces the extant literature that women, as Kaufman in particular has argued, are most effective at the community level. Women's public engagement tends to be localized. Women tackle issues that are of immediate effect to them and their families, what women in Northern Ireland have termed 'bread and butter issues' or 'wee women's work'. It is for this reason that women's peacebuilding is often associated with their roles as mothers or other forms of caring in the community. This work is easy to overlook because it does not vie for power or compete for authority or control. It is not political in this sense. Instead, women's efforts are described as small "p" political because they do not engage in what is termed in the Northern Ireland case the 'constitutional' issue. More broadly, women are far less likely to engage directly in the conflict neither in the violence nor in the big "P" or formal politics. Instead, the Northern Ireland case presents an example of women choosing to engage bottom-up peacebuilding instead of pursuing formal institutional peacebuilding. In the course of research, women frequently referred to their counterparts in South Africa and Bosnia and a process of transnational learning. Through numerous NGO and government facilitations, women in these contexts were introduced and able to associate and discuss

lessons learned, problems shared, creative discourse on addressing issues that women face following protracted conflict. These interactions produce norm diffusion through which women build on shared understandings regarding what it means engage in post-conflict peacebuilding as women. Though the research presented here does not cover either of these cases, it is implied by the references made in interviews that women in both these cases, and, it is presumed, other post-conflict contexts, are similarly engaging in bottom-up peacebuilding as an alternative to other methods. It would be valuable to extend this project to a fuller program of research engaged in other protracted social conflict to test the implications of this research in other contexts.

Post-conflict societies are often embedded in the same gender constraints that prevail during conflict. This is certainly the case in Northern Ireland. Bottom-up peacebuilding is a natural fit for women in this environment because they can engage in local processes, seek change in their communities, while still fulfilling the roles expected of them as wives and mothers within the patriarchy in which they live. Women are constrained by these social institutions, yes, but at the same time, these gender roles have allowed them to pursue change, to engage the *other*, and to challenge the status quo in ways that are interpreted as non-threatening. They are only women doing ‘wee women’s work’ and as long as they pursue these activities within the expectations of their gendered roles, these efforts are welcome and even encouraged.

Of course bottom-up peacebuilding is itself inherently limited. There is a call both at the international non-governmental organization and the inter-governmental organization levels, for example UNSCR 13215, for women to participate more fully in peacebuilding at all levels. One of the arguments for this norm references women as half

of the population and argues that women have the right to be represented. Only when women are present can they make claims to meet their needs. Women's bottom-up peacebuilding is limited by the same problem of representation: in focusing on building the capacity of women and meeting women's needs, are the needs of men ignored? Two answers are presented here. First, in a gendered society, women are expected to think like mothers, either because they are or will be mothers someday. The needs of men are incorporated into women's considerations for their sons. Second, there are numerous men's groups of all shapes and sizes that have historically engaged men. However, this engagement has also historically been development of the bonding kind, rather than bridging. Men's groups like the Orange Order or Rangers or Celtics clubs have fed divisive political parties if not directly into paramilitaries. These groups have often fed the conflict and so lack the capacity to contribute to peacebuilding.<sup>176</sup> Women's bottom-up peacebuilding is constrained by the different roles that many men still play to maintain the divide.

Bottom-up peacebuilding is also limited by its own sort of quietness. In Northern Ireland, bottom-up peacebuilding is not referred to as peacebuilding by those who do it. They are working on community development. They are building capacity among their members and improving individual lives. This is quiet and slow. It affects people as individuals, increasing their investment in themselves, their community and in stability. They in turn pass on this investment to their children. Children are taught, both directly and through examples and contact, to value education and to pursue personal

---

<sup>176</sup> This is not to suggest that men do not also work toward peace or that there are no men's groups engaged in peacebuilding. However, it is important to highlight the explicitly men's organizations that have, historically at least, contributed to contention between the two communities.

development. They begin to value their communities in a broader sense. Peacebuilding in this sense then is also an investment in future generations who learn the lessons of sameness, the value of development and are further removed from the frustration and bitterness of direct conflict. This process is however, easily interrupted or obstructed by any number of other forces. For example, marching season in Northern Ireland is inherently divisive. Children in PUL communities look up to Orange Order mentors and community band members who teach them marching songs which are derogatory to Catholics and imperialist in nature. They internalize these sentiments and take pride in their participation in this ritual. Children in CRN communities are often caught up in reactionary sentiment to these marches. They also learn the songs but they are taught to be offended by them, to feel put down by them. Every summer, marching season invites these communities to reassert the divide. The potential is there for peacebuilding work of all kinds to be ripped apart, for bridges to be torn down, and for the conflict to be reproduced.

Speaking to that specific example as well as to the society more broadly, civil society, with women's groups an active sector, works in a dedicated way year round to inhibit the forces that could potentially disrupt peacebuilding. They work to create space for members of both communities to openly discuss the marching issue and to agree to work together in ways that limit the potential for violence. This represents one example of the constraints of women's groups as civil society actors. In one case, women from two communities who have conflicted over marching through specific points arrived at a solution. When that solution was presented to the appropriate (male) decision makers however, it was discarded. The following year, an agreement, nearly identical was put

forward to the community. The women's solution was dismissed despite the value in the solution itself. Women may be well-positioned in society to cross the divide but if their activities are dismissed then their effectiveness is severely limited.

Community development is not the final answer to building peace in Northern Ireland. It is one mechanism for generating resilience in communities. It can contribute to the prevention of violence recurring. However, community development organizations do not always contribute to resilience. Those like the example of para-community groups are active forces contributing to antagonism. Peacebuilding is slow and fragile. These are the condition in which women contribute to peace.

### **Limitations of the Research**

These findings and implications for the field are also limited by the nature of the design of this project. Although working with one case study carries its own disadvantages, on balance it is the most advantageous approach in many circumstances. On one hand, a single case study restricts the opportunity for comparisons to other conflicts. It also limits the use of broad generalizations about the findings of the study. On the other hand, a single case study avoids some of the limitations of comparative approaches. As Stake observes, studies designed for comparison “substitute the comparison for the case as the focus of study” (Stake 1994: 242). Stake powerfully asserts that generalizations from a single case study are more trusted than generalizations from differences in case studies. Thus, showing the phenomenon occurring in a single case may offer trustworthy insight. In this case the exploration can delve much deeper than would be possible otherwise, reaching into more individual experiences of women in post-conflict. This kind of qualitative research is precisely the goal of this thesis. While

the results of this thesis may not be applicable to the entire population of women in post-conflict areas, the findings will offer a starting point for future research on the subject. As other cases, such as South Africa and Bosnia, are analyzed, the research done here on the women of Northern Ireland may be used for comparison.

There are additional limitations in terms of method. This project was not designed to be a large-N study, even within the case of Northern Ireland. The sample size of this project was limited. Due to time constraints, not all women's organizations could be studied, nor all the women who participate within those organizations that were studied. Further, more time was spent in Belfast and secondly Derry/Londonderry than was spent in rural areas. Most of the research was done with women from working class communities or with experts in the Women's Sector or the Community and Voluntary Sector.<sup>177</sup> Therefore, this project cannot reflect the attitudes and experiences of all the women in Northern Ireland. It can however speak to the experience of the women involved in the project and argue that these women are representative of the broader population of women in Northern Ireland as a result the data collected from even small samples of both urban and rural women from a range of locations across Northern Ireland that time after time either repeated similar sentiments or corroborated claims made in other locations.

### **Implications for Future Research**

There are a number of interesting paths to pursue following this project. The first would be to replicate the research in other post-conflict settings such as South Africa or Kosovo. It would also be interesting to analyze cases of conflict in which community

---

<sup>177</sup> See appendix for list of interview subjects.

development is not so readily engaged by women. This raises the question of what other engagements are available to women? Another path would be the application of methods frameworks used to assess the effects of civil society directly on these women's groups in an effort to measure their effectiveness in the context of their stated goals on the broader society of Northern Ireland. It would also be valuable to take lessons learned here to current cases of conflict in an effort to minimize or reduce the barriers to women in conflict and increase access to peace building. This research also raises questions regarding the generational process of peacebuilding. How long does this take and how might it be more directly engaged?

Finally, this project shed light on the tensions between formal institutional politics and the community and voluntary sector, what would be referred to as civil society in other contexts. Civil society actively contributes to efforts at peace building and yet are poorly included in formal processes. How can these two forces be effectively engaged together?



## WORKS CITED

2012. "Edwin Poots: Deprived Areas High Suicide Risk." *BBC.co.uk*, September 10, 2012.
- 2013a. "Suicide Rates Soar After Peace Deal." *Belfast Telegraph*, April 10, 2013.
- 2013b. Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). In *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.  
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/613355/Ulster-Volunteer-Force-UVF>.
- Abbott, Marie, and Roisin McDonough. 1989. Changing Women: Wmen's Action in Northern Ireland. In *Lost Horizons--New Horizons: Community Development in Northern Ireland*, edited by Eamonn Deane. Belfast: Workers' Education Association in association with the Community Development Review Group.
- Accord Insight. 2013. Women Building Peace. In *Accord Insight*, edited by Alexander Ramsbotham: Conciliation Resources.
- Acheson, Nicholas, and Ed Cairns. 2006. Voluntary Action and Community Relations in Northern Ireland. In *A Report of a Research Project funded by the Community Relations Council and the Office of Frist Minister and Deputy First Minister*: Centre for Voluntary Action Studies. University of Ulster.
- Alison, Miranda H. 2009. *Women and Political Violence: Female Combatants in Ethno-National Conflict, Contemporary Security Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Anderlini, Sanam Naraghi. 2007. *Women Building Peace: What They Do, Why It Matters*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Andersson, Malin. 2006. *Belfast Girls. Women Make Movies*.
- Anthias, Floya, and Nira Yuval-Davis, eds. 1989. *Woman-Nation-State*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Aretxaga, Begona. 1997. *Shattering Silence*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Arthur, Paul. 1996. "Northern Ireland 1968-72." In *Northern Ireland Politics*, edited by Arthur Aughey and Duncan Morrow. London: Longman.
- Atkinson, Robert. 2002. "The Life Story Interview." In *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*, edited by Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein. London: Sage Publications.
- Aughey, Arthur, and Duncan Morrow, eds. 1996. *Northern Ireland Politics*. London: Longman.

- Azar, Edward E. 1990. *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict: Theory and Cases*. Aldershot, Hampshire, England: Dartmouth.
- Babbie, Earl. 1995. *The Practice of Social Research*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Barnett, Michael N., and Raymond Duvall. 2005. *Power in Global Governance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barritt, Denis. 1969. *Green and Orange: A Quaker study of Community Relations in Northern Ireland*. edited by Northern Friends' Peace Board. Sedbergh.
- Bayliss, John, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens, eds. 2008. *The Globalization of World Politics: an Introduction to International Relations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- BBC. 2013. "Union Flag Dispute: Riot Breaks Out in East Belfast." *BBC.co.uk*, January 15, 2013.
- Bean, Kevin. 2007. *The New Politics of Sinn Fein*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Belfast City. 2013. *Belfast City Council: Your Councilors*. Belfast City Council 2013 [cited March 1 2013]. Available from <http://minutes.belfastcity.gov.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx?FN=ALPHA&VW=LIST&PIC=0>.
- Bell, Christine, and Catherine O'Rourke. 2010. "Peace Agreements or Pieces of Paper? The Impact of UNSC Resolution 1325 on Peace Processes and Their Agreements." *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* no. 59 (04):941-980.
- Belloni, Roberto. 2008. "Civil Society in War-to-Democracy Transitions." In *War-to-Democracy Transitions: Dilemmas of Democratization and Peace-building in War-Torn Societies*, edited by Anna Jarstad and Tim Sisk. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Belloni, Roberto. 2010. "Northern Ireland: Civil Society and the Slow Building of Peace." In *Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment*, edited by Thania Paffenholz. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Berger-Schmitt, Regina. 2002. "Considering Social Cohesion in Quality of Life Assessments: Concept and Measurement." *Social Indicators Research* no. 58 (1/3).
- Bernard, H. Russell. 2006. *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. 2nd ed. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.

- Bloomfield, D. 1997. *Peacemaking Strategies in Northern Ireland: Building Complementarity in Conflict Management Theory*. Hampshire: Macmillan Press, Ltd.
- Boulding, Kenneth E. 1990. *Three Faces of Power*. London: Sage Publications.
- Boutros-Ghali, Boutros. 1992. *An Agenda for Peace*. New York: United Nations Publications.
- Bridenthal, Renate, and Claudia Koonz, eds. 1977. *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Brinkerhoff, Derick W., and Peter J. Morgan. 2010. "Capacity and Capacity Development: Coping with Complexity." *Public Administration and Development* no. 30 (2).
- Bruce, Steve. 1992. *The Red Hand: Protestant Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland*. Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks.
- Buckley, Suzann, and Pamela Lonergan. 1984. "Women and the Troubles 1969-1980." In *Terrorism in Ireland*, edited by Y. Alexander and A. O'Day. London: Croom Helm.
- Butalia, Urvashi. 2001. "Women and Communal Conflict." In *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors?*, edited by Caroline O.N. Moser and Fiona C. Clark. London: Zed Books.
- Call, Charles T., and Elizabeth M. Cousens. 2008. "Ending Wars and Building Peace: International Responses to War-Torn Societies." *International Studies Perspectives* no. 9 (1).
- Cameron, John. 1969. *Disturbances in Northern Ireland: Report of the Commission appointed by the Governor of Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
- Cassidy, Kevin J. 2005. "Organic Intellectuals and the Committed Community: Irish Republicanism and Sinn FEin in the Norther." *Irish Political Studies* no. 20 (3):341-356.
- Chan, Joseph, Ho-Pong To, and Elaine Chan. 2006. "Reconsidering Social Cohesion: Developing a Definition and Analytical Framework for Empirical Research." *Social Indicators Research* no. 75:273-302.
- Charles, Nickie, and Helen Hintjens. 1998. "Gender, Ethnicity and Cultural Identity: Women's 'Places'." In *Gender, Ethnicity and Political Ideologies*, edited by Nickie Charles and Helen Hintjens. London: Routledge.

- Chetail, Vincent. 2009a. Introduction: Post-conflict Peacebuilding--Ambiguity and Identity. In *Post-conflict Peacebuilding: A Lexicon*, edited by Vincent Chetail. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chetail, Vincent, ed. 2009b. *Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: A Lexicon*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chinkin, Christine. 2002. "Cultural Relativism and International Law." In *Religious Fundamentalisms and the Human Rights of Women*, edited by Courtney W. Howland. New York: Palgrave.
- Chinkin, Christine. 2012. Bringing Women in from the Margins. In *Women Delivering Peace and Security*. Dublin, Ireland: Hanna's House.
- Chowdhury, Anwarul K. 2011. "The Intrinsic Role of Women in Peace and Security: Genesis and Follow Up of UNSCR 1325." *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture* no. 17 (3/4).
- Cnaan, Ram, Carl Milofsky, and Albert Hunter. 2007. "Creating a Frame for Understanding Local Organizations." In *Handbook of Community Movements and Local Organizations*, edited by Ram Cnaan and Carl Milofsky. New York: Springer.
- Cockburn, Cynthia. 1998. *The Space Between Us*. London: Zed Books.
- Cohn, Carol, Helen Kinsella, and Sheri Gibbins. 2004. "Women, Peace and Security Resolution 1325." *International Journal of Feminist Politics* no. 6 (1).
- Colletta, Nat. J., Teck Ghee Lim, and Anita Kelles-Viitanen. 2001. *Social Cohesion and Conflict Prevention in Asia: Managing Diversity through Development*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. 1997. General Recommendation No. 23 (16th session). edited by Division for the Advancement of Women: UN.
- Community Development Review Group, (Northern Ireland). 1991. Community Development in Northern Ireland: A Perspective for the Nineties: Recommendations for the Formulation of Policies to Support and Promote Community Development in Northern Ireland. Belfast.
- Coogan, Tim Pat. 1995. *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal 1966-1996 and the Search for Peace*. London: Hutchinson.
- Coogan, Tim Pat. 2002. *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal and the Search for Peace*. New York: Palgrave.

- Cullin, Kevin. 2013. Here's an Out Worth Taking. In *Boston Globe*.  
<http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2013/01/25/the-death-case/E6HER4pvJgh8swZQan6V6I/story.html>.
- de la Rey, Cheryl, and Susan McKay. 2006. "Peacebuilding as a Gendered Process." *Journal of Social Issues* no. 62 (1):141-153.
- Department of Education. *Integrated Schools* 2012. Available from  
[http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/85-schools/10-types\\_of\\_school-nischools\\_pg/16-schools-integratedschools\\_pg.htm](http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/85-schools/10-types_of_school-nischools_pg/16-schools-integratedschools_pg.htm).
- DeWalt, Kathleen M., and Billie R. DeWalt. 2011. *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*. Second ed. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. .
- Dominelli, Lena. 1990. *Womand and Community Action*. Birmingham: Venture Press.
- Easterly, William, Jozef Ritzen, and Michael Woolcock. 2006. "Social Cohesion, Institutions, and Growth." *Economics and Politics* no. 18 (2).
- Edgerton, Lynda. 1986. "Public Protest, Domestic Acquiescences: Women in Northern Ireland." In *Caught Up in Conflict*, edited by Rosemary Ridd and Helen Callaway. London: MacMillan.
- Edwards, M. 2004. *Civil Society*. Cambridge: Polity.
- El-Bushra, Judy. 2000. "Transforming Conflict: Some Thoughts on a Gendered Understanding of Conflict Processes." In *States of Conflict: Gender, Violence and Resistance*, edited by Susie Jacobs, Ruth Jacobsen and Jennifer Marchbank. London: Zed Books.
- Elshtain, Jean Bethke. 1992. "The Power and Powerlessness of Women." In *Beyond Equality and Difference: Citizenship, Feminist Politics and Female Subjectivity*, edited by G. Bock and S. James. London: Routledge.
- Elshtain, Jean Bethki. 1987. *Women and War*. New York: Basic Books, Inc.
- English, Richard. 2003. *Armed Struggle: the History of the IRA*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Enloe, Cynthia. 1983. *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women's Lives*. London: Pluto Press.
- Enloe, Cynthia. 1989. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Enloe, Cynthia. 2000. *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Enloe, Cynthia. 2004. *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Enloe, Cynthia. 2007. "Feminist International Relations: How To Do It; What We Gain." In *International Relations for the 21st Century*, edited by Martin Griffiths. New York: Routledge.
- Evason, Eileen. 1982. Poverty. The Facts in Northern Ireland. London: Child Poverty Action Group, Poverty Pamphlet 27.
- Fay, Marie-Therese, Mike Morrissey, and Marie Smyth. 1999. *Northern Ireland's Troubles: The Human Costs, The Cost of the Troubles Study*. London: Pluto Press.
- Fearon, Kate. 1999. *Women's Work: The Story of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition*. Belfast: The Blackstaff Press.
- Fontana, Andrea, and James H. Frey. 1994. "Interviewing: The Art of Science." In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln. London: Sage Publications.
- Foreign and Commonwealth Office. 2010. UK Government National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 Women, Peace & Security. Department for International Development.
- Fraser, Thomas G. 2008. "Northern Ireland: the Search for a Democratic Settlement." In *Beyond Settlement: Making Peace Last after Civil Conflict*, edited by Vanessa E. Shields and Nicholas D. J. Baldwin. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.
- Galtung, Johan. 1976. "Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking, and Peacebuilding." In *Peace, War and Defense: Essays on Peace Research*, edited by Johan Galtung. Copenhagen: Ejlers.
- Gibbins, Sheri Lynn. 2011. "No Angry Women at the United Nations; Political Dreams and the Cultural Politics of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* no. 13 (4).
- Gilchrist, A. 1998. "'A More Excellent Way': developing coalitions and consensus through informal networking." *Community Development Journal* no. 33 (2):100-108.
- Giles, Wenona, and Jennifer Hyndman, eds. 2004. *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gillespie, Judith. 2012. Women Peace and Security. In *Women Delivery Peace and Security*. Dublin, Ireland: Hanna's House.

- Goldstein, Joshua S. 2001. *War and Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Griffiths, Hywel. 1974. *Community Development in Northern Ireland: A Case-Study in Agency Conflict*. Coleraine: New University of Ulster.
- GSDRC. *Statebuilding and Peacebuilding* 2013. Available from <http://www.gsdrc.org/go/topic-guides/statebuilding-and-peacebuilding/bringing-statebuilding-and-peacebuilding-together>.
- Higgins, Michael. 2012. Women Delivering Peace and Security. Paper read at Women Delivering Peace and Security, at Dublin, Ireland.
- Hinds, Bronagh. 2009. In *Feminism and Peacebuilding: Why Women Matter*. Cork, Ireland: Hanna's House.
- IDEA. 2005. Women in Parliament: Beyond Number, A Revised Edition. In *The International IDEA Handbook Series: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance*.
- Institute for Inclusive Security, The. *The Vital Role of Women in Peace Building*. Hunt Alternatives Fund 2012. Available from [www.huntalternatives.org/pages/460\\_the\\_vital\\_role\\_of\\_women\\_in\\_peace\\_building.cfm](http://www.huntalternatives.org/pages/460_the_vital_role_of_women_in_peace_building.cfm).
- Irish Conflict. 2013. *The Troubles in Northern Ireland* [cited January 25 2013]. Available from <http://www.irishconflict.webs.com>.
- Jacobs, S., R. Jacobsen, and J. Marchbank. 2000. *States of Conflict: Gender, Violence and Resistance*. London: Zed Books.
- Johnson, Janet Buttolph, and H.T. Reynolds. 2008. *Political Science Research Methods, Sixth Edition*. Washing, DC: CQ Press.
- Johnson, John M. 2002. "In-Depth Interviewing." In *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*, edited by Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein. London: Sage Publications.
- Johnston, Wesley. Religious Distribution in Belfast. edited by Wesley Johnston: [www.IrelandStory.com](http://www.IrelandStory.com).
- Kaufman, Joyce. 2013. Women, War, and Post-War Transformation Roundtable. Paper read at ISA Annual Convention, at San Francisco, CA.
- Kaufman, Joyce P., and Kristen P. Williams. 2007. *Women, the State and War: A Comparative Perspective on Citizenship and Nationalism*. New York: Lexington Books.

- Lederach, John Paul. 1995. *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation across Cultures*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Lederach, John Paul. 1997. *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Lefranc, Sandrine. 2011. "A Critique of 'Bottom-up' Peacebuilding: Do Peaceful Individuals Make Peaceful Societies?" In. <http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00646986/>; Institut des Sciences Sociales du Politique.
- Lewis, Helen. 2006. *New Trends in Community Development*. Londonderry: INCORE, University of Ulster.
- Licht, Sonja, and Slobodan Drakulic. 2002. "When the Word for Peacemaker was a Woman: War and Gender in the Former Yugoslavia." *Belgrade Women's Studies Journal Selected Papers Anniversary Issue 1992/2002*:115-134.
- Lim, Timothy C. 2010. *Doing Comparative Politics: an Introduction to Approaches and Issues*. Second Edition ed. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Lutz, Helma, Ann Phoenix, and Nira Yuval-Davis, eds. 1995. *Nationalism, Racism and Gender in Europe*. East Haven: Pluto Press.
- MacStiofain, Sean. 1975. *Revolutionary in Ireland*. London: G. Cremonesi.
- Marc, Alexandre, Alys Wilman, Ghazia Aslam, Michelle Rebosio, and Kanishka Balasuriya. 2013. *Societal Dynamics and Fragility: Engaging in Responding to Fragile Situations, New Frontiers of Social Policy*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- Marshall, Donna Ramsey. 2000. *Women in War and Peace: Grassroots Peacebuilding*. Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace.
- Mazurana, Dyan E., and Susan R. McKay. 1999. *Women and Peacebuilding*. Vol. #8, *Essays on Human Rights and Democratic Development*. Montreal: International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development.
- McCall, Cathal. 1999. *Identity in Northern Ireland: Communities, Politics and Change*. London: Palgrave.
- McCarney, Damian. *West Belfast's First Lady* 2007. Available from [cain.ulst.ac.uk/victims/docs/newspapers/daily\\_ireland/mccarney\\_di\\_0407.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/victims/docs/newspapers/daily_ireland/mccarney_di_0407.pdf).
- McCready, Sam. 2000. *Empowering People: Community Development and Conflict 1969-1999*. London: The Stationery Office.



- McIntyre, Alice. 2004. *Women in Belfast: How Violence Shapes Identity*. London: Praeger.
- McKittrick, David. 2013. "Can Belfast Change? Ask Naomi Long, the Centrist MP Who's Facing Death Threats." *The Independent*, April 1.
- Melaugh, Martin. 2011a. A Chronology of the Conflict- 1970.
- Melaugh, Martin. 2011b. Internment- A Chronology of the Main Events. CAIN Web Service.
- Merriam-Webster. 1990. Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary. In *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, edited by Merriam-Webster. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster Inc.
- Miall, Hugh, Oliver Ramsbotham, and Tom Woodhouse. 2011. *Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflicts*. Third ed. Cambridge: Polity.
- Milic, Andjelka. 1993. "Women and Nationalism in the Former Yugoslavia." In *Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union (Thinking Gender)*, edited by Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller. London: Routledge.
- Miller, Errol. 2001. "Gender, Power and Politics: An Alternative Perspective." In *Gender, Peace and Conflict*, edited by Inger Skjelsbaek and Dan Smith. IONDON: Sage Publications.
- Morgan, Valerie. 1996. *Peacemakers? Peacekeepers? Women in Northern Ireland 1969-1995*. Londonderry: INCORE.
- Morrow, Duncan. 1996. "Northern Ireland 1972-95." In *Northern Ireland Politics*, edited by Arthur Aughey and Duncan Morrow. London: Longman.
- Morse, Jane. 2013. "Obama Urges Belfast Youth to Advance Peace, Economic Prosperity." *IIP Digital*.
- Moser, Caroline, and Fiona C. Clark. 2001. *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict, and Political Violence*. London: Zed Books.
- Mulholland, Marc. 2003. *Northern Ireland: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mulholland, Marie. 2001. "The Challenge to Inequality: Women, Discrimination and Decision-Making in Northern Ireland." In *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors*, edited by Caroline O.N. Moser and Fiona C. Clark. London: Zed Books.

- Newry and Mourne Women Ltd. 2013. *NewryandMourneWomen.org: a Voice for Women in the Newry and Mourne Area* 2012 [cited March 28 2013]. Available from <http://www.newryandmournewomen.org/aboutus/index.asp>.
- NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. *About Us* 2013. Available from <http://womenpeacesecurity.org>.
- NI Assembly. 2013. 2012 [cited February 28 2013]. Available from [www.niassembly.gov.uk](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk).
- NICIE. *Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education* 2013. Available from <http://www.nicie.org/>.
- NICRC. 1971. *Flight*. Belfast, UK: Northern Ireland Community Relations Commission.
- NICRC. 1974. *Intimidation in Housing*. Belfast: Northern Ireland Community Relations Commission.
- NICVA. 2012. *State of the Sector VI: The Northern Ireland Voluntary and Community Sector*. In *State of the Sector Research Programme*, edited by Northern Ireland Community and Voluntary Association. Belfast.
- NIHE. *Housing Executive* 21013. Available from <http://www.nihe.gov.uk/>.
- NILT. 2013. *Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey*. edited by ARK. Belfast: Economic & Social Research Council.
- NISRA. 2010. *Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010*. edited by Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.
- NISRA. 2013. *Suicide Deaths*. Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2012 [cited April 1 2013]. Available from <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/demography/default.asp31.htm>.
- NIWEP. 2008. *Submission to the Committee on the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW): VIth Report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*. Northern Ireland Women's European Platform.
- Nolan, Paul. 2012. *Peace Monitoring Report*. Belfast, UK: Community Relations Council.
- Northern Ireland Assembly. *Statistics* 2012. Available from <http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/mlas/statistics.aspx>.

- Northern Ireland Executive. *Your Executive*. nirect 2013. Available from <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/index/your-executive/ministers-and-their-departments.htm>.
- Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey. 2009. About the Survey. Economic and Social Research Council.
- Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. 2012. *Women in Northern Ireland*. edited by Department of Finance and Personnel.
- Northern Visions. 2009. *Our Generation-- In Conversation iwth Jackie Redpath*. Belfast: Northern Visions NvTv Plus.
- O'Brien, Constance. 2009. *New Directions in Community Development and Conflict Resolution: Towards Peace-Building in Northern Ireland and South Africa*. Koln, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishers.
- O'Leary, Brendan, and John McGarry. 1997. *The Politics of Antagonism: Understanding Northern Ireland, Conflict and Change in Britain Series*. London: The Athlone Press.
- O'Rourke, Catherine. 2012. "Dealing with the Past in a Post-Conflict Society: Does the Participation of Women Matter? Insights from Northern Ireland." *William and Mary Journal of Women and the Law* no. 19.
- Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, United Kingdon. 2005. *A Shared Future: Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland*.
- Orjuela, Camilla. 2005. *Civil Society in Civil War, Peace Work and Identity Politics in Sri Lanka*. Goteborg: PhD Dissertation, Department of Peace and Development Research, University Goteborg.
- Paffenholz, Thania, and Christoph Spurk. 2006. *Civil Society, Civic Engagement and Peacebuilding*. In *Social Development Papers: Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- Paffenholz, Thania, Christoph Spurk, Roberto Belloni, Sabine Kurtenbach, and Camilla Orjuela. 2010. "Enabling and Disenabling Factors for Civil Society Peacebuilding." In *Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment*, edited by Thania Paffenholz. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Paliament, European. *Northern Ireland MEPs* 2013. Available from [http://www.europarl.ie/en/Your\\_MEPs/n\\_ireland.html;jsessionid=503A6CF4EB8CF1E7BCAA26A6C9FF6251](http://www.europarl.ie/en/Your_MEPs/n_ireland.html;jsessionid=503A6CF4EB8CF1E7BCAA26A6C9FF6251).
- Parver, Corrine, and Rebecca Wolf. 2008. "Civil Society's Involvement in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding." *International Journal of Legal Information* no. 36 (1):51.

- Peace People. *History* [cited August 17, 2011. Available from <http://www.peacepeople.com>.
- Persic, Callie. 2004. "The Emergence of a Gender Consciousness: Women and Community Work in West Belfast." In *Irish Women and Nationalism: Soldiers, New Women and Wicked Hags*, edited by Lousie Ryan and Margaret Ward. Dublin: Irish Academic Press.
- Peterson, V. Spike. 1991. *Gendered States: Feminist (Re)Visions of International Relations Theory*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Poulligny, B. . 2005. "Civil Society and Post-Conflict peacebuilding: Ambiguities of International Programmes Aimed at Building 'New' Societies." *Security Dialogue* no. 36 (4):495-510.
- Pratt, Nicola, and Sophie Richter-Devroe. 2011. "Critically Examining UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security." *International Journal of Feminist Politics* no. 13 (4):489-503.
- Public Service Commission. 2010. Federal employees' involvement in political activities. *Guidance Document*, <http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/plac-acpl/guidance-direction-eng.htm>.
- Putnam, Robert D. 1993. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Tevival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Rajasingham, Darini. 1995. "On Mediating Multiple Identities: The Shifting Field of Women's Sexualities Within the Community, State and Nation." In *From Basic Needs to Basic Rights*, edited by Margaret Schuler. Washington, D.C.: Women, Law and Development.
- Ranchod-Nilsson, Sita, and Mary Ann Tetreault. 2000. "Gender and Nationalism: Moving Beyond Fragmented Conversation." In *Women, States, and Nationalism: At Home in the Nation?*, edited by Sita Ranchod-Nilsson and Mary Ann Tetreault. London: Routledge.
- Rehn, Elisabeth, and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. 2002. "Women, War, Peace: The Independent Experts' Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-Building (Progress of the World's Women 2002, Vol. 1)." In. New York: UNIFEM.
- Ridd, Rosemary, and Helen Callaway, eds. 1986. *Caught Up in Conflict*. London: Macmillan Education LTD.

- Robson, Terry. 2000. *The State and Community Action*. London: Pluto Press.
- Rooney, Eilish. 1995. "Political Division, Practical Alliance: Problems for Women in Conflict." *Journal of Women's History* no. 6/7 (4/1):40-48.
- Roulston, Carmel. 1996. "Equal Opportunities for Women." In *Northern Ireland Politics*, edited by Arthur Aughey and Duncan Morrow. New York: Longman Group.
- Rubin, H. J., and I.S. Rubin. 1995. *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sales, Rosemary. 1997. *Women Divided: Gender, Religion and Politics in Northern Ireland*. London: Routledge.
- Schuler, Margaret. 1995. "From Basic Needs to Basic Rights." In *From Basic Needs to Basic Rights*, edited by Margaret Schuler. Washington, D.C.: Women, Law and Development.
- Shirlow, Peter. 2012. "Northern Ireland Is Not at a Crossroads It's Stuck on a Roundabout." *The Guardian*, December 11.
- Smith, Anthony. 1996. "Culture, Community and Territory: The Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism." *International Affairs* no. 72 (3):445.
- Sodaro, Michael J. 2008. *Comparative Politics: A Global Introduction*. Third Edition ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.
- Stake, Robert E. 1994. "Case Studies." In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln. London: Sage Publications.
- Strand, A., H. Toje, and I. Samset. 2003. *Community Driven Development in Contexts of Conflict*. edited by World Bank Concept Paper Commissioned by ESSD. Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute.
- Study Group on Training for Community Work. 1968. *Community Work and Social Change: The Report of the Study Group on Training set up by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation*. London: Longman.
- Sylvester, Christine. 1994. *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sylvester, Christine. 2002. *Feminist International Relations: An Unfinished Journey*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, Rupert. 2001. "Northern Ireland: Consociation or Social Transformation?" In *Northern Ireland and the Divided World: The Northern Ireland Conflict and the*

- Good Friday Agreement in Comparative Perspective*, edited by John McGarry. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tickner, Ann. 1992. *Gender in International Relations*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Turk, Volker. 2009. "Capacity-Building." In *Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: A Lexicon*, edited by Vincent Chetail. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- UN Women. 1985. Third World Conference on Women. Nairobi.
- UN Women. 1995. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In *Fourth World Conference on Women*. Beijing.
- United Kingdom Women's National Commission. 2008. Submission to the United Nations' Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.
- United Nations Security Council. 2000. Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. New York.
- UNTerm. *Peacebuilding*. UN Publications 2013. Available from <http://unterm.un.org/dgaacs/unterm.nsf/0f99a7d734f48ac385256a07005e48fb/4dc0e58e6ab2561885256a00000773dc?OpenDocument>.
- Uphoff, N. 1996. *Learning from Gal Oya: Possibilities for Participatory Development and Post-Newtonian Social Science*. London: IT Publications.
- US Office of Special Counsel. 2001. Title 5: Administrative Personnel. edited by Code of Federal Regulations: US Government Printing Office via GPO Access.
- USIP. *What is UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and Why Is It so Critical Today?* 2013. Available from [http://www.usip.org/gender/peacebuilding/about\\_UNSCR\\_1325#Why\\_did\\_the\\_UN\\_Security\\_Council\\_pass\\_Resolution\\_1325](http://www.usip.org/gender/peacebuilding/about_UNSCR_1325#Why_did_the_UN_Security_Council_pass_Resolution_1325).
- Varshney, Ashutosh. 2001. "Ethnic Conflict and Civil Society: India and Beyond." *World Politics* no. 53:362-98.
- Wali, Sima. 1995. "Women in Conditions of War and Peace: Challenges and Dilemmas." In *From Basic Needs to Basic Rights*, edited by Margaret Schuler. Washington, D.C.: Women, Law and Development.
- Warner, Geoffrey. 2006. "The Falls Road Curfew Revisited." *Irish Studies Review*.

- Warren, Carol A. B. 2002. "Qualitative Interviewing." In *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*, edited by Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein. London: Sage Publications.
- WCRP. 2013. *Women's Centres Regional Partnership* [cited January 22 2013]. Available from <http://www.wcrp.org.uk>.
- Weiner, Ron. 1976. *The rape and plunder of the Shankill in Belfast: People and planning*: Nothems Press.
- Whyte, William Foote. 1993. *Street Corner Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wikipedia. 2012. *Emma Groves* 2011 [cited February 10 2012]. Available from [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emma\\_Groves#cite\\_ref-The\\_troubles\\_we.27ve\\_seen\\_8-4](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emma_Groves#cite_ref-The_troubles_we.27ve_seen_8-4).
- Windsor Women's Centre. *About Us* 2012 [cited January 31, 2013]. Available from <http://windsorwomenscentre.com/about>.
- Women's ad hoc Policy Group. 2011. *Women's Manifesto: Elections 2011 Northern Ireland Assembly and Local Government*. edited by WRDA. Belfast. [http://www.wrda.net/Documents/Northern\\_Ireland\\_Women%27s\\_Election\\_Manifesto\\_2011.pdf](http://www.wrda.net/Documents/Northern_Ireland_Women%27s_Election_Manifesto_2011.pdf).
- WRDA. 2013. *Women's Resource and Development Agency*. Women's Resource and Development Agency 2013 [cited March 28 2013]. Available from <http://www.wrda.net>.

## **APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW ANNEX**

1. Mari Fitzduff, Conflict and Coexistence Programme at Brandeis University, July 30, 2012
2. Jackie Redpath, Chief Executive, Greater Shankill Partnership, July 31, 2012
3. Monica McWilliams, Associate Researcher, Transitional Justice Institute, Chair in Women's Studies, School of Politics, Criminology and Social Policy, University of Ulster, former Co-Chair NIWC, August 8, 2012
4. Margaret Ward, Director, Women's Resource and Development Association, August 10, 2012
5. May Blood, Baroness of Blackwatertown MBE, August 17, 2012
6. Lynda Edgerton Walker, Women's Rights Activist, Instructor, former member of the NIWC, August 29, 2012
7. Betty Carlisle, Manager Shankill Women's Centre, Board Member Greater Shankill Partnership, September 5, 2012
8. Callie Persic, Urban Development Officer Belfast City Council, September 6, 2012
9. Avila Kilmurray, Director, Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, September 10, 2012
10. Marion Weir, Shankill Women's Centre's Community Relations Outreach Officer, September 12, 2012
11. Aisling Ni Labhrai, Good Relations Officer, An Culturann, September 12, 2012
12. Dawn Purvis, former MLA and former leader of the Progressive Unionist Party, September 24, 2012
13. Tierna Cunningham, Deputy Lord Mayor, Sinn Fein, September 26, 2012
14. Kirsty Richardson, Director, Greenway Women's Centre, September 26, 2012.
15. Michele Baird, CEO Women's Information Northern Ireland, October 4, 2012
16. Paula Bradley, MLA Northern Ireland, DUP, Chair All Party Group on UNSCR 1325, October 8, 2012
17. Sally Smyth, Director, GRACE, October 9, 2012.
18. Geraldine MacAteer, CEO West Belfast Partnership, October 11, 2012
19. Eileen Weir, Shankill Women's Centre, October 15, 2012



20. Bernie Kelly, Councillor, Belfast City Council, SDLP, October 17, 2012
21. Susan McEwan, Corrymeela, October 18, 2012
22. Yvonne Galligan, Professor School of Politics, International Studies and Philosophy, Queen's University Belfast, Director, Centre for the Advancement of Women in Politics, QUB, October 24, 2012
23. Kathleen, Newry and Mourne Women Ltd., November 7, 2012
24. Gillian Gibson, Director, Footprints Women's Centre, November 8, 2012.
25. Naomi Long, Member of Parliament, Alliance Party, November 13, 2012
26. Anne Carr, Dialogue Practitioner, November 13, 2012
27. Marie Brown, Director Foyle Women's Aid, November 16, 2012
28. Geraldine Compton, Director, Waterside Women's Centre, November 18, 2012.
29. Bronagh Hinds, Commissioner, Women's National Commission, November 26, 2012
30. Sinead Lynch, November 29, 2012
31. Majella Murphy, Project Coordinator, Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network, October 24, 2012
32. Margaret Logue, Director, The Women's Centre, Derry, November 19, 2012
33. Hilary Sidwell, Consultant, former Women's Officer for Derry City, December 3, 2012

Members/employees/users of the following organizations and community groups were also interviewed; individuals' names are withheld for confidentiality.

- Belfast Interface Project
- Falls Road Women's Centre
- Footprints Women's Centre
- GRACE Women's Ltd
- Greenway Women's Centre
- Shankill Women's Centre
- Strathfoyle Women's Activity Group
- Trademark
- Waterside Women's Centre

- Windsor Women's Centre
- The Women's Centre, Derry