Lost In Transition? Republican Women's Struggle After Armed Struggle.

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Summary

This thesis explores the conflict transition experiences of republican women in the North of Ireland, and examines how they politically organise in post-war scenarios. Based on semi-structured interviews, it presents four key findings. First, republican women use alternative forms of post-war commemoration in order to encapsulate their vision of what constitutes a combatant role and war-time sacrifice. In doing so, it reveals insightful new ways in which women's war-time contributions are conceptualised. Second, their vision of peace and equality is embedded within an anti-imperial and anti-capitalist struggle, representing significant points of departure from prevailing feminist definitions. Third, the institutionalisation of Provisional republicanism impacted negatively on both women's roles during peace negotiations and their feminist organising within the republican movement. Finally, findings indicate that republican women's post-war activism resides not solely in institutional politics, but across a broad-based terrain of political struggle, including grassroots activism, semi-autonomous organising, electoral politics and community work. The thesis finds that formal politics provides an important yet highly restrictive terrain of political struggle with limited transformative potential. In addition, the research demonstrates that political consciousness and mobilisation gained during the war-time period continues to motivate their full-time activism today, indicating that women's empowerment within armed conflict can be successfully carried over into post-war scenarios.

Theoretically, this research demonstrates that women's differential positioning means that they experience, respond and resist post-war patriarchy, among other forms of oppression, according to their unique standpoint. The thesis argues for a shift away from highly generalised approaches based upon universal categories in favour of a more nuanced direction within the field of women and conflict transition. Examining *all* of the ways in

which *all* women organise for peace and equality yields a stronger feminist analysis of

patriarchy and women's eclectic forms of resistance in post-war scenarios.

Chapter One-Introduction

War also destroys the patriarchal structures of society that confine and degrade women. In the very breakdown of morals, traditions, customs, and community, war also opens up new beginnings.

Meredith Turshen (1998: 20)

Introduction

When we examine the experiences of women mobilised by nationalist movements, such as republican women in the North of Ireland, then Meredith's statement certainly rings true. This entire research is a simple feminist curiousness (Enloe 2004) that can be succinctly summed up into a single question, what happens to combatant women after the war? Women and conflict transition is an important and ever-increasing field of feminist research (El-Bushra 2007). The last fifteen years has witnessed a considerable increase in explorations of women's activism in the cause of peace and non-violence during the conflict transition period (Anderlini 2007; Arostegui 2013; Baines 2005; Cockburn 2007, 2013, 2014; De Alwis et al. 2013; DeLargy 2013; Giles 2013; Hammond-Callaghan 2011; Harris 2004; Hoewer 2013; Hunt & Posa 2001; Porter 2003). Despite this burgeoning field of feminist research, the relative absence of combatant women's voices from the ongoing feminist conversations remains a prevailing trend.

Existing research on women and conflict transition focuses primarily on those who oppose violence or those working across the divide in deeply polarised societies. Many of these accounts tend to use highly generalised claims and universalistic categories in their analysis. This is particularly evident in the North of Ireland where widespread assumptions regarding the homogeneity of women's experiences and activism in conflict transition

pervade much of the current literature. To date, there has been little research conducted on combatant women and conflict transition. The dearth of attention to the post-war experiences of female combatants invariably produces multiple blind-spots in the current feminist vision. This research is a critical exploration of the conflict transition experiences of republican women in the North of Ireland and seeks to redress this important shortfall.

The overarching aim of this thesis is to explore the post-war experiences of republican women in order to understand how they politically organise during conflict transition. Given that this is the first in-depth study of republican female combatants and conflict transition, this research represents an important intervention into the field of women and conflict transition. The thesis calls for a shift away from highly generalised approaches based upon universalistic categories in favour of a more nuanced approach which excavates post-war patriarchy in all its varied manifestations. Examining *all* of the ways in which *all* women organise for peace and equality yields a far stronger feminist analysis of patriarchy[1] and women's eclectic forms of resistance in post-war scenarios.

Women & Conflict Transition: Contextualising the Study

Feminist theorising of women's relationship to war has shifted considerably over the last twenty years with a distinct departure from highly-generalised universalisms towards a broader spectrum of vision which takes into account women's multiple war-time roles (Lorentzen & Turpin 1998; Moser & Clark 2001; Meintjes, Pillay & Turshen 2001; Jacobs,

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[1] I conceptualise gender as a structural power relation based on the socially constructed differences between masculinities and femininities. Gender is, 'more broadly, a way of categorising, ordering, and symbolising power, of hierarchically structuring relationships among different categories of people, and different human activities symbolically associated with masculinity or femininity' (Cohn 2013: 3). Patriarchy allows us to theorise and understand the power relations and hierarchies associated with gender. I draw on the work of Cynthia Enloe (2004; 2014) and define patriarchy as the structural and ideological system that perpetuates the privileging of masculinity while subordinating most women and femininity itself. As a social and relational construct, it is important to state that masculinity and femininity are both plural categories, and change across time, space and culture.

Jacobson & Marchbank 2000). Moreover, recent feminist interventions regarding female combatants adds to existing research which challenges essentialist visions of women's peacefulness (Alison 2004, 2009; MacKenzie 2012; Sharoni 2001; O'Keefe 2003, 2013; Sjoberg 2010). Despite this vast body of feminist scholarship, the field of women and conflict transition has yet to bear any discernible resemblance to such diversity, where women's role as 'peace-maker' retains something of an exalted status.

Within the field of women, war and peace, prevailing feminist approaches are criticised by El Bushra (2003) and Pankhurst (2003) for presenting a simplistic and over-generalised narrative of women as either victims or the proverbial peace-builder, while neglecting those women who occupy other roles, including that of armed fighter. Unquestionably, women's opposition to all forms of violence and war are legitimate forms of feminist activism. Furthermore, feminist strategies of women's institutional participation as peace-maker or of women working across polarised communities as legitimate forms of feminist organising, is also not in doubt. These approaches and narratives become deeply problematic however when they gain a hegemonic grip within feminist explorations of conflict transition. As a consequence, vast fissures among women are largely overlooked within the dominant discourse of a universal sisterhood, and therefore fail to give adequate attention to the ways in which differentially positioned women respond in times of conflict transition. In other words, the key issue at stake here is the displacement of women's differential narratives and experiences in favour of a one-size-fit all approach. Despite the calls for feminist vigilance regarding the difference between women, gendered tropes of 'women's propensity for peace' appear to be the dominant axis of feminist inquiry in the field of conflict transition. So hegemonic are the tenacious links between women and non-violence, that 'scholars of female combatants are subject to criticism, if not censure'

(Pankhurst 2003: 158). The fundamental flaw of such approaches is that we miss the ways in which combatant women experience conflict transition.

This study contends that the primary line of feminist inquiry over-relies on drawing from a similar pool of perspectives, producing a limited and largely stagnant feminist dialogue or what Annick Wibben (2011) deems an 'impoverished feminism'. According to Meredith Turshen, 'women's expectations in the aftermath differ according to their experiences and engagement in conflict' (2001: 80), alerting us to the pitfalls of generic, universal prescriptions of what women's post-war needs and interests entail. Departing from highly generalised accounts, this research seeks to explore how former republican combatants organise for peace and equality. It attempts to demonstrate that women's differential positioning invariably means that women experience, respond and resist post-war patriarchy, among other forms of oppression, according to their unique standpoints and positioning's. It therefore eschews broad, generalised accounts and determines the ways in which republican female combatants politically organise in the aftermath of armed conflict. A significant point of departure resides in the use of a plural standpoint theory, which moves away from highly-generalised, universal accounts. Standpoint theory allows us to generate a particular truth such as that of the perspectives of republican women without falling into the essentialist cul-de-sac of claiming that these are representations of *all* women in the North of Ireland.

In addition to the wide-spread exaltation of women's peacefulness, many diverse strands of radical, socialist and liberal feminism are now converging around the notion of women's institutional inclusion as the optimum strategy for the pursuit of a feminist peace and women's equality. Focusing solely on the ways in which top-down institutions can *allow* women to pursue peace within its structures is deeply problematic, as it neglects the other more participatory and grassroots forms of organising. Prevailing feminist approaches ensure that the overwhelming preference for 'getting a seat at the negotiating table' comes at the

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expense of other forms of women's peace-building. The placing of feminist energy in institutional structures at the expense of women's other forms of post-war activism firmly situates the primacy of power in the former, providing limited understandings of the ways in which *all* women organise for peace and equality using power from below.

In addition, this research also seeks to add significant data to the question of gender and nationalism in the post-war period. Feminist critics of nationalism as a patriarchal structure often cite the post-war regression, as robust evidence of the pitfalls for women's participation within such movements (Enloe 2014; McClintock 1993). Women pursuing a feminist agenda alongside their nationalist struggle are consistently told by their male counter-parts to side-line their gender concerns for the more pressing issues of state formation. In other words, the advice to nationalist women from their male comrades when it comes to women's equality is 'not now, later' (Enloe 2014: 120). By exploring the post-war experiences of republican women, this research is ideally situated to ascertain if combatant women heed the advice of their male comrades or if they resist such calls through their eclectic forms of post-war activism in pursuit of their political objectives. Certainly as the Provisional republican movement shifts away from previously radical positioning to a more institutional, mainstream standpoint, the conflict transition stories and experiences of republican women yield significant insights into the ways women respond to such seismic moments of transition.

Despite the acknowledgment of combatant women, through both feminist scholarship and SCR 1325[2], the notion of 'womenandpeace'[3] prevails (El-Bushra 2007). According to

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[2] Adopted in October 2000, SCR 1325 reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. Resolution 1325 urges all actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in all United Nations peace and security efforts. Full text of the resolution available at http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/

Cynthia Enloe, feminists 'should be curious about all sorts of women's resistance' (2014: 12). Unfortunately, and as this thesis argues, the field of women and conflict transition suffers from a lack of that curiosity, to the extent that a partial line of vision is being produced (For example see Arostegui 2013; Hoewer 2013: 461; Hunt & Posa 2001: 39; Porter 2003). As a consequence, we are largely failing to excavate the field of women and conflict transition in a holistic way, thereby yielding limited forms of analysis. By doing so, we are missing the ways female combatants organise for peace and equality in the aftermath of armed conflict. If we are to explore the conflict transition experiences and contributions of *all* women in a meaningful manner, then 'it is necessary to take into account the multiple visions of differently situated women' (Wibben 2011: 14). The relative dearth of attention to female combatants' voices renders current approaches towards peace and post-conflict inadequate (MacKenzie 2012: 3). As the tide of optimism regarding SCR 1325 continues to recede, and in light of the overwhelming consensus regarding the failure of the Good Friday Agreement[4] (hereafter the GFA) to deliver meaningful change for women, this research arrives at an opportune moment to explore the alternative voices and experiences of republican combatant women. By doing so, we not only correct the deficit of female combatant voices, but the study of their unique conflict transition visions and political organising can add significant new data to the existing field of research.

In sum, investigating patriarchy requires us to pay attention to the multiple workings of masculinities and femininities. To do so, we need to explore the actual lives of complicatedly diverse women (Enloe 2014: 5). Championing only those women who refuse identity politics and who are located in what Tickner calls 'women's spheres' risks excluding the perspectives of other politically concerned women from conflict transition studies (Byrne

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[3] Judy El-Bushra coined this phrase to underscore the perpetual linkages between women and non-violence.
[4] Also known as the Belfast Agreement. Signed in 1998, it paved the way for power-sharing in the North of Ireland and is cited as a major milestone in drawing the armed conflict to an end.

2014). While feminist interventions in the field of conflict transition over the last twenty years has produced a vast amount of important research, the marginalisation of combatant women, among others, ensures that its sizable quantity is fundamentally undermined by its theoretical thinness owing to its lack of diversity. This research seeks to redress this oversight and shortfall.

Why Republican Women?: The Purpose, Significance & Limitations of the Study

This is a qualitative research project based on forty semi-structured interviews carried out by the author in 2012 and 2013, mainly in the North of Ireland[5]. Ideological splits (most of which are often marred by bitter divisions culminating in violent feuds) are a trademark characteristic of Irish Republicanism, so my use of such a generalised term like 'republican women' requires precise clarification. Research participants all self-identified as members or activists within the Provisional IRA and Sinn Féin[6], generally referred to as the Republican Movement. While there have been many republican groupings throughout the recent armed conflict, the group known as the Provisional IRA (PIRA), became the main militant republican protagonist in terms of its size, capabilities and support. While Sinn Féin initially played a subordinate role alongside armed struggle, electoral successes by the party in 1981 resulted in a change of strategy, leading to a much stronger emphasis and focus on electoral politics in co-existence with armed actions.

My choice to denote the research participants not as combatants but as republican women stems mainly from the fact that not all were members of the IRA. Overall, thirty-one

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[5] Given that the epicentres of armed conflict existed mostly in the contested Six Counties of the North of Ireland, it is unsurprising that most of the interviews were conducted there. That said, a small number of interviews did occur in the South of Ireland.

[6] The term used by many (in local communities, mainstream commentary, some scholarship, media) to denote the Provisionals is "Provos" (or also colloquially as the Provies). Despite the passage of over 45 years since the bitter split between Official and Provisional wings of republicanism, the term Provo has endured and remains in widespread use today.

of the forty interviewees openly identified as former members of the IRA, three described themselves as 'republican activists', while the remaining six were members of Sinn Féin only. Furthermore, as this research centres on the transition experiences of Provisional republican women, I chose to limit participants solely to members of that movement for a simple reason; the republican movement's departure from previous 'revolutionary' armed actions to its current position as a largely constitutional political party, represents a movement which has travelled the full circle from violence to non-violence. Given this, it is important to state that there are many other republican women who are not members of the mainstream Provisional republican movement. Many of these women locate their activism in one of the many other Irish republican organisations (some militant, others non-militant) termed as dissenters or dissidents by their political opponents. The findings within this research therefore can only be discussed in the context of those women still within the Provisional republican movement. The data does not speak to those women located in other spheres of republican struggle.

Given the context of this study, a comparative study of loyalist women could also have significantly augmented the findings. There were a number of reasons why I chose not to undertake this approach. First, loyalist women are often cited with playing a 'less central role' within their respective non-state militaries (Alison 2009; Potter 2014). Unlike female combatants in state forces and loyalist/unionist paramilitaries, republican women are widely acknowledged for playing a relatively central and prominent military role within the IRA (Alison 2009; O'Keefe 2003, 2013; Ward 2004). Second, like many other non-state liberation movements around the world, republican women carved out political spaces within the republican movement to develop a broad social and political agenda that reached far beyond the national question, including gender equality, LGBT rights, ethnic and racial minorities and reaching out to other struggles in places such as Palestine and South Africa (Maillot

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2005). In contrast, 'feminism would find a cold house in loyalism' (Potter 2014: 10) where it was deemed a 'dirty word' (Ward 2006). As loyalist forces were concerned with defending and preserving the state (and status quo), it therefore limited the transformative political potential for loyalist women, creating difficulties in a comparative context. Finally, despite my relatively small connections to people in working-class loyalist communities, issues of successfully accessing loyalist women for interview would undoubtedly have been problematic[7]. In other words, it is highly unlikely that I would have come close to matching the number of republican interviewees with loyalist interviews[8].

In the original research design, my research supervisors and I explored the possibilities of conducting a comparative study of combatant women in other liberations struggles. Given her widespread contacts with South Africa, my secondary supervisor, Professor Honor Fagan initiated a process of exploration with academics and NGO's in South Africa. However, the task of accessing interviewees would have required relocation to South Africa for a minimum of one year. Given the time-line of the thesis, and a vast change in my own personal circumstances[9], it was agreed that the idea of a comparative approach would unfortunately not happen. This, possibly more than any other factor, limits the findings of the thesis. Comparative approaches broaden our understandings of the political and social worlds and so, a comparative element for this study would have significantly enhanced the strength of the research findings.

Among the many mainstream interrogations of the Troubles in the North of Ireland, there exists a significant amount of research on both republican, loyalist and state

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[7] In contrast, my family connection to the republican stronghold of West Belfast afforded me with relatively high levels of access to republican women. These issues, and more, are detailed in Chapter Two.

[8] Miranda Allison (2009) encountered these very same issues during her research for her book, *Women & Political Violence,* where access to loyalist women proved arduous when compared to her access to republican women.

[9] At the time of research design, my wife was four weeks pregnant with our first daughter. We discussed the possibilities of relocation but given my wife's own work commitments here in Ireland and of course the impending arrival of our daughter, the relocation to South Africa was simply not feasible.

combatants. Topics include exploring their insights as to why the conflict ended (Tonge, Shirlow & McAuley 2011), the reintegration and post-conflict experiences of former paramilitary prisoners, particularly in their grassroots work involving conflict transformation (McAuley, Tonge & Shirlow 2011; McEvoy & Shirlow 2008, 2009) and prison experiences (Coogan 2002; McKeown 2001). While much of this research relates primarily to male combatants, women's role as armed protagonists has begun to receive an increasing amount of attention. Welcome interventions from Fairweather et al (1984) and Margaret Ward (1984) began to shed light on the various ways in which women's lives were politicised by the armed conflict. In particular, they documented the responses of nationalist and republican women to the actions of the state. While these texts initially stood in relative isolation, the 1990's witnessed a burgeoning literature examining the role of republican women who despite some initial resistance from male members, 'became a vital part of the IRA' (Ward 2004: 191), taking on a variety of important positions within the military struggle including 'active service such as carrying out killings and bombings' (McDowell 2008: 339).

Further studies of both republican and loyalist female combatants challenged the dominant perception regarding women's peacefulness (Alison 2004, 2009), explored the blurring of traditional private/public boundaries through women's street protest and activism (Aretxaga 1997; Ashe 2006; O'Keefe 2003), their roles as wives and/or partners of male prisoners (Shirlow & Dowler 2010), feminist organising within non-state nationalist movements (O'Keefe 2003, 2013), women's imprisonment (Corcoran 2006: McCafferty 1981; Murray 1998) and in particular their development of a broader political consciousness, including the development of republican feminism (O'Keefe 2013). While the war-time experiences of female combatants in the North of Ireland are well documented in these important and insightful studies, their post-war perspectives however suffer from a dearth of attention. Given the highly mobilised nature of republican women's activism across a myriad

of political tiers, their political struggles since the ceasefires of 1994 represent a principal and relatively unexplored avenue of feminist inquiry.

Understandings of combatant women's post-war organising in the North of Ireland remain vastly under-researched. This research represents the first major, in-depth study of republican women and conflict transition. The important contributions yielded through this study not only enhances our knowledge of female combatants in post-war scenarios, but it also speaks to the wider debates concerned with women and conflict transition. Given the widely-lauded SCR 1325, the research data adds important contributions regarding the spaces which combatant women identify as the most politically enabling. In doing so, this thesis can enhance feminist understandings of women's ways of politically organising beyond the rigid confines of what is deemed normative roles and behaviour.

The story under exploration in this research is the transition of republican women within a movement previously dedicated to armed political violence to a largely mainstream institutional political party. Given this seismic departure, it is important to uncover the ways in which the shift away from armed struggle shaped women's levels of political mobility and activism. How do republican women organise for peace? How do they define women's equality? What spaces do they identify as being the most productive for that activism? How do they define peace and women's equality? Are they receiving the post-war recognition for their war-time contributions? How has the institutionalisation of the Provisional republican struggle shaped their political mobility and agency? I would argue that the distinctive contribution of this research resides in the fact that republican women, unlike 'women of peace', presented a clear military and political challenge to the state and the status quo. Yet despite such a unique war-time role, their transition experiences remain wholly unexplored. In sum, I am not suggesting that the role of republican female combatants is a lesser or greater role than those of others, but it is their unique standpoint coupled with a relative

dearth of academic attention which bestows its important contribution. Given the fact that female combatants have been largely absent from the ongoing feminist conversation in the North of Ireland's conflict transition period, the data contained here adds significant new insights to the field of women and conflict transition.

Terms and Definitions

Before proceeding, it must be noted that the discourse utilised within armed conflict and conflict transformation is often as contested and politically charged as the armed actions themselves, and the North of Ireland is certainly no exception. Given this, a note or two on terminology will provide the reader with a basic introduction and understanding of the meanings behind the terminology utilised and some of the reasons for their use. Peace processes are affected by the kind of violence which has taken place; and to understand peace, we therefore need first to know more about violence (Brewer 2010: 16). The contested interpretations of the violence which occurred in the North of Ireland certainly reflect the divergent views on the peace process, which many unionists rejected pejoratively as the 'appeasement process' (Vance 2008). While republicans and some nationalists would describe the recent political violence as a 'war', 'a conflict', an 'anti-imperial struggle', or a 'fight for national self-determination', many unionists and loyalists (and others including academics, political parties, journalists, etc.) characterise the conflict as 'terrorism', or 'ethnic cleansing', while those within the upper echelons of the British and Unionist establishment would designate the problem as an aggravated crime problem or at best, a case of extremist terrorism which many countries similarly encounter and endure. Within mainstream narratives and media circles, what was broadly settled upon was the incredibly ambiguous and euphemistic term 'the Troubles'.

In light of the politically-loaded discourse surrounding the Troubles, it is important to clarify my choice of terminology. As the reader will undoubtedly have noticed even at this formative stage of the thesis, I use terms such as the 'North of Ireland' (or the North) as opposed to the official title of Northern Ireland, the South instead of the 'Republic of Ireland[10], as well as phrases such as 'armed struggle', 'political violence'. This is not, nor should it be taken, as an endorsement of the political philosophy of the republican movement. It should certainly not be interpreted as a tacit approval or support for either the IRA or Sinn Féin. My use of this discourse stems from a feminist commitment to research participants that I would use *their* stories in order to explore *their* transitionary experiences[11]. In order to do so and as a mark of respect to them, I use their republican terminology and phrases throughout the entire dissertation.

While Miall et. al. define conflict as 'the pursuit of incompatible goals by different groups' (2005: 27), *armed* conflict denotes those conflicts in which parties resort to the use of force in pursuit of their objectives. Azar (1990) articulates the far more pertinent notion of a 'protracted social conflict', that being the violent and prolonged struggle by differing communal groups for basic needs such as security, equal access to political, social institutions and economic participation and recognition. Implicit within such terminology is the idea that the sources of conflict reside within a disputed state as opposed to outright 'conventional war' between separate states. Similarly, Lederach (1997) concurs that the nature of protracted intrastate conflicts requires a new set of concepts and approaches that go beyond the traditional statist method and therefore, many contemporary armed conflicts are of a

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[10] It is important to state that I have no ideological difficulties in recognising either the six-county state of Northern Ireland or the twenty-six county state of the Republic of Ireland.

[11] A significant number of interviewees were concerned about this issue and did enquire if I would use their republican terminology in the writing of the thesis. It would have been disingenuous and undoubtedly hurtful to interviewees had I used terms such as 'terrorists' or 'terrorism'. That said, I am also mindful that those who suffered as a result of IRA actions might also be offended by my use of republican terminology. This research however, is not a moral judgement on the use of violence during the Troubles. In order to tell the story of republican women, I decided that I would do so using their republican discourse and terminology.

protracted nature, usually comprised of an ethno-national dynamic which tend to revolve around community and group rights, specifically around control of the state, state formation or the redefinition of a territory (1997: 8). Protracted ethno-national conflicts are usually characterised by deep-rooted, intense animosity, fear, and severe stereotyping (Lederach 1997: 23). Given the bitter divisions and protracted nature of the recent conflict in the North of Ireland, certainly the definition of a protracted conflict as set out by Azar and Lederach, are quite pertinent and applicable to the North of Ireland.

The decline of inter-state wars or armed conflicts in recent decades creates the need to understand conflict and efforts to resolve it in new ways; processes and theories of conflict resolution 'has only begun receiving serious attention since the 1990's'. (Wallensteen 2007: 4). At its most basic level, conflict resolution attempts to address the fundamental incompatibilities that affect the conflicting parties (Wallensteen 2007: 5). Conflict resolution implies that the deeply embedded causes of conflict are fundamentally addressed and removes hostility from the behaviour and attitudes of the differing parties. In other words, the root causes of the conflict have been permanently resolved and removed. Conflict transformation however goes beyond simply the warring parties and implies a deep transformation of the institutions and discourses that reproduce violence of whatever form, and is clearly linked to Galtung's idea of structural and cultural violence (Gawerc 2006: 29). Given that this research utilises a feminist framework which challenges normative assumptions around terms such as post-conflict or conflict resolution, I have chosen to use conflict transformation as opposed to conflict resolution as it reflects more accurately the many types of conflicts and 'violences' which exist in the so-called post-conflict period. The notion of a process of conflict resolution implies a very hegemonic and powerful discourse

which equates the removal of conventional violence as enough to satiate the conditions for 'peace'[12].

Peace processes are typically characterised by two modes of political action, that being peace-making and peace-building. Again while both are highly contested terms, this thesis understands peace-making as the negotiated processes usually at a formal, party political and governmental level which results in an agreed peace accord while peace-building refers to the grassroots activism which begins long before the declaration of ending of armed actions and usually continues long after peace accords have been signed. Theoretically, peace-making is typically concerned with creating a 'negative peace'[13] and ending conventional violence. Such top-down approaches assume that if peace is secured between the warring parties at a macro, party political level, then peace will automatically trickle down to a grassroots level. Formal peace processes are often criticised for focusing too narrowly on governance reform and are largely based on a 'naïve assumption that once a settlement is reached then violence irrevocably and swiftly disappears' (Brewer 2010: 32). Conversely, peace-making is a longer process of peace-building, thus altering adversarial relations (Oberschall 2007: 28), encompasses a focus on more social and economic issues at ground-level, and the informal contacts made across the ethno-national/religious divide. Therefore, peace-building is best understood as a process for tackling the oppression of structural and cultural violence as well as playing a vital nurturing role in which the embryonic negative peace made at a formal level can take hold at a grassroots level.

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[12] In the instances where I do use the term 'conflict resolution', it is to denote the top-down, exclusionary approaches which invariably deliver a very minimal form of 'negative' peace.

[13] In very basic terms, negative peace refers to the absence of violence. When, for example, a ceasefire is enacted, a negative peace will ensue. It is negative because something undesirable stopped happening. Positive peace is filled with positive content such as restoration of relationships, the creation of social systems that serve the needs of the whole population and the constructive resolution of conflict.

Organisation of the Chapters

Chapter Two explores the perennial quagmire of men doing feminist research. Given that men can never experience the political and social worlds as women do, can they truly participate as feminists? Can men claim to 'give voice' to women's lives and perspectives? This chapter explains the methodology used in this research. It details feminist standpoint theory, which I argue, largely overcomes the perennial issues of 'lived experiences' as a basis for feminist research and allows researchers (such as male feminists) to theorise from the standpoint of others (the lives of women). After exploring feminist epistemologies, it then goes on to explore the research design, the justification for the use of semi-structured interviews and the field research process itself. I then outline some of the ethical considerations and reflect upon issues of power and subjectivity in the analysis of research data, particularly in light of the ongoing Boston College Tapes controversy[14].

Chapter Three expands upon the issues identified in the first section of this chapter. In particular, it comprehensively explores many of the theoretical approaches and key debates in the field of women and conflict transition. It firstly draws attention to the perils of generalising around 'women of peace' arguing that such an approach is highly limited and ultimately serves to marginalise other voices, such as those of combatants. It argues that in order to move away from such generalisations and limited visions, a plural standpoint approach is required to illuminate the differences *between* women. The chapter then develops a discussion on the various strategies used for women's peace-building in conflict transition. Despite the many forms of women's activism in the pursuit of equality and a genuine peace,

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[14] The Boston College Oral History Archive on the Troubles initiated a research project in 2001 to collect recorded testimonies of former paramilitary members, both loyalist and republican. Interviewees were guaranteed that their recordings would only be released after their deaths. A series of subpoenas issued to Boston College by the US Department of Justice on behalf of the United Kingdom in May and August of 2011, requested the tapes and transcripts for use in criminal investigations. In 2013 a court in the United States ordered that the tapes be handed over to PSNI investigating officers.

such as formal politics, grassroots organising, and cross-community transversal actions, the chapter suggests that the institutional inclusion of women represents the primary path of many contemporary feminist explorations. The chapter finds that the increasing focus on top-down structures overlooks the ways in which women use power from below in order to pursue peace and equality. The final section deals with important feminist interventions with regards to standard definitions of peace and security. Formative feminist interjections are recognised in the pioneering work of Cynthia Enloe (1990, 2000) and Ann J. Tickner (1992), paving the way for a large body of contemporary scholarship interrogating androcentric visions of peace and security. It suggests that feminist theories of peace and security play a vital role in re-defining the prevailing androcentric visions of peace and security.

Chapter Four provides the reader with a comprehensive overview of the Irish peace process. The chapter first examines the tentative moves to end armed conflict in 1988, up to the first round of political party negotiations in 1996. These formative steps towards a ceasefire were clandestine and exclusively male, which becomes something of an enduring characteristic of the peace process. It then moves on to examine the ways in which various groups of women organised in order to broaden the narrow, state-centric agenda to encompass issues which directly impacted upon women. The following section deals with the formal GFA negotiations. Despite the presence of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (hereafter the NIWC), the 'inclusive talks' were a largely male affair, primarily focused on androcentric concerns regarding military weaponry, political institutional design and state security. While the agreement did make reference to women's equality and their right to political participation, the final section finds that such affirmations were largely aspirational and rhetorical. Low levels of women's formal participation, high-levels of violence against women, the absence of reproductive rights and their concentration in low-paid, precarious

labour reveals that little has changed for women in the North of Ireland, despite the official declarations of a society at peace.

Chapter Five embarks on the analysis of the primary data generated in interviews with republican women. It critically explores the ways in which republican women themselves conceptualise their contributions and sacrifices within the armed struggle. It is a narrative which runs counter to the male-dominated post-war memorial landscape. Drawing heavily from feminist International Relations (IR) theory, it not only asks 'where are the combatant women' (McEvoy 2009) in post-war memorialisation but argues that combatant women's experiences, narratives and meanings challenge existing frameworks and discourses, and therefore revolutionises the ways we define combatant and war-time sacrifice. The chapter contends that we need to move beyond simply 'adding women' to the existing picture, and instead argues that their unique standpoints can subvert established discourses and definitions in order to challenge the forces of patriarchy.

The chapter uncovers a theoretically rich narrative of multiple military roles which challenges the limited, masculine definition of 'a person with a weapon'. It draws out how interviewees reject the hierarchical dichotomy of fighter/supporter in favour of recognising the importance of *all* military contributions to republican armed struggle. The chapter continues with a consideration of the gendered ways in which sacrifice is conceptualised. Interviewees displace the traditional notion of sacrifice in favour of a definition which acknowledges the different and highly gendered sacrifices women endure in order to participate in armed struggle. The final section examines the innovative forms of commemoration by republican women in recent times. It suggests that these alternative forms of commemoration accurately capture their eclectic war-time contributions at all levels of militant republicanism, bringing previously overlooked militant women onto the memorial landscape.

Chapter Six explores the ways in which republican women conceptualise peace and equality. While prevailing feminist approaches tend to examine peace and equality in gendered terms only, the data presented in this chapter illustrates the benefits yielded when we pay attention to the cultural relativism of women's perspectives. By taking into account the historical, cultural and geographical processes and structures we uncover the ways in which differentially positioned women envision peace and equality. The narratives in this chapter is a three-fold struggle against British imperialism, the violence of neoliberal austerity and capitalism, and the worsening instances of patriarchal oppression, most notably through increased gender-based violence and the lack of women's full reproductive rights. Of particular note, not a single interviewee mentions women's participation within institutional frameworks as a means of visualising peace or women's equality. While firmly challenging the masculine misnomer of 'post-conflict' in the North of Ireland, the chapter also highlights the importance of remaining attuned to the diverse ways women experience multiple forms of oppression in the aftermath of armed conflict.

Chapter Seven examines how the institutionalisation of the Provisional republican movement has shaped women's political agency within Sinn Féin. This chapter finds that women's previously radical activism is increasingly diluted as the movement shifts towards an institutional party position. In particular, the primacy of peace negotiations and the switch to solely electoral politics inflicts major losses on the political struggles of republican women, where they are confined to largely 'traditional' roles during negotiations. In particular, the ambiguous demise of the Sinn Féin Women's Department is emblematic of the pitfalls for the institutionalisation of political struggles. While the Women's Department was a prolific feminist outlet during the years of the Troubles, its demise and rebranding as the Equality Department during conflict transition highlights the limitations for women's organising solely within institutional political parties.

Chapter Eight explores the eclectic post-war political activism of republican women, across both formal and informal spheres of politics. The chapter first explores the motivations behind interviewees' current activism, indicating that war-time politicisation and mobilisation can be successfully carried over into post-war scenarios. The chapter then moves on to explore the spaces where republican women organise for peace and equality today. The chapter finds that the overwhelming majority are full-time activists in both formal and informal politics. While their institutional politics through Sinn Féin is deemed important and at times effective, the terrain of institutional politics is also cited as highly limited. In particular, the chapter finds that many interviewees see formal politics as elitist, sexist, ineffective, and in some cases, as an actual structure of inequality. Furthermore, the notion of ceding principles and toeing party lines around issues such as reproductive rights is consistently cited as a source of disappointment. Given these limitations, it is unsurprising that interviewees are also highly active in community politics and grassroots organising, where many stated a clear preference for its non-hierarchical structures and effectiveness in delivering change for working-class, republican communities. In sum, the overall argument is that while institutional politics is an important terrain of women's political struggle, it is nevertheless clearly insufficient to deliver the type of change envisioned by republican women. Therefore we need to remain mindful of women's activism in its entirety, not just within formal political settings.

Chapter Two -'Does the Body Rule the Mind or the Mind Rule the Body?[15]': The Perpetual Dilemmas of Men Doing Feminist Research

Aoife: "No hold on a minute here before we get started, let me just be clear; from this consent form it states that your research project is feminist research? So are you calling yourself a feminist?"

Researcher: "Yes I am."

Aoife: "No, no, I'm sorry, I'm not having that. I'm really sorry, it is nothing personal but men cannot be feminists. As a woman and as a feminist, I cannot accept men as feminists, it's just not possible. Sure it's a complete contradiction."

Introduction

The dialogue above is an extract from a conversation between research participant 'Aoife' and I, and occurred as we both read through the consent form prior to commencing the actual interview. As I respectfully argued to the contrary, 'Aoife' was unequivocal in stating that men can never experience the social and political worlds in the same way women do. Men's lack of 'women's experiences' therefore renders men as ill-equipped to conduct feminist research on behalf of women. It was an interesting, if not unnerving start to an interview. It certainly thrust me into reflecting on a topic that I had largely neglected up to that point during fieldwork. Can I as a man claim to give voice to women in conflict transition? Given my male subjectivity, is it possible for me to generate feminist knowledge? Moreover, how do these subjectivities shape and distort my research process and findings? Much of the

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[15] Morrissey & Marr. 1984. From *'Still Ill'* by The Smiths.

reflection contained within this chapter links directly into the perennial question; can men be feminists?

Specific paradigmatic approaches to research profoundly shape how we view the political and social world, and so specific paradigms formulate our methodologies and research principles. It informs how we view and interpret the world and plays a significant role in how we construct meaning and claims to valid knowledge. This study utilises a feminist standpoint method as it provides the epistemological solution for the perpetual dilemma of men doing feminist research. Standpoint theories start from women's lives in order to generate knowledge, bridging the epistemological gap between experience and research. The chapter begins with a brief exploration of feminist epistemology, before moving on to tackle the many perplexities of men doing feminist research and my own perspectives on this important matter. It then moves on to detail the actual methods used and the research process itself. In particular I discuss issues of power, hierarchies, knowledge claims and my own numerous subjectivities which undoubtedly shaped the entire research process and in turn, the research findings.

Feminist Epistemologies

In contrast to mainstream approaches, feminist research attempts to deconstruct power hierarchies between the researcher and the researched, generating data in order to further women's emancipation, with a key focus on reflection and interpretation (Byrne and Lentin 2000:4). Methodology entails a framework or theory which explores various methods, their uses and abuses. It is fundamentally concerned with the process of how research is gathered and how knowledge is produced, with a critical examination and consciousness around issues of subjectivity and the relations between the researcher and the researched (Letherby 2003). Feminism is a critical perspective on social and political life that draws our attention to the

ways in which social, political, and economic norms, practices, and structures create injustices that are experienced differently or uniquely by certain groups of women (Ackerly and True 2010:1) . Unlike traditional methodologies, feminist research is not solely about explaining but it is also concerned with transforming in a critical and reflective way. In order to do so, it maintains a commitment to continually review and challenge notions of what are appropriate and reliable ways of knowing and understanding the world (Letherby 2003:25). At the heart of feminist enquiry is the adherence to a set of research principles and ethics which are mindful of hierarchies, power relations and authority within the research process (Hesse-Biber 2007; Stanley and Wise 1990). Insisting that knowledge production is a key site which has constructed and sustained women's oppression (DeVault 1999:30), feminist methodologies are premised on the basis that social truths and knowledge production in western society are unequal and hierarchical (Stanley and Wise 1990).

A key focus for feminist research is the emphasis on prioritising women's lived experiences. Given the absence of women historically throughout both natural and social science, making women's voices heard not only corrects this gender imbalance but is also used to critique and alter existing power structures and dominant forms of knowledge. While rejecting the idea of a singular truth, Harding (1991) advocates that starting research from women's lives provides 'less false' and 'less partial' accounts. Lather insists that critical social science must be premised upon the development of research approaches which empower those involved to change as well as understand the world (1991:3-4). Many feminists advocate the use of reciprocity within the field as it is long recognised as a way of creating conditions which generates rich data but more importantly the research process itself becomes an emancipatory and collaborative endeavour between the researcher and the researched. In these instances, research can help participants understand and thus change their situations (Harding 1991:57). The idea however, that feminism can simply allow 'women to

speak for themselves' (Maynard and Purvis 1994) is theoretically and practically problematic. If feminism is a political project which attempts to 'speak for women' (Hekman 1999: 24), it presents the problem of who exactly is qualified to 'speak' on behalf of women? Furthermore, and adding to the complexities, is it ever possible for men to speak on behalf of women?

'Are You Experienced?': The Benefits and Burdens of Men Under Patriarchy

The dominance of oppositionality between both genders ensures that 'male feminists are both a problem and a puzzle' (Digby 1998: 2). Men's lack of 'women's experiences' is often cited as a key obstacle to 'men doing feminism'. But given that many women are not feminists, some are even anti-feminist (Hopkins 1998: 42-43), it is pertinent to question how useful it is to attach such fundamental importance to actual experience as the premise for feminist theory, research and political action. Moreover, it is equally important to be critically aware that men and masculinity are plural concepts. The prevailing trend throughout much feminist theory is to engage in dualistic positioning; hierarchical binary succinctly summed by De Beauvoir (1972) as the 'One and the *Other*'. Such feminist thinking is premised on the idea that all women share at least some core believes and experiences as the basis for theorising from their lives. Differences between men and women's social and political realities also inform different modes of thinking (Gilligan 1993) and therefore men and women theorise and generate knowledge differently. Such a notion however resides in the belief that hierarchically opposing categories of masculine and feminine are enforced either through an essentialist or a socio-cultural disposition. While some scholars acknowledge the vast differences among men, in sum, feminist theory posits that 'some men are disempowered by virtue of class, race and ethnicity, sexuality, age and able-bodied-ness. But all men are privileged *vis-à-vis* women' (Kimmel 1998: 64).

My own ontological position is that all societies are patriarchal, a system which pervades and informs all aspects of our political and social worlds and therefore, I do not have any theoretical difficulty in accepting that all men possess diverse and multiple advantages over women. I do however, refute the idea that feminism is somehow concerned solely with women while neglecting men's stake in challenging patriarchy. While feminism is undoubtedly concerned with the liberation of women from the yoke of patriarchy, my own interpretation of feminism, like that of many others, concerns the tackling of both enforced masculinities *and* femininities as part of the prevailing gender order. While ending women's oppression is at the heart of feminist theory, research and activism, such an objective can only occur through the dismantling of patriarchy and the dominant gender order. Given the plurality of categories such as 'masculine' or 'male', I suggest that the goal of challenging patriarchy need not be limited to women only. Many men are undoubtedly constricted by patriarchy (obviously in very different ways to women) despite the multiple dividends they yield under such a system.

As a man claiming to be a feminist, I am critically aware that 'men must recognise their own roles in sexist privilege and oppression, and work for change, men have to face the extent to which fighting patriarchy means fighting themselves' (Kahane 1998: 213). Yet the benefits of sexism and patriarchy are never evenly distributed given intersecting identities, and so any sweeping generalisations that men cannot be feminists ignores the many ways in which men are also restricted by patriarchy. As a male, I undoubtedly benefit from patriarchy in many ways (employment, freedom from threats of various types of violence, wages, differing access and opportunities, to name but a few) but it is also important to state the ways in which I am also constricted by it. The imposition of the male gender identity can be painful and can act as a motivator in attracting men towards the feminist project (Bartky 1998).

Connell (1995) convincingly argues the impossible burdens of most men as they attempt to live up to the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, a constant set of expectations and norms regulating what is required to be a 'real man'. I suggest here that as a man, it is entirely credible that I too have a profound interest and stake in ending patriarchy but that my experiences are fundamentally different to women's due to inequalities of power and of course, lived experience. So while I accept that I as a man can never claim to possess an understanding of patriarchal oppression as experienced by women, I argue that it is plausible that men can make a significant contribution to feminist struggles. 'Men, like anyone else, are feminists if they believe and do what feminists believe and do. If one still wants to argue that a woman and a man could have the same beliefs. Actions, goals, and positions, but only the woman could be a feminist, then this is just arbitrary weighting given to gender and as such should be subjected to the scrutiny of gender criticism itself' (Hopkins 1998: 51). In other words, just as a white person can engage in anti-racist struggles without ever actually experiencing such bigotry, then so too men can align themselves to a *feminist* standpoint rather than the erroneous claim to a *woman's* standpoint.

In addition, women's differential social and political positioning invariably results in multiple experiences between women and therefore calls into question usefulness of 'experiences' as a fundamental premise for feminist research and political action[16]. Vast generalisations regarding how *all* men oppress *all* women ignore the multiple differences between women but equally as important, they also ignore the vast differences between men. We cannot explain a woman's individual oppression using the category of gender alone.

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[16] Of course such a position would be entirely rejected by radical feminists such as Adrienne Rich and Andrea Dworkin who strongly argue that the roots of patriarchy are located in the subjugation and control of women's sexuality, heterosexual relations, pornography and state regulation of women's bodies, such as reproductive rights. In sum, Men's domination in the 'public' world stems directly from their domination over women's bodies in the 'private world'. See Kate Millett's (1970) *Sexual Politics*; Adrienne Rich's (1994*) 'Compulsory Heterosexuality an Lesbian Experience'*; Catherine MacKinnon (1989) *'Sexuality, Pornography & Method: Pleasure Under Patriarchy.'*

While differentially situated women invariably experience oppression in diverse ways, nevertheless gender relations as a structural force remains. If this is the case, how useful then is the idea of a universal women's experience as the basis for feminism? Given that many women do not feel oppressed and the fact that some women are oppressed by other women, these important variances within women's experiences calls into question the idea of a universal core experience among all women. It therefore questions the notion that men's lack of 'women's experiences' precludes them from engaging with feminism.

Bridging the Gap of Experience and Theory: Feminist Standpoint

According to Harding, experience and 'what women say' alone are not reliable grounds for knowledge claims but are instead good places from where to begin theorising about women's lives (1991: 123). Having dealt with the issue of men's stake and motivations for their involvement within feminist theory and research, Sandra Harding's statement here, I suggest, paves the way for dealing with the question of men's lack of experience by providing an ideal epistemological theory. Advocating for the use of a feminist standpoint method, Harding attempts to bridge this gap between experience and theories of knowledge, a position which I have adopted for this research. Harding argues that experience can indicate the correct direction in which feminists should begin their research, but that feminist knowledge are theories which 'start out from, that look at the world from the perspective of, women's lives' (1991: 124). In other words, feminist theories are generated from women's lives as opposed to the notion that experience alone is sufficient to produce feminist visions. Joan Scott (1992) has criticised the idea of a core experience as it assumes an essential feminine nature among all women and therefore ignores the constructed nature of experience. In other words, feminist standpoint offers 'men the same resources for producing knowledge that they offer to women' (Harding 1998: 184). Nevertheless, it is important to state that women's lives and experiences are valuable sources that researchers can use to generate knowledge, facts and

theories. If experience is not the basis for undertaking feminist epistemology, then this surely leaves the feminist door ajar for men to engage in feminist research that can hold as much validity as that undertaken by a female feminist.

Feminist standpoint is rooted in Marxian theory regarding the epistemological privilege of the proletariat. Knowledge, according to Marx, is fundamentally rooted in the material day-to-day activities of human material production. Within the austere and distinct categories of the capitalist and proletariat, there is a profound separation between intellectual production and manual labour, resulting in a system whereby the dominant sect occupy positions of privilege, therefore engaging in knowledge production. Rather than advocating that the oppressed class have a differing perspective to the hegemonic discourse, Marx articulates that indeed they possess a social vision that is in fact more accurate. Standpoint differs from a perspective because it must be wrestled for through political struggle in order to go beyond merely describing the unjust social order (Harding 1991).

According to Hekman (1999), there are two central understandings to contemporary feminist standpoint; first, that knowledge is situated and perspectival and second, that there are multiple standpoints from which knowledge is produced. Linking directly to Marxist theories regarding how knowledge is constructed through material human activity, Hartstock (1983) articulated a belief that men and women's social and political realities are profoundly shaped and informed by their different activities and experiences. A sexual division of labour which structures social relations, therefore, produces differing social and political visions, one of the oppressor and one of the oppressed. Standpoint theory maintains that the dominant groups vision of reality is 'partial and perverse', 'ignorance' derived from their stake in maintaining the prevailing social order and status quo. It argues instead that the oppressed possess the 'truth' regarding the reality of social relations. In terms of epistemology, the

overarching principle of standpoint theory resides in the contention that the true vision of human relations resides with the oppressed, and so, is potentially emancipatory.

According to standpoint theory, the ruling group define 'reality' through dominant discourse, which sits quite closely to the work of Foucault (1980) who defined the ways in which hegemonic discourse defines knowledge while also articulating the ways in which subordinated truths and knowledge can be accessed and extracted. So while Hartstock claims that there is an oppressed 'truth' which can counter the partial and perverse visions of the dominant group, it is my position that Foucault's argument that all perspectives are partial and perverse is more pertinent. Early feminist standpoint suffered from the contradiction of being a 'situated knowledge' while also claiming a core, universal truth by virtue of one's gender, thus the perennial battle between the universal and the particular. In other words, if standpoint is 'situated knowledge', then all perspectives and narratives emanate from subjective positions which are profoundly shaped by specific contexts of intersecting identities. So while Hartstock claims that 'women's lives make available a particular and privileged vantage point on male supremacy' (1983: 284), I refute the notion that all women share similar experiences of male supremacy due to fundamental differences between women due to differential social and political positioning.

Furthermore, and contrasting with Hartstock, I would argue that all knowledge and truths are situated and socially constructed and therefore are, to varying degrees, partial. This is why standpoint theory is essential to this research. The data in this research is not the truth as such, but is the truth according to republican women as they saw and experienced it. While this presents problems for the fundamentals of standpoint theory, if we however, recognise these differences, I suggest that we can use standpoint epistemology in order to generate a particular truth, such as that of the perspectives of republican women, without falling into the essentialist cul-de-sac of claiming that these are representations of *all* women in the North of

Ireland. To be sure, I am not claiming that male feminists can ever experience women's lives, but they can use the theory generated from women's lives in order to take a feminist epistemological standpoint. As such, standpoint 'offers opportunities for men to develop distinctive subject positions as socially situated men who have learned to think through feminist theories' (Harding 1998: 186).

In addition, Harding (1998) and Eisenstein (1993) quite convincingly argue that while Marx and Engels were not proletarians, they nevertheless produced hugely important power analyses of how the class system works using standpoint theory. In other words they had the ability to produce knowledge from the perspective of the proletariat without actually having experienced their particular social and political realities. This was a remarkable precedent, which laid the groundwork for many future standpoint developments. In particular Harding (1998) cites the vast swathes of research produced by whites on racist systems and so concurs that men can therefore also provide gender analyses emanating from women's lives without possessing an actual lived experience of women's oppression. This is the key benefit for men undertaking feminist research from the perspective of women's lives. The work of Robert Keohane (1989) on feminist IR is an outstanding example of men undertaking feminist research, as is Ilja A. Luciak's (1999) research on female combatants in Latin America. Michael Potter's (2014) exploration of loyalist women in the North of Ireland (which also uses feminist standpoint) is another primary example of research on women conducted by men.

What Difference Does 'Difference' Make?: Multiple Standpoints

Formative standpoint theorists such as Nancy Hartstock and Dorothy Smith argue for two important yet ultimately contradictory positions; first, that all knowledge is situated (and therefore socially constructed in multiple ways) and second, that there is epistemic privilege

among the oppressed allowing a true vision of social relations. The paradigm shift within feminist theory away from essentialist positioning towards an exploration of the differences between women, challenges the claims of a homogenous group (women) who possess an accurate vision of reality by virtue of their gender identity alone. The notion that women's lives can be explored through the singular prism of gender only is now firmly appraised as an incredibly limited and partial lens of enquiry. Yet feminist standpoint 'continues to develop and has become an influential part of a more general paradigmatic shift…..away from universalistic theoretical frameworks' (Stoetzlet & Yuval-Davis 2002: 317).

In order to keep apace of the vast paradigm shifts within feminist theory, it is important to note that feminist standpoint theory fell victim to accusations of essentialism by claiming universal narratives. The focus in contemporary times on differences between women has led to a reformulation of standpoint to a more pertinent pluralised '*standpoints'* or what Tickner terms 'modified standpoints' (1997: 622). In other words, it is self-evident that if women possess multiple experiences they will therefore produces multiple standpoints, presenting the obvious question; which standpoint is the truer vision of society? Hekman (1999) posits that if we accept the vast and multiple differences between women, then we are in fact in danger of abandoning the very idea of feminism itself as a political movement. Yet such a predicament, I suggest, can be avoided. Rather than examining gender as a 'competitor' alongside other intersecting structures of power, we must recognise the fluid ways in which patriarchy intertwines with other structural forces to produce differentially positioned women. Such a position abandons the highly simplistic dualism of singular dominant and oppressed narratives and instead views both categories as profoundly plural and heterogeneous. If our ontological view is one which views the world as patriarchal, then it is of course not only possible but correct to position gender as the primary structure of enquiry while also being cognisant of how gender intersects with multiple identities.

Sandra Harding, possibly more than any other theorist, attempted to move standpoint theory away from the essentialist pitfalls and argued that standpoint provides feminists with the necessary solution to the perpetual battle between essentialist and relativist positions. Harding insists that there are multiple standpoints given the vast differences among women but also challenges the post-modern relativism by insisting that women's lives provides an objective location for research. Harding argues for a 'strong objectivity' which acknowledges the contextual positioning of all knowledge yet argues that certain 'social situations tend to generate the most objective claims' (Harding 1991: 142). Harding is severely critiqued by some for assuming that the experience or existence of oppression alone guarantees a more objective account (Hekman 1999: 45). Moreover, I would argue that a fundamental building block of feminist theory is the rejection (or at the very least a deep suspicion) of claims regarding objectivity and truth, and so Harding's demands for a 'strong objectivity' appears to revert towards a more positivist stance. In this, I would tend to agree with the position of Hekman, that feminist standpoint is theoretically and epistemologically more sound when it acts as a powerful counter-discourse to the prevailing hegemonic order as opposed to claiming it as privileged and stronger in objectivity (1999: 45).

While the existence of multiple standpoints stood accused of undermining the very premise upon which standpoint is based, the fact remains that overwhelmingly women remain subordinate to men. Feminist standpoint does not abandon the category of gender or the idea of theorising from women's lives and therefore remains a credible and useful method (particularly for men engaging in feminist research) for generating feminist epistemology. It retains gender as a primary category of exploration while also recognising the vast differences between women who are differentially situated. In his research on loyalist women in the North of Ireland, Michael Potter identifies feminist standpoint as an ideal corrective measure to the prevailing masculine accounts within research accounts on loyalist

communities while also providing an important critique of the prevailing social order with a view to using such critiques as a starting point for political struggle (2014: 13). Many IR feminists also cite standpoint as the ideal method of challenging masculine domination while remaining attuned to the differences between women (Keohane 1989; Tickner 1997). Given my ontological position that the world is undoubtedly patriarchal, it is therefore perfectly legitimate to claim that all women (and many men) suffer under such a system, thus bestowing the theoretical importance of retaining gender as a category of analysis.

Using A Qualitative Approach

This study of republican women in conflict transition utilised forty semi-structured, in-depth interviews in order to examine their unique perspectives and their current political activity. Qualitative research, particularly non-hierarchical interviewing, is often cited as a primary feminist methodology as it 'gives voice' to women's experiences (Oakley 1981; Stanely & Wise 1993). In addition, secondary materials including political literature, party policy documents and various websites were also valuable sources throughout the research. Using interviewee narratives and placing emphasis on personal experiences within transitioning societies illuminates the ways in which female combatants negotiate their post-war roles. In order to explore and elucidate women's lives, DeVault cites the use of personal testimony, particularly through ethnographies and qualitative interviews 'as extremely effective ways in making women visible' (1999:30). Silverman asserts that interviews 'provide access to the meanings people attribute to their experience and their social worlds' (2004:126), thus generating theories and knowledge from women's standpoint. Qualitative researchers consistently stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln 1998:8). In order to undertake a thorough exploration of republican women's transitioning away from armed conflict, I chose in-depth interviews as the strongest method

for two main reasons. First, semi-structured interviews gives voice and meaning to the personal narrative and second, by applying the non-hierarchical model advocated by Oakley (1981), it allowed the amelioration of power dynamics within the interview process[17].

According to Miller and Glassner, the key strength of qualitative interviewing is the opportunity it provides to collect and rigorously examine narrative accounts of social worlds (2001:137). It creates the conditions to discover realities by generating data which gives an authentic insight into people's experiences (Silverman 2001:87). Interviews, particularly semi-structured interviews, are the most widely used technique for conducting systematic social inquiry. It is a way of generating empirical data about the social world by asking people to talk about their lives (Holstein and Gubrium 2001:140) within the context of a special form of 'talk', or what Esterberg denotes as a 'peculiar form of conversation' (2002:85). Semi-structured interviews are cited as ideal for exploring topics more openly in which the interviewees can express their opinions and ideas (ibid: 87). In particular, Esterberg highlights the ability of in-depth interviews to first, generate theory, second, allow a freer exchange between the interviewer and the interviewee, third, are ideal for trying to understand what life is like from the perspective of others, and finally concurring that they are a good way to study women and other marginalised groups (ibid: 85,87).

Interviews have long been used to bring people's experiences forward and make those experiences visible (DeVault and Gross 2007:176). The use of personal narratives not only enables participation but also can explore the social experiences of 'silenced women' (Geiger 1986:335). From a feminist perspective, interviewing is a powerful research tool in exploring women's experiences as it allows the participant to tell their stories (Denzin and Lincoln 1998:74), while also enabling the participation of the interviewee as a collaborator within the

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[17] Later in the chapter I will discuss the degrees of success I felt I achieved in such an endeavour but ultimately I conclude that given my own subjectivities, eradicating power inequalities within a research process such as this is not possible, and any claims or suggestions otherwise are erroneous.

research. According to Holstein and Gubrium, interviews are interactive and therefore constructional. The 'active interview' allows knowledge to be assembled whereby participants become constructors of knowledge (2001: 142) resulting in a process of 'meaning production' (Devault 1990; Reinharz 1992; Smith 1987).

In addition, all major explorations of female combatants both globally and in the North of Ireland, have utilised in-depth interviews as the ideal method of exploring these often overlooked experiences (For examples of loyalist women see McEvoy 2009 and Potter 2014; for republican women see Alison 2004, 2009; Fairweather et al. 1983; O'Keefe 2003, 2013). Megan MacKenzie in her research on female soldiers in Sierra Leone found that the use of in-depth interviews provided an important alternative version of the war there, where testimonies of female soldiers stood in stark contrast to the official narrative and dominant discourse of the armed conflict there. Interviews there allowed female combatants to articulate their 'stories, dreams, complaints, and desires' (2012: 2), which challenged the gendered assumptions regarding women's role in the conflict there. MacKenzie concurs that without 'asking and listening' to the experiences of women and girls then we are left with a limited understanding of war and conflict transition (2012: 3).

In her study of female combatants in Sri Lanka and the North of Ireland, Miranda Alison once again cites the need for in-depth interviews as a significant feminist method of countering the dominant masculine narrative of war. Theresa O'Keefe's research on feminist identity and activism among republican combatants also utilised in-depth interviews as a key method in uncovering the agency of the seemingly marginalised. Certainly in the context of the North of Ireland, those women who engaged in or supported political violence remain the outsiders of the narrative. Once again, the focus and 'duty' of the researcher, according to O'Keefe, is to allow those excluded voices to 'tell their story' (2013: 17).

Of course there are other approaches, most notably Alice McIntyre's (2004) Participatory Action Research (PAR) within a nationalist/republican community group in Belfast. PAR encompasses ideas around theory and practice, teaching, learning and activism for social change, and undoubtedly it fits perfectly with tenets of feminist theory and research. Notwithstanding that McIntyre's research involved nationalist/republican women as opposed to former female combatants, such an approach was not feasible in this instance. Republican women are dispersed and located across multiple sites of activism and struggle and so the idea of choosing one such site for PAR would inevitably produce a very limited result. In addition, the marginalisation and exclusion of combatant women from mainstream accounts of the armed conflict in the North has unsurprisingly transferred seamlessly into the realm of conflict transition there. The intense focus on women's role as bridge-builder ensures that female combatants remain on the periphery of academic explorations of gender and conflict transformation. Given this exclusion, I feel that in-depth, semi-structured interviews provided the most effective method for illuminating these unique, yet muted experiences.

One final note on research design, it is important to state that in the original research design I intended to organise two to three focus groups of varying numbers of participants to compliment individual interviews but this proved impossible due to concerns of privacy among many research participants, many of whom were reticent to articulate their views in public. Very early on during field research it was apparent that many participants were fearful and reluctant to express their views in front of other participants in public forums such as focus groups. This is an important theme which I will return to shortly in my discussion of the power dynamics which profoundly shaped the research process.

The Interviewees

Participants in this research all self-identified as members or activists within the Provisional IRA and/or Sinn Féin, generally referred to as the republican movement. While there have been many eclectic republican groupings throughout the course of the conflict, the group known as the Provisional IRA (PIRA) however, became the main militant movement in terms of its size, capabilities and support[18]. While always in existence and initially at a lower level alongside the armed struggle, from 1982 onwards Sinn Féin began playing a greater role, resulting in a stronger emphasis on electoral politics by the republican movement. This research is based on face-to face semi-structured interviews with forty women who were involved as armed and unarmed activists within the republican movement. I use the term 'republican women' as opposed to 'combatants' to reflect the fact that not all participants engaged in military roles.

Of the forty participants, thirty-one identified themselves as members of the IRA, six were solely members of Sinn Féin, while three identified their role as 'republican activist'[19]. In terms of age, participants ranged from thirty-one years old up to late seventies. The vast majority of interviewees however were aged in their fifties and sixties. Given that the epicentres of conflict occurred mainly in urban working-class communities, it is unsurprising that the vast majority of participants hailed from either Belfast or Derry. In all, twenty interviews occurred in Belfast, eight in Derry, four in Dublin and the remaining eight occurred in various towns and villages along the border. Fieldwork began on May 26th 2012 and concluded on November 25th 2013.

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[18] For the last century, a trademark characteristic of militant Irish Republicanism is ideological splits, feuds (often violent) and fall-outs resulting in the formation of multiple republican groupings, some political, some militant. For a more detailed outline of various Irish Republican groupings from the early 1920's onwards, including the 'Troubles', see Tim Pat Coogan's (2000) *The IRA*, Harper Collins Publishing.

[19] It is important to state that none of the participants who identified themselves as "republican activists" detailed exactly what that role entailed. My own interpretation of this description is that of an active support role for the IRA, including but not exclusive to communications, weapons storage, weapons transportation, intelligence gathering, reconnaissance, and look-out patrols, among others.

Out In the Field

The high level of access to interviewees achieved in this research is a remarkable accomplishment given the clandestine nature of the republican movement and the ongoing court cases dealing with the Boston College tapes, which I will deal with in detail a little further on. Undoubtedly, this feat was helped enormously by my familial connection to west Belfast. My father is from the Andersonstown area of west Belfast and my grandfather was a well know publican who owned two bars on the Falls road in west Belfast[20]. As a child, visits to west Belfast were a regular occurrence particularly during school holidays and there is no doubt that even as children we knew we were visiting a place that was very different from what was considered 'normal life' in the South of Ireland. Armed police and British Army patrols, armoured jeeps, ubiquitous checkpoints of both cars and civilians, burnt out cars, bombed out buildings were trumpeted messages that this was a society and community in conflict. While politics was never discussed in front of us as children, in my early teenage years I quickly developed my own interest in the conflict there and Anglo-Irish political history in general. While none of my immediate family were members of the republican movement, others within the family circle in west Belfast were and some imprisoned for their activities. This coupled with my relatively well known family name (and in particular the popularity of my grandfather in the Mid and Lower Falls area) played a vital role in the success of locating research participants and the building of relationships with them.

Using a 'snowball' technique, participants were located using three separate gatekeepers. Gatekeepers either control or provide the initial research access to participants

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[20] Even though it encompasses the staunchly loyalist Shankill road and other loyalist areas such as Suffolk and Blacks road on the Stewartstown road, west Belfast was and remains a predominantly nationalist and republican area. Given this, it was unsurprisingly an epicentre of armed actions and killings during the 'Troubles'. The Falls road stretches from Divis Street in the city centre and runs for almost three miles west where it officially ends at the junction of the Andersonstown road and Glen road. The Falls is the main arterial route through west Belfast and remains a heartland of various forms of republican activity, both political and militant.

and are essential in case studies such as this. Snowball sampling refers to a method whereby one initial participant refers another participant onto the author, leading to a chain of referrals. The first gatekeeper worked within the Coiste organisation, established in the late 1990's to help republican ex-prisoners and their families, who provided access to sixteen participants; ten in Belfast and eight in Derry. I first met this gatekeeper in 2009 when undertaking some research for an undergraduate dissertation but we established a relationship and stayed in touch with sporadic emails and correspondence related to republican women. It is important to state that my familial connections to both west Belfast as a place and the thinner connections to the republican movement were indispensable in the building of trust between this gatekeeper and I. A second gatekeeper, who also participated in the research and is a Sinn Féin member in Belfast, who introduced me to three participants while finally, a family friend, again in Belfast introduced me to a further two participants. As part of the reflective process upon the conclusion of each interview, a number of participants then recommended other women to interview and passed on my contact details accordingly leading to more participants.

The IRA is (and was) an illegal organisation and its members, even today, are still incredibly difficult to access for interview, particularly by a male, 'southerner' like me. I would also add here that there was an additional barrier when attempting to locate female combatants for the simple reason that their role is still considered by some as being 'non-conventional'. Women's numbers within the ranks of the IRA were also much lower than men's, and this certainly added to the difficulty of locating female research participants. In addition, it is also important to qualify that although forty interviewees is a relatively high number, it is undoubtedly a small percentage of the actual number of women involved in the republican movement. Nevertheless, as a researcher, I was more than satisfied that I managed to locate and interview forty participants which form the bulk of analysis for this research

project. There are of course limitations to such an approach. First and foremost, all research participants stemmed from the broadly homogenous Provisional republican movement. While some are now outside that movement, the fact that I excluded other republican groups will undoubtedly shape the data generated here. Invariably, there is a lack of diversity among the participants in light of the many eclectic republican groupings in existence today. Perhaps an interesting line of investigation could have been to interview women who remain militarily active in republican groups today but this was abandoned for a number of reasons.

First and probably most importantly, is the issue of the Boston College tapes. The Provisional IRA is now officially disbanded, although contentious enquiries by the PSNI into past actions remain ongoing. Many research participants in this project deliberately eschewed talking of instances which could be legally harmful to them. Uncovering sensitive information through interviewing persons who are members of militant groups still currently engaged in political violence would undoubtedly expose those participants, the researcher and the project to various dangers and harm. This is particularly important given the ongoing debacle regarding the Boston College tapes.

The Boston College Oral History Archive on the Troubles initiated a research project in 2001 to collect recorded testimonies of former paramilitary members, both loyalist and republican. Interviewees were guaranteed that their recordings would only be released after their deaths. The first two interviewees to die were former UVF member David Ervine in 2007 and former IRA commander Brendan Hughes in 2008. Both men's testimonies formed the content of a book and television documentary *Voices From the Grave*. As part of his testimony, Brendan Hughes discussed the abduction of Jean McConville in 1972 who the IRA alleged was passing information onto the British Army, a claim strongly refuted by her

family[21]. After an 'interrogation', Mrs. McConville was later killed by the IRA and secretly buried for thirty-one years until her body was uncovered in 2003. In 2010, Dolours Price, a former IRA member gave interviews to the Belfast newspaper *The Irish News* in which she revealed that she had participated in the Boston project and then went on to speak in detail of her role and the role of others, most notably Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams in the abduction and killing of Jean McConville.

When it emerged publicly that former paramilitaries spoke candidly on recorded tape of their role and the role of others in various illegal armed actions, a series of subpoenas were issued to Boston College by the US Department of Justice on behalf of the United Kingdom in May and August of 2011, requesting the tapes and transcripts for use in criminal investigations. In 2013 a court in the United States ordered that the tapes be handed over to PSNI investigating officers, some of which has led to the arrest and charging of one veteran republican in April 2014. In May 2014, Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams was arrested by the PSNI for questioning about the killing, an arrest allegedly stemming directly from the Boston College tapes[22]. The effects of this arrest, I believe, will have profound consequences both for the ongoing political endeavours to deal with the past and perhaps most obviously, will have negative consequences for future efforts to access former combatants in the field of armed conflict, and other sensitive fields of research for that matter. Five others have been

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[21] Along with her family's denial of their mother's involvement in giving information to the British Army, an investigation by Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland Baroness Nuala O'Loan in 2006 corroborated the family's claims that Jean McConville was not a British Army informant. However, along with the IRA allegations, Ed Moloney (who is certainly no friend of the IRA or Sinn Féin and is frequently the target for republican criticism) in his 2002 book *A Secret History of the IRA* validates republican claims that Mrs. McConville had in fact worked for the British Army in gathering intelligence. The fact remains that Jean McConville is not here to testify her position. Whether or not Mrs. McConville was an informant or not is a moot point, it is nevertheless now an irrelevance given the overwhelming sense of revulsion regarding her abduction, killing, and secret burial, even among hardened republicans.

[22] Gerry Adams went 'voluntarily' to Antrim Police Station with his solicitor in a pre-arranged meeting with police officers investigating the McConville case. Upon his arrival however, he was formally arrested and questioned for the next three days and nights.

questioned in relation to the killing of Jean McConville. There is currently an ongoing court battle by the PSNI to secure the entire archive of forty-six interviews.

During field research, only three of the forty participants did not mention the words 'Boston College' to me, particularly prior to commencing the recorded interview which undoubtedly cast a shadow over this research. In one instance, a distant family member cancelled her interview, based solely on fears stemming from the Boston College controversy. I know from speaking to other scholars in the field of combatants that it looms large over their research also. Social scientists have cited the Boston College subpoenas as undermining their ability to conduct sensitive research in the future, arguing that the repercussions of this case will be felt far beyond the Boston College project and jeopardise future access to sensitive or controversial research participants (Schmidt 2012). The debacle has had the effect of undermining the credibility of all researchers and authors[23] (Clarke 2012). The failure of Boston College to make good on their promise of withholding interview tapes until after the death of former paramilitary interviewees has rendered academic guarantees of anonymity, confidentiality and data storage as meaningless, unless of course researchers are willing to stand firm against the threat of prosecution. Within this research, promises and protocols around the safeguarding of participant identity, data storage and confidentiality was met with hilarity in some cases, if not wry smiles in others. After much discussion between my research supervisors and I, we reluctantly decided that interviewing those still involved in military organisations would prove a perilous course of action with far more potential pitfalls than benefits. Given that the research is restricted to women within the Provisional republican movement, this undoubtedly limits the scope of the findings and certainly circumvents any vast claims to be representative of all republican women.

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[23] Just to illustrate the point, my office partner is currently conducting interviews for a doctoral dissertation on pensions policy in Ireland and she has informed me that most of her interviewees mention Boston College when discussing their rights to anonymity and confidentiality. It appears that Boston College is exerting an influence over all facets of social research across diverse and multiple fields.

Second, in terms of the project framework, the discourse around issues of post-war would have proved difficult with participants who still view themselves at war. Explorations of transition with women who still see the North as a place at war would inevitably complicate matters. A key reason for choosing female members from the provisional republican movement is that it is an organisation which shifted from violent activists who opposed the state to a party of government within the said state. Thirdly and finally, contrasting with their republican counterparts in other militant and political organisations (such as INLA, IRSP, OIRA, various loyalist groups, among others) women played a prominent and central role in the republican movement, in comparatively higher numbers than other republican groups. Furthermore, the rise of republican feminism (O'Keefe 2013) produced a movement which overtly supported feminist struggle and women's equality. Therefore, limiting the research to those who remained within the mainstream republican movement provides the ideal case-study for examining how women's war-time mobilisation is shaped by the period of transition.

The Interview Process

An enduring legacy of the conflict is that republican (and loyalist) communities are still largely wary of strangers. A failure to adequately deal with the past along with the continuing fear of prosecution for actions during the conflict ensures that access to former combatants, both male and female, can be an arduous task. Being a 'southern' male undoubtedly affected if not inhibited participants' willingness to speak openly and frankly during the interview. From my own previous experience with republican communities in the North, I knew that establishing familiar connections would ease some of the potential reticence among participants, but more importantly would build some trust and rapport between us. One key factor in reducing my 'stranger' effect was my family's connection to west Belfast where my grandfather was proprietor for two public bars along the Falls Road. The bars are still in the

family name today. This was essential in establishing connections and rapport between the participants and I, while my familiarity with their northern vernacular as well as knowledge of place names, people and events were absolutely invaluable during the interview process. Another key factor was the fact some distant family members are/were republicans and imprisoned during the conflict. This coupled with the family bars, created a strong sense of familiarity with participants and also played a vital role in my initial meetings with all three gatekeepers.

The initial fifteen interviews occurred in two ex-prisoners centres in Belfast and Derry respectively, where gatekeepers arranged a schedule of interviews to be conducted in a designated room within the centre. While there is no doubt that the participants chosen for interview by gatekeepers occupied a certain perspective within the republican movement, as a researcher, I felt comfortable and free to ask participants about their experiences on any matter. While this arrangement made my formative field research an incredibly straightforward process, on reflection it may not have made the ideal method for conducting interviews. Both ex-prisoners centres contained a media/interview room which is used for all types of interviews (academic, television news, documentaries, etc.).

Looking back now, it is clear that the gatekeepers controlled the location, the times (although I was always consulted on this) and most importantly the participants. While the interviews beyond these initial fifteen occurred in interviewees homes, I didn't feel comfortable asking the first fifteen if they were happy with the interview location. On reflection, this was a vast oversight on my part as methods literature indicates that participants feel more comfortable when the research occurs in locations of their choosing, particularly in their homes or places of work. This ensures that participants feel more in control of their own environment (Letherby 2003:108). I must emphatically state however that I do not believe that gatekeepers were deliberately attempting to control the research. On

the contrary, given my 'outsider' status, I am absolutely sure gatekeepers were attempting to make my field research as stress free as possible. I must also add that all staff and persons at the ex-prisoner centres were incredibly welcoming and generous with their time and resources. In every interview, tea, coffee and refreshments were provided to me and interviewees.

On reflection both immediately after the interview and months later, I felt that all participants spoke candidly and honestly throughout the interviews. It did not appear that anyone felt constrained or restricted in terms of what they could or could not say due to factors such as interview location. Two interviewees afterwards did express some fears that gatekeepers may have access to their interview transcripts which I categorically assured them was not the case. After these initial fifteen interviews, snowballing meant that interviews moved beyond the initial three gatekeepers but it was clear that many subsequent interviewees were only taking part because it had been 'OK'd' by others. In many of these cases, an initial meeting or correspondence (phone calls or email) would be initiated by me. It was only then at the time of interview that I discovered that many of these participants had checked with other participants as to my background and credentials before deciding to participate. It again serves to illustrate that despite twenty years passing since the first IRA ceasefire, the republican community in the North is wary and uncertain (and understandably so) when it comes to speaking to 'outsiders'. Undoubtedly, the content of the interviews were shaped by such a deeply pervasive climate of suspicion.

Of the remaining twenty-five interviews, twenty-four occurred in family homes with one at a place of work. Overwhelmingly there were marked differences between these interviews and those earlier ones at ex-prisoner centres and Sinn Féin offices. While the initial fifteen had the feeling of a 'formal interview' around them (which can be restrictive to both researcher and interviewees), the interviews in the family home felt more like

conversations and this is clearly evident when it came to the analysis of the transcripts. Arriving for interviews at the family home, I always brought cakes and biscuits (which I also did at the ex-prisoner centres) and upon entering the home, interviewees would immediately offer tea and coffee. It was during the preparation for the tea where informal chat 'broke some of the ice' and built up a rapport well before the commencement of interviews. That, coupled with the safety and comfort of familiar surroundings in the home produced a setting whereby I feel research participants felt far more relaxed, resulting in a far more fluid exchange between us. This is probably most apparent in the length of interviews. On most occasions, I would spend two to three hours at the home, leaving with a recording of at least over an hour, ninety minutes in most cases. At the conclusion of interviews, time was spent reflecting back on the interview and on certain issues that were raised during the process, as well as general chat about political developments or personal stories about our own families.

Power and Inequality in the Research Process

As a male researcher guided by feminist research ethics, the research process was designed in such a way so as to reduce the hierarchies and power inequalities between the researcher and the interviewees, which I quickly discovered was simply not feasible, with the notable exception perhaps of Participative Action Research (McIntyre 2004). Prior to the rise of feminist methodologies, little attention had been paid to the role of researchers in perpetuating the power dynamics within the research process with traditional 'textbook' methods on research portraying the researcher as an expert yet also a 'disinterested observer' while participants are viewed as 'units of analysis' and 'variables' (Lynch 2000: 78; Oakley 1981). The privileging of the 'expert' perspective enshrines inequality within the research process whereby the detached view of the expert is imposed as the interpreted 'truth' upon a participant's personal experience (Daly 2000). Smith asserts that it is vital that the researched are not objectified (1987: 111); ethical research preserves and encourages their presence as

subjects and active agents within the process (ibid: 151). Similarly Lather (1991) advocates interactive approaches to research produce a dialectical process whereby participants move away from mere objects of research and become active subjects empowered to their conditions, experiences and perspectives.

Challenging this, Letherby (2003) insists it is impossible to attain a research process that is equal, emancipatory and fully participatory. The researcher has control over the research process, responsible for transcribing and analysing, will write the research data and is ultimately the person who delivers the final research findings. Stanley and Wise (1993), acknowledging that inequalities are impossible to eradicate, have argued for a process of 'equalisation' within research, one that mitigates inequalities between the researcher and the researched achieved through process transformation and empowerment. Given my own background and male subjectivity, I concurred that completely eradicating all inequalities was impossible. I did however utilise various strategies to at least attempt to 'equalise' the process, including the returning of interview transcripts and the sending out the research questions prior to the interview, among others which will discussed in detail below.

While feminist methodologies are committed to literally 'giving voice to women's experiences', this in itself is not always a guaranteed outcome of implementing feminist principles and can be problematic. During the course of my research, it was quite clear that choices around topics for discussion during interviews, as well as themes for analysis afterwards, were choices that I alone made. While the semi-structured interview allowed space for participants to freely discuss any issue they deemed relevant to their experience, the interviews however were consistently guided by a loose framework of topics that I as researcher wished to cover within each interview. While acknowledging that the establishment of a truly egalitarian relationship within the interview process is extremely arduous, I did seek to ameliorate some of the inequalities through a number of measures.

Interview times and location were decided solely either by the gatekeepers, or in most cases by research participants themselves. Due to the nature of the research and the people involved I was always conscious that access to participants could be closed off at any time. On some occasions, interviews were either cancelled or postponed, most of these frustratingly at the last moment. All participants were given the broad research questions/themes a number of days, sometimes weeks prior to their interview. While most found this quite helpful and reassuring it did have the effect that some participants felt that they would be unable to answer some questions, articulating that certain topics were not applicable to their story. At all times, I emphasised the fluid and loose structure of the interview and stressed their role in guiding the interview process also. Some participants chose not to answer certain questions prior to and some during the interview process, once again illustrating the dialectical relationship between researcher and participants.

A cornerstone of feminist research methodologies is the idea of empowering women or utilising emancipatory research processes whereby women's lives can actually be transformed. While this research will hopefully add important data to larger theoretical debates around women and conflict transformation, I also envisaged that the research could be of use to participants themselves. Firstly, by documenting their experiences and stories, I would argue that this research sheds light on this overlooked section of women which challenges the dominant narrative of women and conflict transition. And second, I have already presented some of my research findings to groups of republicans, one in Dublin and the other in Belfast. I intend to work with some of my gatekeepers upon the completion of the project with a view to presenting some of the key findings and recommendations from the work, which could add to the growing debates regarding women and republicanism today. Some interviewees inquired about the future dissemination of the findings. Some requested any updates regarding the findings, others spoke about a possible presentation of the findings

to a wide group of republicans (Ex-prisoner centres and the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis were mentioned by some as possible venues), while others inquired as to whether it would be published in book format.

Another key method of 'equalisation' adopted during the research was through the ownership of interview data. All interviews were transcribed by me and returned to every participant for their consideration if they so wished; of the forty interviews, thirty-six chose to receive a copy of their interview transcript while four declined. Participants had the opportunity to read their interview transcript. While most research participants responded to simply acknowledge receipt of their transcript, only six made some minor changes, mostly grammatical. Correspondence through email occurred until the participant was satisfied with an agreed final draft. This process was time-consuming and at times, problematic, particularly with the fact that the transfer of fluid conversation between people never 'reads well' as transcribed text. Some participants felt the need to re-phrase certain sentences that didn't appear grammatically correct. Interviewees felt that there were times when their words sounded too 'bitter', 'happy' or 'angry'. I reminded all participants that interview transcripts always fail to capture the context and atmosphere in which they were spoken.

In addition, some also expressed fears about who would actually see their comments. Those who engaged in critical commentary feared that gatekeepers or others higher up in the republican movement also had access to their interview transcripts. This is an important aspect for a number of reasons. First, it demonstrates the constraints that some participants felt and so raises the possibility that others also may not have spoken as candidly given their suspicion that others than myself may have access to the interview. Second, it illustrates that some interviewees were only expressing certain views under the guarantee of anonymity and privacy. Two interviewees became particularly worried after reading their transcripts and talked of withdrawing from the process, such was their fear of anyone else reading their

views. After much reassurance[24], they consented to me using their transcript. Like any political party, it would appear that some interviewees expressed concerns that they may be straying beyond the party line in some of their thoughts and views. That said, others who were severely critical of the movement and leadership during the interview assured me that they cared little who saw their transcripts and even insisted that I use their real identity. And third, this issue reveals that issues of power within the research process stretches far beyond the confines of the interview session itself. It is quite clear that despite my best intentions to mitigate the power inequalities within the research, such as data storage, usage and retention resided firmly with me the researcher.

With regards to interview questions/themes, these rarely changed but they were, never a rigid structure as such. Spaces opened up by participant's narratives were followed without the necessity of following a strict set of guideline questions. Broadly speaking, interview questions were as follows:

- How do they define peace and women's rights? What does a genuine peace look like?

- How has the institutionalisation of the Provisional republican struggle shaped/effected their post-war activism? In what ways has women's struggle within the republican movement changed during the transition? How do republican women react/resist in this changing political landscape?

- Where do republican women locate their post-war activism? Which spaces are deemed to hold the most political potential?

- How do republican women define their war-time contributions and sacrifices? How do they ensure an accurate post-war recognition of those unique experiences?

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[24] By email correspondence, I assured the interviewees that only the interviewee and I would see and/or have access to interview transcripts. I also reaffirmed the measures and safeguards used to protect their anonymity.

Each interview produced a unique and individual narrative so it would have been impossible to adhere to a strict line of ordered questions, particularly as many participants pre-empted questions through their personal accounts. Invariably, most interviewees explored the main research topics/themes with little guidance from the researcher. I quickly discovered that my main role was asking follow-up or probing questions or asking participants to detail explanations, meanings and experiences of key events.

With respect to my own personal safety and wellbeing, I felt safe and at ease at all times with one exception being an interview located in the nationalist/republican enclave of Short Strand in east Belfast in mid-December 2012. Due to the political geography of this area, Short Strand is encircled by a 'Peace Wall', separating it from the surrounding majority Loyalist community in that part of the city. While the presence of these 'Peace Walls' are nothing out of the ordinary in Belfast, the interview occurred against the backdrop of a bitter Loyalist protest over the flying of the Union flag at Belfast city hall. Daily protests meant heightened tensions in that area. Short Strand is a small community of no more than 3000 residents meaning that individuals entering and exiting the area are easily identifiable. My return walk from Short Strand into the city centre was incident free but there is no doubt that I was extremely wary and anxious about potential dangers in the immediate few minutes after exiting that community.

Analysing the Data

As a feminist researcher, I am very aware that analysing, interpreting and writing up of social research is not an abstract activity. Researchers do not automatically convey the "truth", instead they construct and control meaning through their own interpretation which in turn is shaped by her/his particular perspective and standpoint (DeVault 1999:79). In order to transform the transcripts into meaningful data, I used a grounded coding system (Strauss and

Corbin 1990) otherwise known as open coding, which essentially entails scanning each line of transcript, taking note of emerging patterns and trends. Grounded theory research develops analytical categories and theories from the data rather than adhering to preceding concepts or theories; theory is derived from the data and meaning is achieved through reflection upon the data (Ackerly and True 2010:204). In other words, it is a specific area of study in which the relevant concepts and theories subsequently emerge (Strauss and Corbin 1990: 23)

From this technique, I employed what Esterberg (2002) describes as 'focused coding' where a number of recurring themes are numbered or designated using mutli-coloured markers and again, transcripts are analysed and indexed according to their theme. Employing a grounded approach within a feminist research paradigm developed a process whereby empirical data began to produce multiple concepts or theories to explain certain social facts relating to women and conflict transformation. By using this method, very quickly recurring patterns and themes were apparent and subsequently formed the basis of findings chapters. Again it is important that I am mindful of the limitations of such an approach and how such strategies are imbued with power. Like the interview themes and questions, I had absolute control over the themes/concepts I would use for the findings chapter. Acknowledging my own male subjective position, there is no doubt that my choices of themes and overall analysis is informed by my own subjective view of the political and social world and once again illustrates the undeniable fact that, power resides firmly with the researcher, despite intrepid efforts to change this.

Overall, many interviewees appraised the interviews as a positive experience. Some were clearly emotional during and after the interview with many remarking that they'd never reflected back on the conflict or the subsequent years of the peace process. This is significant and certainly adds weight to the methodological approach utilised in this research. While it

would be rather crass and patronising for me however to claim that this research managed to enrich women's lives or helped give meaning to their experiences, nevertheless, the interviewing process was appraised as a largely positive experience by all interviewees.

On reflection, I believe that the idea of research being truly equal, empowering and emancipatory for all involved is at best, naïve, as the task of gathering data in the field quickly illuminates the power dynamics that are covertly omnipresent, despite my best efforts to 'equalise' or mitigate such underlying forces. Feminist research demands that we produce knowledge for the benefit of the researched in order to further the aims of the feminist movement, yet this was consistently countered by the fact that this research is also an academic progression for me as someone who wishes to pursue a 'career' within academia. Unquestionably, the benefits of undertaking research mainly fall to the researcher either in pursuit of larger political objectives, educational fulfilment, monograph or a conference presentation.

While it is likely that the person this research had the most impact upon was the researcher, I need to remain mindful of the fact that trauma manifests in many differing ways and at different times, so it would be erroneous to claim that simply because trauma or other emotional effects among participants was not evident at the time of interview, that this simply rules out the possibility of indirect trauma occurring, hours, days or weeks after the interviews completion. In my conversations with interviewees both immediately after the interview and in the months following, the majority stated that they thought the process was a positive experience, with many indicating that the interviews were the first time they had reflected back on their war-time and conflict transition experiences.

Ethics and Protocol

Any research involving human participants is required to follow strict ethical guidelines in order to protect the participants and the research process itself (Flick 2002: Punch 1998; Spradley 1979). The methods and ethics involved in this research were reviewed and approved by the Ethical Review Board at Maynooth University in June 2011 prior to commencement of field research. In terms of confidentiality and the risks to participants, research such as this can involve sensitive material that has the potential to harm individuals and/or organisations. This study involved working with many individuals who had previously engaged in illegal activities involving the use of political violence. While the issue of potential harm from legal prosecution is self-evident, some participants informed me that some of their family members are unaware of their roles in the conflict. While the rights and protection of the participants was at all times paramount during the research process, it was also important that I was mindful of these risks in the formation of interview questions and the types of themes that were to be discussed. As Denscombe states, social researchers have no status or privilege that puts them above the moral and legal code that operate for the rest of society (2002:177). Interviews were mainly focused on women's transition activism and their transition from conflict into conflict transformation[25]. Invariably, participants' roles and experiences of the conflict also played an important part in explaining that narrative. All participants spoke of their conflict experiences in quite broad and generalised language in a deliberate act of ambiguity in order to mitigate any potential legal or personal risks.

Informed consent is a benchmark for social research ethics (Denscombe 2002:183). Prior to commencement of each interview, participants were invited to read and discuss the detailed consent form. First, I introduced myself to the participants, explaining my motives

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[25] That said, unanimously all interviewees gave detailed account of their motivations and experiences within the republican movement during the Troubles.

for undertaking this research, followed by an outline of the nature and objectives of the study and stating the importance of their contribution to this study. Interviewees were then apprised of the nature of the research, the benefits, the potential risks involved and the future dissemination of data in the public realm. Also included were my own contact details as well as contacts for both my research supervisors and the University's Ethics Board. Participants were also invited to provide me with a means of contact if they wished to receive a copy of their anonymised interview transcription. All interviewees retained a copy of the consent form for their own records. Participants retain the right to withdraw any or all of their information or involvement at any time during the research process (Flick 2002; Punch 1998; Spradley 1979).

Maintaining the anonymity of people and organisations was a clear priority in order to mitigate and avoid potential harm. All materials related to the interview process were securely stored both digitally and physically in secure locations. I had sole access to these materials, including recordings, interview transcripts, interview schedule, and consent forms[26]. As a researcher, I guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality to research participants and I intend to honour that agreement. While some participants suggested that I use their real name, I declined and advocated that the potential harms from this far outweighed the almost nil benefit from including them[27]. Given the relatively lower numbers of women within the republican movement, I feel that it is necessary to remove any potential, no matter how small a harm to research participants and so it is important to state that while all names used in this thesis are fictitious in order to protect identities, it is equally as important to state that the pseudonyms chosen by the author did not duplicate any of the real names of the participants, again reducing the likelihood of exposing a participants identity.

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[26] In light of the ongoing Boston College court cases, I have declined to state here the exact location of these materials, regardless of the unlikeliness of state interest in these interviews.

[27] This once again illuminates the power inequalities in the research process, where I effectively had the right to exclude their true names from their words and experiences in the findings.

Conclusion

Accessing, interviewing and analysing the perspectives of republican women in the North of Ireland demands a concise and defined methodology. The prospect of a 'southern' male conducting such research only exacerbates the complexities of such an endeavour and presents many perilous difficulties. In this chapter I argued for the many theoretical and practical ways in which I believe I successfully negotiated these challenges, at least to a certain degree. As the idea of a man conducting feminist research remains something of a misnomer, I believe the use of feminist standpoint provides the most suitable theoretical approach for this research, allowing me to generate data from women's lives as opposed to experiencing women's lives. Feminism, more than any other paradigm, has successfully abolished the notion of objectivity, so much so that it is now generally accepted by all that social researchers can never be entirely objective (Denscombe 2002:157). Throughout this chapter, issues from my gender right up to my family connections to west Belfast, I have attempted to honestly lay out my multiple and diverse subjectivities which profoundly shaped the design, data gathering and analysis of this research. In other words, I do not profess that this dissertation (or any other social research for that matter) is in any way objective or impartial.

The application of semi-structured interviews within a plural standpoint framework provides the most effective method for exploring and illuminating the narratives and experiences of republican women in a field where women are often referred to in universalistic terms and categories. While interviews allow for deeper and theoretically richer understandings of female combatants' experiences, the obvious charge levelled against this approach is that primary data is drawn from interviewees who occupy one particular perspective within a defined movement. As stated earlier in the chapter, this research does not claim to uncover a singular truth encompassing that of *all* republican women nor does it

claim to provide a 'less false' account of conflict transformation. It does however provide

testimony from an important yet largely neglected constituency of women which can

significantly challenge and alter the ways in which conflict transition is currently devised and

conducted.

Chapter Three -Women & Conflict Transition

Introduction

This chapter is a comprehensive and critical overview of the current literature pertaining to women and conflict transition. It not only asks 'where are combatant women' (McEvoy 2009) in conflict transition within existing research but argues that the absence of their unique experiences and perspectives renders current approaches partial and highly limited. The chapter first examines the partiality afforded to 'womenandpeace' (El-Bushra 2007) in contrast to combatant women. It suggests that the dearth of feminist research on female combatants in the post-war period is rooted in the long-standing radical feminist school of thought that accentuates women's propensity for peace and non-violence. Despite the acknowledgement and recognition of women's war-time roles as combatants, it appears that gender tropes still retain a hegemonic grip on the field of conflict transition. I then explore various formal and informal strategies for the pursuit of a feminist peace, uncovering a largely universal chorus calling for women's institutional inclusion within formal peace processes. The chapter then moves onto to examine transversal approaches involving women working across the divide. It suggests that while such approaches create opportunities for some women, they nevertheless provide a limited political terrain for combatant women who situate their post-war activism firmly within a nationalist movement.

The chapter then explores existing literature on combatant women. It finds that the vast majority of academic research on female combatants is confined largely to Disarmament Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) processes[28]. While studies of DDR provide

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[28] Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR), or Disarmament, Demobilisation, Repatriation, Reintegration and Resettlement (DDRRR) are applied strategies for executing successful peacekeeping operations, and is generally the strategy employed by all UN Peacekeeping Operations. Disarmament entails the physical removal of the means of combat from ex-belligerents (weapons, ammunition, etc.); demobilisation entails the disbanding of armed groups; while reintegration describes the process of

incredibly useful and significant data, the DDR 'moment' is one of many important post-war moments for combatant women. A vast shortfall occurs in the current literature, globally and in the North of Ireland, as the entire conflict transition experience of female combatants is largely absent. Finally, the chapter explores the burgeoning field of peace and security, and the ongoing debates regarding the ways in which women define peace and security according to their differential positioning and needs.

'Which Women?': Feminist Theoretical Approaches To Conflict Transition

According to Christine Sylvester, feminism has long associated itself with peace and non-violence (2010: 609). Despite this, there is now a relatively sizable amount of feminist research documenting women's role as armed activists, presenting significant theoretical contributions to the field of women, armed conflict, peace and security (Alison 2009; Lorentzen & Turpin 1998; Moser & Clark 2001; Meintjes, Pillay & Turshen 2001; Jacobs, Jacobson & Marchbank 2000; MacKenzie 2012; O'Keefe 2003, 2013; Sharoni 2001; Sjoberg 2010; Sjoberg & Gentry 2007). These significant studies challenged the dichotomies of men/violence and women/peace, demonstrated women's discernible gains, and defied the notion that women and political violence are somehow mutually exclusive. While the feminist spectrum has broadened to acknowledge combatant women during war-time, vast strands of feminist interactions within the field conflict transition remain primarily focused on accentuating linkages between women and peacefulness (Anderlini 2007: 2; Baines 2005; Cockburn 2007, 2013, 2014; De Alwis et al. 2013; DeLargy 2013; Giles 2013; Porter 1998, 2000, 2003).

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reintegrating former combatants into civilian society, ensuring against the possibility of a resurgence of armed conflict.

Accounts exploring women's roles within state militaries unsurprisingly reveal subservient and subordinate roles (Enloe 2000; Mathers 2013). However, research exploring women's agency as armed protagonists within non-state nationalist militaries in Latin America (Chinchilla 1990; Luciak 1999; Molyneux 1985), Palestine (Abdulhadi 1998; Sharoni 2001) North of Ireland (Alison 2009; Dowler 1998; O'Keefe 2003, 2013; Potter 2014), South Africa (Cock 1991; Geisler 1995), Asia (Jaywardena 1986), indicates high levels of agency and politicisation as a direct result of women's combat roles. Despite these important feminist interjections, the current literature on conflict transition suggests that gendered tropes of 'women's propensity for peace' still retain much theoretical weight. So much so, 'that the idea of men as aggressive and violent and women's 'natural' peacefulness remains so hegemonic that it almost seems immune to counter evidence' (Cohn & Jacobson 2013: 105).

So powerful are the tenacious links between women and non-violence, some posit 'that scholars of female combatants are subject to criticism, if not censure' (Pankhurst 2003: 158). To be unequivocal, I am not suggesting that there are no feminist explorations of female combatants and conflict transition. On the contrary, there is a significant, yet limited amount of important research exploring their post-war experiences (Luciak 1999; MacKenzie 2009, 2012; McEvoy 2009). The dearth of attention to combatant women relative to those women who wage peace however, ensures that the experiences and perspectives of female combatants remain firmly on the periphery. The fundamental shortfall of such approaches is that we miss the ways in which combatant women experience conflict transition. Moreover, by focusing largely on women's opposition to violence, we miss the ways women who previously used political violence organise for peace and equality during conflict transition. In sum, the relative neglect of female combatants ensures that the field of women and conflict transition remains only partially explored.

While many scholarly studies preface or postscript their work with an acknowledgement of female combatants and the need for their meaningful inclusion (For example see Hammond-Callaghan 2011; M'Cormack-Hale 2012; Porter 2003), invariably the centre of analysis is primarily focused on women's opposition to violence. Across much of the literature, female combatants tend to receive tokenistic mentions, with many paying lip service to the need to include *all* women in explorations of conflict transition. When combatant women do come into view, invariably it appears in the form of an obligatory single chapter on their experiences of DDR. Notwithstanding its vital contribution, the focus on DDR provides a limited glimpse of female combatants before they are once again forced to retake their seats on the side-lines (For example see Anderlini 2007; Bouta et al. 2005). Notwithstanding some notable exceptions (Luciak 1999; MacKenzie 2012; Molyneux 1985), the entire conflict transition experiences of female combatants' remain vastly under-researched, leaving huge knowledge gaps on the ways they organise politically in post-war scenarios.

The dearth of combatant women's voices and experiences is underscored in the existing research on conflict transition in the North of Ireland. Despite the relatively high levels of women's involvement in armed republicanism and loyalism during the Troubles (Allison 2009; Dowler 1998; O'Keefe 2003, 2013; McEvoy 2009; Potter 2014), their conflict transition experiences remain vastly under-researched. There has yet to be a comprehensive study of their entire transition. This omission is glaring when contrasted with the overwhelming attention afforded to women's endeavours for peace and bridge-building in the North of Ireland (See Anderlini 2007; Byrne 2014; Cockburn 1998, 2013; Cowell-Meyers 2003; Deiana 2013; Fearon 1999; Fearon & McWilliams 2000; Hammond-Callaghan 2011; Hinds 2011; Murtagh 2008; Porter 1998, 2000; Rynder 2002). Within the realm of women and conflict transformation, female combatants now embody the proverbial 'other', the

outsiders' outsider. For the most part, their inclusion occurs in highly limited ways, the cursory mention which satisfies the demands for an inclusive approach encompassing *all* women yet their voices and experiences remain consistently marginalised. This thesis represents the first in-depth study of republican women and conflict transition seeking to address this shortfall.

According to Donna Pankhurst, much of the existing scholarly literature on women and conflict transition highlights a common theme of women seeking to minimise the levels and effects of violence through their different social roles (2003: 158). Underpinning this research is a number of theoretical positions and assumptions (often implicit) about the relationship between women, war and peace (El-Bushra 2007: 132). In the following section, I suggest that overwhelming emphasis on women's opposition to all violence is heavily underpinned by radical feminist thought.

Understanding the Links between Women & Peacefulness

A large body of literature exploring the links between women and peace, and the links between men and militarism/violence is well established and longstanding. It is also deeply embedded in the school of radical feminist theory (For example see Reardon 1985, 1993; Ruddick 1989). Feminist peace scholars stress women's unique perspectives and distinct ways of knowing due to differing standpoints during times of war (Gilligan 1982; Reardon 1985, 1993; Ruddick 1989). Their fervent and deep-seated connection to working for peace is attributed to a number of factors. Betty Reardon (1998) refers to male characteristics of aggression, domination and belligerence, while some attest that peace activism embodies a feminist political dimension which challenges the patriarchy as well as providing an autonomous 'women-only space' (Cockburn 2007; Roseneil 1995). Others cite that women's peace-making provides wider society with an alternative perspective (Kaufman and Williams 2011) and some have claimed that women's assigned role as domestic home-makers provides

them with a unique perspective on the horrors and sufferings of war, spurring them into peace-making (Peterson and Runyan 1993; Romanova and Sewell 2011). Certainly the horrors of sexually-motivated war crimes inflicted upon women during war-time are cited as a key factor in motivating women's opposition to violence and war (Brownmiller 1975). According to Jodi York (1998) it is the pursuit of justice which spurs women's peace activism as opposed to pure maternal thinking.

One of the most prominent and enduring theories postulated is that of maternal feminism (Ruddick 1989). Carol Gilligan (1982) posits the idea of cultural feminism, arguing that women are socialised to think more about relationships than men and therefore obtain a greater empathy and understanding towards others. Drawing on Gilligan's work on women's moral reasoning, radical feminists such as Betty Reardon and Sara Ruddick emphasise the differences between men and women in their ways of knowing and thinking, owing to their biological and social role as mother and primary care-giver. Women's partiality and prevalence within peace activism is explained through an essentialist discourse in which 'many women throughout the world have come to see in this function of giving life and maintaining the species a special responsibility to struggle against that which, in damaging their own health and reproductive capacity, threatens the continuation of life and reduces its quality-weapons of mass destruction, warfare, poverty, and ecological devastation' (Reardon 1993:16). In contrast to the death and destruction of men's wars, 'there is a peacefulness latent in maternal practice' (Ruddick 1989: 136) and it is women's engagement with feminism which ignites this partiality towards a peaceful disposition.

While there have been striking instances of strategic and political use of the subject position of 'motherhood' to resist the most oppressive of regimes such as in the most famous case of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina (Fisher 1993), or the current case of mothers calling on the Nigerian state for the return of their daughters from Boko Haram , the

interpretation of this as an essentialist connection to peacefulness, as opposed to a culturally constructed political strategy, should be avoided given the greater complexity to how gender factors in warring and political mobilisation (Fagan 2000; Zenn and Pearson 2015). In addition the claim to a universal maternalism does not accurately portray the vast differences among women and instead 'incorporates a very western ideal of what motherhood should be' (Cohn and Jacobson 2013: 108). Research by Ruth Jacobson in 2000 in the North of Ireland finds that motherhood and 'love for one's children' can motivate support for violence as much as it can inform women's pursuit of peace. Cynthia Enloe (2000) also examined the ways in which 'motherhood' is 'manoeuvred' into supporting various wars and military ventures. Others examined how 'motherhood's' symbolic role within nationalist ideology has paved the way for women's support for many wars (Enloe 2000; McClintock 1993). Maternal feminist positions therefore are underpinned by a universal assumption that motherhood somehow means the same thing to most, if not all mothers, regardless of their differing social, political and economic positioning. It projects an idealised conceptualisation of women's 'rightful role' within wars and conflict transitions and has the effect of marginalising those who stray beyond such rigid gender stereotypes.

Since critics first alleged that feminism claimed to speak universally for all women, feminist researchers have been acutely aware of the limitations of gender as a single analytical category (McCall 2005). The concept of 'global sisterhood' was critiqued for its failure to take on board the power relations that divided women (Haraway 1991). While liberal feminists have consistently highlighted the differences *and* equality which exists between women and men as two distinct groups, debates now tend to centre more on the quagmire of theorising differences *between* women (Barrett 1987). There is now a widespread recognition of the inadequacy of analysing various social divisions as separate, internally homogenous, social categories (Yuval-Davis 2006: 206). While the category of

'women' is clearly complex and heterogeneous, feminists must be attentive to differences of race, class, sexuality and ethnicity while retaining the identity of 'women' as a fundamental basis for feminist theory and practice. Notwithstanding the differences between women and the fluidity of gender identities, gender oppression nonetheless, still exists (Eisenstein 1994). Given this, it is important to deal with the various schools of feminist thought that challenged the universalised narratives of a 'global sisterhood' within radical feminism.

Intersectional feminists take issue with the generalised, universal claims prevalent within liberal and essentialist feminist thought. Originally coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality was intended to address the fact that the experiences and struggles of women of colour fell outside the rigid boundaries of both gender studies and racial studies respectively. At the heart of intersectionality are the analyses of multiple structures of oppression which women experience and resist. Black feminist thought criticised much of the dominant feminist theory as ethnocentric, stemming largely from a specifically white, western perspective which failed to reflect the vastly divergent positions of African-American and non-Western women (bell hooks 1982; Hill-Collins 1990). Black feminists called dominant Western feminism to task over its inability to recognise the power differentials between white women and women of colour.

Post-colonial feminists also took issue with the hegemonic positioning of Western feminism arguing that the lives and experiences of women in post-colonial settings differ significantly from Western women due to the intersections of gender, nation, class, and religion. While feminism is foregrounded, post-colonial feminism is intertwined with the politics of nationalism, socialism, eco-feminism as well as challenging everyday sexism and patriarchy. Chandra Mohanty (1986) critiques Western feminists' attempts to homogenise all women without any reference to their colonial history or their differences pertaining to race, class and national structures. Post-colonial scholars such as Mohanty (1988) and Spivak

(1986) argued for the standpoint of women based upon their unique and diverse 'situatedness' and rejected the blanket universalising of women into homogenous categories.

Following a singular axis of enquiry using gender only is predicated on the notion of women's universal experiences of oppression. Such assumptions see women's subordination as impermeable to other forms of oppression and posit patriarchy and gender inequality as universally experienced. Intersectionality, Black feminist theory and Post-colonial feminism, among others, displaced the notion of a universal sisterhood and catalysed the emergence of a more plural feminism which recognised differences as well as commonalities between women. What emerges here is a feminism which no longer sees 'men' as the single source of oppression. On the contrary, nationalist women fight alongside nationalist men in anti-imperial struggles just as black women fight alongside black men in anti-racial struggles.

Yet despite these formidable challenges and the prevailing rhetoric of recognising women's diversity, the dominant mode of feminist inquiry in the field of post-war centres on the notion of women as a universal category, uncomplicated by, for example, racial, ethno-national or sectarian politics. It is not the objective (nor is it possible) for this chapter to resolve these deeply complex ontological and epistemological debates. Rather, I attempt to problematize the ways in which feminists theorise the position of women (and men), during the conflict transition period. The greatest charges levelled at essentialist linkages between women and peace stems from their contention of a universal sisterhood and the belief of a singular narrative encompassing all women's experiences and voices. Within the field of women, war and peace, essentialist feminists are criticised by El Bushra (2003) and Pankhurst (2003) for presenting a simplistic and over-generalised narrative of woman as either victim or the proverbial peace-builder. The approach undertaken in this research is a clear departure from the prevailing approaches in that it utilises a plural standpoint as opposed to universal claims. The 'truth' contained in this research does not claim to represent

all women in conflict transition but does represent the unique standpoint of a particularly situated cohort of politically active women in the North of Ireland.

While theories of maternal feminism and its many diverse challenges are beyond the scope of this chapter (and thesis)[29], a key focus for this author is the way in which the hegemonic conflation of women with peacefulness fundamentally shapes the ways in which gender relations are conceptualised and devised during conflict transition, where the female combatant remains something of an outsider. In sum, investigating patriarchy requires us to pay attention to the multiple workings of masculinities and femininities. To do so, we need to explore the actual lives of complicatedly diverse women (Enloe 2014: 5). Despite the acknowledgment of combatant women, through feminist scholarship and SCR 1325, women's association with peace and non-violence prevails. If we are to explore *all* women's conflict transition experiences and contributions in a holistic manner, 'then it is necessary to take into account the multiple visions of differently situated women' (Wibben 2011: 14). The absence of female combatants' voices renders current approaches towards peace and post-conflict inadequate (MacKenzie 2012: 3).

Strategies for Peace & Equality in Post-War: Formal & Informal Approaches

Women's informal peace activism has long been viewed as a prominent and 'acceptable way' for women to enter the conflict and post-conflict processes (Bouta *et al.* 2005). Case-studies from conflicts around the world, including Angola (Wilson 2005), Haiti (Merlet 2001), Liberia and Chechnya (Romanova and Sewell 2011), Mozambique (Jacobson 2005), North of Ireland (Cockburn 1998, 2007; Hinds 1999; Jacobson 2000), Palestine/Israel (Cockburn

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[29] For a more in-depth critique of 'maternal' standpoints, see Chapter Three in Miranda Alison (2009) *Women and Political Violence*; Carol Cohn's (2013) comprehensive and wide-ranging Introduction chapter to *Women & Wars*, and Jacobs, Jacobson & Marchbank's (2000) Introduction to *States of Conflict: Gender, Violence and Resistance*.

1998, 2007; Sharoni 2001), Peru (Cordero 2001), Rwanda (Baines 2005; Brown and Uwinez 2011), Sierra Leone (Bouta *et al*. 2005), South Africa (Hassim 2006), Sri Lanka (De Alwis 2001), Sudan (Kaufman and Williams 2011) and Zimbabwe (Mutisi 2011) all document the many instances where women have emerged from their 'traditional domestic role' and engaged in various methods of informal peace-building at a grassroots and community level.

Probably the most notable and more widely-known instance is that of Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, referred to earlier, who have protested since 1977 against the 'disappeared', who vanished at the hands of the Argentine regimes' political repression (Fisher 1989). Another, notable group are the Women in Black (WiB), who began by protesting against the actions of Israel within occupied Palestine in 1988, while also demonstrating solidarity with the Palestinian people, eventually growing to be an international organisation (Cockburn 2007). The Women of Greenham Common in England (Roseneil 1995), who protested against the installation of American nuclear weapons received international recognition for their enduring protest which lasted from 1983 until 2000. All three protests are noted for utilising gender and motherhood as a powerful symbols of informal resistance to violence and injustice within the normally male-dominated public spaces.

Liberal feminists have long-called for women's inclusion within existing institutions and frameworks. While normally associated with the sphere of formal politics, the liberal strategy of 'adding women' has gained vast currency among many strands of feminism in the field of conflict transition. Over the last fifteen years, diverse strands of socialist, radical and liberal feminists converged around the institutional inclusion of women as the optimum strategy in pursuit of a feminist peace. Contrasting with the liberal tenet that women have a right to participate by virtue of proportionality and equality, many radical feminists stress women's *difference* to men, arguing that 'men who plan wars should not be allowed to plan the peace' (Hunt & Posa 2001: 38). In other words, women of peace have a distinctly

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different perspective to bring to the negotiating table (Hammond-Callaghan 2011; Harris 2004; Hunt & Posa 2001). In particular, the aftermath of SCR 1325 sees swathes of feminist scholars building upon the political potential of the resolution by demanding the institutional inclusion of women (Anderlini 2007; Hammond-Callaghan 2011; Harris 2004; Hunt & Posa 2001; Porter 2003, 2007).

Some of those calling for the 'adding of women' within formal institutions cite the gender democratic deficit caused by women's exclusion, believing that 'women are half the global population and a critical part of society, and without them real and sustainable peace cannot be achieved' (Arostegui 2013: 535). Those striving to engage in the formal system argue that 'regardless of whether women have a positive or negative impact, they, like men, have a right to participation; it is a given' (Anderlini 2007: 3). The text of the resolution re-affirmed 'the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and peace-building……and the need to increase their role in decision-making'[30]. Explorations of SCR 1325 suggests that it offers vast political potential in which to challenge the status quo through institutional participation (Anderlini 2007: 71; Arostegui 2013; Hoewer 2013: 461; Hunt & Posa 2001: 39; Porter 2003: 253).

While the resolution ostensibly calls for the inclusion of *all* women in all approaches to conflict transformation, many critical feminists take issue with the fact that the discourse around the resolution invariably demands a particular *type* of 'woman' (El-Bushra 2007; Pankhurst 2003; Willett 2010). Despite the welcome shift away from the perpetual linkages between women and victimhood in favour of focusing on women's agency, some feminist scholars take issue with the ways in which the resolution conceptualised women as a moderate, positive voice for peace, which broadly speaking, reproduces gender typecasts

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[30] The full text of the resolution is available at http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf?OpenElement

(Gibbings 2011; Shepherd 2011; Willett 2010). These utopian representations, or 'essentialised visions' of women as 'bridge-builders' promotes a particular idea of what it means to be a woman or what is considered appropriate feminine behaviour, which can be used as a rationale to privilege certain voices and exclude others' (Gibbings 2011: 532-534).

In addition, the resolution is also critiqued for its representation of women solely in gendered terms, which fails to recognise how women are oppressed by intersections between gender and other social categories and structures (Pratt & Richter-Devroe 2011), while there is little or no discussion pertaining to masculinities or militarism (Whitworth 2004: 137). The gendered assumptions underpinning this discourse are premised on a:

> 'belief that women peace activists are united by several factors, including: a capacity to build bridges across political divides on the basis of shared experience; an interest, borne of their caring and social service roles, in the restoration of security; a shared experience of oppression which encourages in them an appreciation of the value of peace; their capacity as wives and mothers to influence other family members; and the fact that in most societies women have traditionally played mediation roles in violent conflict' (El-Bushra 2007: 142).

Moreover, SCR 1325 and the use of NAP's[31] invariably support a very militarised vision of security, which in many ways serves to legitimise (often pre-existing) post-conflict visions (McLeod 2011: 606-607). The contemporary legacy of SCR 1325 has re-energised the old liberal feminist adage of 'add women and stir', with many women's groups and feminist mobilising around gender mainstreaming and women's equal representation within formal modes of conflict transformation.

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[31] National Action Plans; under the resolution every member state is required to devise a NAP to ensure the resolution is fully complied with i.e. that women are included.

Furthermore, others argue that the resolution 'acts to accommodate tokenistic 'spaces' for alternative voices, claiming inclusiveness, when in fact it operates to compromise dissent, and renders women's voices and actions invalid' (Willet 2010: 144). The key issue for SCR 1325 is that it remain incredibly limited due to the flawed approach of 'mainstreaming gender in existing institutional and discursive frameworks that are still male-dominated by state-centric, patriarchal and militaristic practices' (Willet 2010: 149). Liberal and radical feminist demands for the institutional inclusion of women is problematic for feminists as it tends to take place on the terms laid out by the dominant discourse (Wibben 2011: 7). Even from an anti-militarist feminist position, the adding of women to existing structures of conflict transformation leaves the war system intact (Carol Cohn cited in Shepherd 2011: 515).

Willet argues that many of the groups behind SCR 1325 were undoubtedly 'inspired by more liberal interpretations of feminism' (2010: 148). Gender security and women's rights are represented as something that can be achieved through the application of liberal notions of *equality* (McLeod 2011: 606), rather than a radical challenge to the way war, conflict transition and international relations are currently devised and conducted. A key argument within this study is that while gender mainstreaming, or the adding of women to existing mechanisms for ending armed conflict, is important, it is also a rather limited terrain of political struggle. It is certainly a highly questionable approach in light of the fact that women are being 'added' to 'a process that clearly does not prioritise or value women's voices for peace' (Farr 2011: 55).

While many socialist, radical and liberal feminists energise around the 'inclusion of women' within institutional approaches to resolving armed conflict, it once again raises the perennial question of 'which women?' Such universal and generalised approaches neglect to cite exactly *which* women should be included and so the premise of their argument is based upon an assumption that a proportionate, incremental increase of women is a valid measure

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of women's input. In other words, regardless of the 'quality' of that input, any quantitative increase in women's participation is automatically equated with meaningful participation and, more importantly, assumes that *any* woman speaks for *all* women (Shepherd 2011: 510). In the realm of conflict transition, many caution against such hegemonic, generalised narratives because women cannot speak with one voice when it comes to war and peace (Karam 2001; Sales 1997).

Furthermore, there are, of course no guarantees that a greater presence of women would even lead to a sustained challenge in the masculine culture of such institutions in the short term, let alone prevent the re-emergence of conflict (Pankhurst 2003: 168). It appears that the overarching aim for many feminist scholars is to represent women's unified opposition to violence in order to build a strong case for their inclusion within formal peace processes. From a critical feminist perspective, there is a danger that embracing the 'acceptable' role of women as peace-maker risks diluting the overall feminist project. It is a position which 'fails to challenge the very stereotypes of masculinity and femininity which may need to be transformed if conflict is to be managed non-violently' (El-Bushra 2007: 141). As such, women's partiality for non-violence is often universally applied to all, leaving little space for other voices, particularly those who use armed actions as a form of resistance.

Institutionalising Women's Equality

In addition to women's roles 'in the prevention of war', SCR 1325 and much of the ensuing UN discourse stated that 'peace means equality between women and men'[32]. Conflict transition is often cited as a period of opportunity to construct a new post-war society, and the struggle for women's rights is unsurprisingly viewed by feminists as an important part of post-war reconstruction (Kaufman & Williams 2010; Meinjtes et al. 2001; Ni Aolain et al. 2011). For some, women's rights reside in constitutional commitments regarding gender

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[32] For the full text of the statement, see http://www.un.org/press/en/2000/20000308.sc6816.doc.html

equality and human rights for all (Bouta et. al. 2005; Deiana 2013; Mazaruna et al. 2005; Porter 2003, 2007; Side 2009). Others dismiss top-down affirmations as empty, gender-neutral rhetoric and instead stress the need for specific visions and strategies to meet women's distinct needs and strategies for transforming gender relations (Caprioli 2004; Dolgopol 2007; Ni Aolain et. al 2011; Meintjes et al. 2001; Turshen 2001.

Meredith Turshen succinctly sums up this debate in the following questions, 'does the consolidation of women's war-time gains depend on the state (such as legal reform) or on women's organisations and movements? Do women's post-war difficulties stem from the traditional gender order, or are war and peace simply two distinct terrains demanding different roles? (Turshen 2001: 79). Emboldened by the flurry of excitement caused by SCR 1325, the calls for 'adding women' to formal institutions holds much sway in the literature, particularly in the North of Ireland (for example see Buckley 2013; Deiana 2013; Galligan 2013; Side 2009). Feminists, who stress the importance of state-centric institutions as the central site for political struggle, focus on the use of gender quotas, women's inclusion within formal institutions or processes, constitutional guarantees of equality, equal pay in employment, among others. Gender equality therefore relates to equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women, men, girls, and boys (Bouta at al. 2005: 5; Mazaruna et al 2005: 13). Of particular favour are buzzwords such as 'gender sensitivity' and 'gender mainstreaming'.

Similar to the widespread celebrations regarding SCR 1325, many feminist scholars examining the North of Ireland were energised by the inclusion of a 'commitment to gender equality' clause, among others, within the 1998 GFA. This, along with the short-lived yet widely lauded women-only party, the NIWC, inspired a plethora of literature demanding gender equality through women's formal political participation and legislative guarantees (Cowell-Meyers 2003, 2008; Murtagh 2008; Side 2009). For some, the 'inclusion of gender

as a thematic issue in peace negotiations, creates the conditions for fostering a gender-equitable citizenship as the peace process evolves' (Deiana 2013: 400). Although the GFA predated SCR 1325, today the resolution now finds itself prominently utilised as a mechanism for the pursuit of women's formal inclusion as an effective means of securing equality (see Deiana 2013; Hoewer 2013; Ward 2009). Despite the substantial tide of optimism among many, institutional politics in the aftermath of the GFA has failed to produce substantive changes for women, where gender equality remains a subsidiary aspiration (Cockburn 2013; O'Keefe 2011, 2013).

Critical feminists take issue with the notion that the eradication of patriarchy somehow resides within the state-centric and institutional politics. Placing feminist faith in the machineries of the liberal state is perhaps surprising, given the abundance of feminist scholarship illustrating the limited capabilities of the state to deliver. Its function as a 'protection racket', safeguarding the interests of the already powerful is well documented (Pateman & Grosz 1986; Eisenstein 1988; Pateman 1988; Moller-Okin 1989; Brown 1995). Top-down approaches to conflict transition democracy, which invariably focuses on institutional democracy and the re-establishment of political rights and citizenship, are cited as providing limited results (Waylen 1994: 352). Others argue that 'elections and electoral systems have little real impact on inviting women and minorities as stakeholders in the power structures of a transitioning state' (Ni Aolain et. al 2011: 234), and so 'the institutionalisation of electoral democracy is by no means a sufficient guarantee that the emerging political structures will reflect popular interests' (Luciak 1999: 44).

Furthermore, the adding of women to existing structures risks the co-opting of women's struggle, running the risk of diluting feminist goals and objectives (Waylen 1994: 340), where the prescribed actions of quotas or gender mainstreaming 'is less ambitious, or at least less radical' (Ni Aolain et al. 2011: 12). Those of a more critical feminist perspective

appraise such approaches as insufficient to tackle the underlying causes of women's subordination (Dolgopol 2007). According to Meredith Turshen, 'women's expectations in the aftermath differ according to their experiences and engagement in conflict (Turshen 2001: 80), alerting us to the pitfalls of generic, universal prescriptions of what women's rights entails. Given this, we need to remain attuned to women's diverse needs by eschewing broad, generalised accounts which disguise differences. During the transition from war to peace, the rhetoric of equality and rights tends to mask the reconstruction of patriarchal power. Therefore equality with men can never adequately address the structural forces which undergird their subordination.

Feminist approaches advocating women's institutional inclusion retains significant weight among many and it remains the dominant approach within many scholarly studies, no more so than in the North of Ireland. Vast tracts of feminist research appear wedded to exploring this strategy, creating multiple blind-spots in the feminist vision of women and post-war activism. As the tide of optimism regarding the 'gender equality' affirmations within the GFA gives way to a bleaker appraisal in the North of Ireland, it is also accompanied by a widespread disappointment regarding the limited results of SCR 1325 thus far. It is therefore a significant time to examine other forms of political struggles in the post-war period, such as those by combatant women.

'Women Bridging the Divide': Transversal Politics

Transversal politics primarily emerged as an alternative strategy to the universalistic, essentialist approaches, which emphasised a singular identity of gender only. Identity politics serve as a mechanism for essentialising homogeneity, assuming that all persons who fall into a particular category share a common perspective (Yuval-Davis 1997, 2011). Transversalism is a type of feminist cross-community coalition politics, 'a kind of intersectional praxis'

(Byrne 2014: 113); 'a process that can on the one hand look for commonalities without being arrogantly universalist, and on the other affirm difference without being transfixed by it' (Cockburn & Hunter 1999: 18). In sum, the challenge for transversal politics is to remain cognisant of the ways in which women can enter into 'dialogue across difference' without asserting their collective identity in a manner which precludes their engagement with others (Yuval-Davis 2006: 199).

The method of transversal politics requires participants to negotiate multiple identities and recognise power differences. Such engagements are based on common emancipatory values, democratic decision-making processes and a tolerance of difference (Byrne 2014: 111). A benefit to its application within deeply polarised societies is that it uncovers how peace is really done, 'how some ordinary people arrange to fill the space between their national differences with words in place of bullets' (Cockburn 1998: 1). According to Pryse, a transversal methodology allows feminists to theorise from women's lives while remaining cognisant of the differences between and among them (2000: 109).

Transversalism is rooted in standpoint epistemology which recognises that the world is seen differently from varied positions; such knowledge is 'unfinished', not invalid. In order to enhance these unfinished 'knowledges', dialogue between differentially positioned people is deemed the ideal strategy for epistemological production. While transversal politics is widely utilised in diverse fields such as global democracy and social movements (Eschle 2001), and in transnational feminist methods (Giles & Hyndman 2004), much of the feminist literature tends to focus on its use in deeply polarised sites of conflict such as Israel/Palestine and the North of Ireland (Byrne 2014; Cockburn 1998, 2013, 2104; Roulston 2000; Porter 2000, 2007; Murtagh 2008).

Feminist cross-community organising is often extoled for demonstrating ways in which women can work across deeply polarised communities. While the theoretical kernel of transversal politics resides with intersectional feminist Nira Yuval-Davis (1994, 1997, 2011), others, such as Cynthia Cockburn undertook field studies in order to 'fill the transversal container'. Cynthia Cockburn's landmark study of women's groups in the North of Ireland and in Palestine/Israel in *The Space Between Us* concurs that evidence abounds of 'cooperation between women of polarised ethno-national groups, contradicting norms in their countries, where those identifications have been mobilised for war' (1998: 211). Her study advocates that women can organise around shared political interests, and therefore reduce the significance of ethnic difference and the plausibility of nationalist discourses (1998: 226). In addition, Cockburn believes that transversal approaches tackle the 'dangerous belief in universal sisterhood and a relativist stress on difference that dooms us to division and fragmentation' (1998: 8). Ironically, the emergence of the NIWC is lauded both for its transversal politics *and* its claims to a universal sisterhood during the formal peace process in the North of Ireland.

Eilish Rooney (2006) takes issue with transversal notions of 'dialogue across difference', arguing that the women depicted, constituted and claimed by the dominant discourse are of course women who appear to be uncomplicated by sectarian or class tensions. Often the women depicted 'fit an ideal picture of one who is not involved in discredited politics; or at least not involved through her agency or consent' (Ashe 2006: 360). Other scholarly appraisals of transversal politics deem it as an essentialist form of 'lowest common denominator politics' (Hackett 1995; O'Keefe 2013), which papers over the conflictual experiences of many women in the North and attempts to reduce women's issues solely to those perceived as being universally shared by women (O'Keefe 2013: 151).

The risk of identifying cross-community political groups as the vehicle for advancing a feminist agenda is that 'it leaves intact those exclusionary national political parties that have proven hostile to women and feminist concerns and will survive long after conflict has ended' (Byrne 2014: 117). While cross-community organising has significant benefits around issues of health, education, employment, at the heart of such organising is the assumption that women, more than men, can abdicate from their national identities and organise around gender issues only. The relinquishing of national identities as espoused in transversal politics neglects the ways in which feminist concerns are also pursued within nationalist movements, among others. Championing only those women who refuse identity politics and who are located in what Tickner calls 'women's spheres' risks excluding the perspectives of other politically concerned women from the peace process' (Byrne 2014).

While transversal approaches differ to other feminist strategies, it also bears many similarities. The discourse of women as reconciler and bridge-builder, often promoted and utilised by institutional bodies, underpins transversalism and is rooted in the belief that there are no power differences between women. It also presents the state as a neutral arbiter, and so prevents women from confronting issues of state violence and breaches of human rights (Little 2002: 174). Calls for the erasure of difference between women and/or the adding of women to existing structures, stems from a 'strategic essentialism that resonates more with first-wave feminism than contemporary feminist debates' (Little 2002: 164). The vast focus of feminist research on the informal activism of transversal politics or the formal strides of the NIWC within institutional politics bequeaths many knowledge gaps in the field of women and conflict transition in the North of Ireland. To date, there has yet to be a detailed exploration in the North of Ireland of those women who pursue their post-war endeavours as former combatants within a non-state nationalist movement. Given the high levels of academic attention to women's post-war formal, informal and transversal organising for

peace, it is clear, either by default or design, that certain types of women's activism are deemed more acceptable to explore than others. It is now an opportune moment to expand the feminist lens in order to encapsulate the unique experiences of republican women and conflict transition.

Female Combatants, Nationalist Women & Conflict Transition

Despite the fact that combatant women and conflict transition remain relatively under-researched, there is a significant, yet limited swathe of research. Recent studies on female combatants and conflict transition tend to focus on the ways in which women can be best included within Demilitarisation, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programs. DDR programmes are now widely recognised as an integral element of peace processes. At a basic level, they constitute a process whereby combatants voluntarily turn in arms at designated centres and begin a process of demilitarisation and reintegration. The key debates within women and DDR, as detailed below, centre firstly on the ways in which women are victimised and excluded by androcentric norms and secondly, on the various strategies to remedy such predicaments (Anderlini 2007; Bouta et al. 2005; MacKenzie 2012; Mazurana and Cole 2013; Ni Aolain *et al.* 2011).

The UN defines DDR as 'a process that contributes to security and stability in a post-conflict recovery context by removing weapons from the hands of combatants, taking the combatants out of military structures and helping them to integrate socially and economically into society by finding civilian livelihoods' (Mazurana and Cole 2013: 197). DDR programs usually offer incentives for the handing over of weapons in the form of material goods or cash payments. In terms of reintegration, ex-combatants require skills assessments, training, education and assistance in grants and loans. Demobilisation refers to the process whereby militant groups are either downsized or completely disbanded (Mazurana and Cole 2013:

200), while reintegration programs are designed to return ex-combatants to the roles or circumstances that existed previously (Maulden 2011: 75). Ostensibly DDR programs are presented as a neutral and inclusive program for *all* combatants. They are in fact however, highly gendered processes.

A common strategy for DDR is the 'one person, one gun' qualification which severely discounts and marginalises the other important roles that many women play within armed groups such as communications, weapons transportation, cooking and cleaning. Their prevalence within such roles however, ensures that large numbers of women and girls are excluded by such rigid criteria. Gendered assumptions among DDR officials, coupled with the very narrow definition of a combatant as a 'person with a gun' is 'over-simplistic' (MacKenzie 2012: 54) and often leads to discrimination against female fighters, particularly those in support roles. In addition to this, communications of DDR programs often go through commanders, a process which locates significant control and power in them to determine who is eligible, which leaves the process open to corruption and deceit (Mazurana 2004; 2005). In some instances, because guns can literally be traded in for cash, women were either ordered or tricked into handing over weapons before DDR.

From a gender perspective, the three main problems with DDR are firstly, their narrow definition of a combatant which inevitably excludes many women and girls, particularly those engaged in the many support networks, secondly, social stigma around normative gender roles and thirdly, the gendered training programs available to women and girls. Social stigma surrounding former female soldiers in post-war societies meant that publicly declaring their combatant role during the war acted as a disincentive for most women to engage in DDR. It appears that combatant women are considered to have stepped beyond their assigned gender role and are thus labelled 'deviants'. Invariably, women who

engaged in a combatant role are reluctant to publicly declare so because of concerns around 'marriagability' resulting in a low uptake of DDR programs by women (MacKenzie 2012).

In addition to the rigid qualifying criteria and social stigma, the majority of training and education programs offered to female combatants such as soap-making, tailoring and catering, ensure that future roles exist within traditional patriarchal norms and do little to disturb the gender hierarchy. By encouraging women and girls back to their pre-conflict roles, 'any new roles or positions of authority they may have held during the conflict are stripped from them, and any opportunities to rethink and reshape gender stereotypes and hierarchies are destroyed' (McKenzie 2012: 73-74). Reintegration programs are often criticised for their lack of attention to women's needs and concerns, specifically around issues of health, justice, security, educational and economic opportunities. So even where women and girls are successful in gaining entry to DDR programs they often find their needs and concerns are not addressed. Training programs offered to women and girls included low-skilled, low level educational sets.

Furthermore, extensive research on DDR processes reveals that the failure to recognise women's multiple military roles has major implications for gender relations in the aftermath of armed conflict (Anderlini 2007; Bouta et al. 2005; Mazaruna et al 2005; Mazaruna 2013; Ni Aolain et al 2011). The invisibility of female combatants in the post-war period is not an innocuous oversight. Feminist scholars of DDR document the perilous consequences that female combatants endure as a result of their marginalisation in the post-war narrative. First, by dismissing their role as armed protagonists, it depoliticises their actions during the war-time period, rendering them as followers as opposed to actors (Mazurana & Cole 2013). Second, depicting women and girls as non-combatants ensures that males only are deemed the main security threat. This is what MacKenzie refers to as a process of 'de-securitising women' (2012: 50) Third, by portraying the war-time roles as

operating along normative gender roles it follows that the transition away from armed conflict will see a "return to normal", that being a patriarchal order. Depicting men as the real and sole fighter ensures that women and girls are rarely considered a security concern and therefore are not a priority for conflict transition processes (MacKenzie 2012: 50; Mazurana & Cole 2013: 212).

While such explorations offer incredibly rich insights into the gendered and often patriarchal assumptions underpinning such programs, they also tend to implicitly re-establish a link between women and victimhood. Megan MacKenzie takes issue with some of the recent developments regarding DDR, citing the reports of women 'being left behind' by gendered DDR programs as 'oversimplified' (2012: 86). Much of the current debate focuses on women's right to be included in order to yield the same benefits and services as their male counterparts (Anderlini 2007). Yet again the dominant demand appears to be the inclusion of women within existing, top-down processes in order to benefit as equally as men do. A significant limitation is that the focus appears to be on policy formation, program design, all of which emanate from a top-down position which invariably neglects women's voices and agency. The key to women's empowerment is that their voices and experiences must be heard, something largely overlooked within many attempts to explore the post-war experiences of female fighters including DDR programs (MacKenzie 2012). Hence even in the case of female combatants, where women may emerge from armed conflict with consolidated gains, the overwhelming focus is on their victimisation and exclusion from formal DDR processes. This effectively reinvigorates the linkages between women and victimhood.

While DDR is an important part of the story concerning female combatants and conflict transition, focusing solely on their 'demobilisation' as armed fighters neglects the ways in which combatant women use consolidated gains from war-time experiences to

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organise politically in conflict transition. Moreover, such approaches also rely on top-down structures to illuminate women's war-time roles at the expense of examining how women *themselves* conceptualise their war-time roles and sacrifices. This shortfall creates the need for comprehensive studies of the transition of female combatants in its entirety. In particular, the existing gaps in research ensures that the ways in which female combatants organise their post-war political struggles for peace and equality remain largely under-studied and less understood.

Female Combatants: Their Political Struggles for Peace & Equality in Post-War Scenarios

Despite their rhetorical promises, revolutionary nationalist movements do not have a good record with regards to women's emancipation; promises to improve the status of women and end their subordination have gone largely unfulfilled (Luciak 1999; McClintock 1993; Seidman 1993). A key departure now for feminist scholars examining nationalist women in conflict transition is not to explore the ways in which male-led movements' position women, but the ways in which nationalist women *themselves* organise their political struggle in their pursuit of peace (O'Keefe 2013). Field research on female combatants and nationalist women from Palestine (Abdulhadi 1998; Farr 2011; Holt 2003; Richter-Devroe 2012), South Africa (Seidman 1993, 1999, 2003) and Latin America (Chinchilla 1990; Luciak 1999; Molyneux 1985) eschew top-down explorations and instead, focus on how women themselves pursue their political struggles in the post-war period.

Female FMLN members in post-war El Salvador re-energised their semi-autonomous activism during conflict transition period in order to ensure women's demands were visible (Luciak 1999: 48). The post-war period in Nicaragua witnessed significant gains for women there due to the formation of AMNLAE, a mass-based women's popular organisation which ran in parallel to other Sandinista organisations. In order to consolidate such gains, Chinchilla

advocates for vigorous grassroots pressure as well as international solidarity and links to other feminist groups (1990: 393). A common trend across case-studies of female combatants and nationalist women in Latin America is their visions of women's rights as something far more than participation in formal politics. Issues of health care, education, childcare, gender-based violence, struggle against sexism, the burden of unpaid domestic labour are all consistently cited as barriers to women's emancipation (Chinchilla 1990). There remains a perpetual failure of formal democratisation to deliver any meaningful change for women's immediate needs or their interests in ending women's subordination (Reif 1986; Waylen 1994)

In South Africa, ANC women organised in semi-autonomous groups to pursue women's rights alongside the anti-apartheid struggle agenda, broadening the political agenda of the ANC. Many of these demands resided in the immediacy (or what Molyneux refers to as practical gender concerns) of the State's failure to provide basic resources. The feminist demands which emerge within the ANC in the early 1990's and throughout the transition emanated not from the few at a leadership level but from the grassroots popular base from which the ANC draws its support (Seidman 1993: 315). The pressure to question male control in the transition comes from women who have organised independently or semi-autonomously, and who clearly insist that their gender-specific needs be addressed alongside the national question (Britton 2002; Seidman 1993: 315).

Field research from Palestine also reveals a distinct trend of regression as institutional politics re-emerges. The gendered political structures of the Palestinian Authority (PA) presented restrictions and limitations for Palestinian women. The numerous case-studies from Palestine, particularly in the aftermath of the 1993 Oslo Accord, illustrate the ways in which nationalist women continue their political activism, framing it in a way which challenges many gendered assumptions. While operating to resist ongoing Israeli aggression, Palestinian

women also face the constraints of conservative gender ideologies within their own movement (Farr 2011: 545). Palestinian women channel their energies into all aspects of women's lives including health, education, legal literacy, income generation, advocacy of rights, among others (Farr 2011: 545). Such activism has increased women's role in public life and to some extent has challenged patriarchal control, helping Palestinians understand the interconnections between public, militarised violence and violence in the home (Farr 2011: 545). 'Most practically, they argue that the gap between where ordinary people find themselves and where politicians focus is so significant that nothing decided at the top will have meaning when attempts are made to apply it on the ground' (Farr 2011: 546)

In light of this, women's autonomous organising in the face of post-war patriarchal barriers offers women the best site and opportunities for continuing their political struggle (Holt 2003; Richter-Devroe 2012). Palestinian female resistance activism can potentially affect social and political change; the underlying gender identity of the 'courageous female protestor' also challenges the reductionist gender binaries of male/protector and female/protected which undergird traditional conceptualisations of political activity (Richter-Devroe 2012: 182). The case of Palestinian women demonstrates that different groups of women live different experiences and wage their struggle for emancipation according to their location and needs (Abdulhadi 1998: 669).

Sophie Richter-Devroe (2012) argues that female popular resistance by nationalist women's autonomous groups in Palestine forces us to rethink what 'doing politics' actually means for women; it challenges established norms associated with women's politics. Firstly, women's grassroots activism within the normally male-dominated public sphere challenges the patriarchal notion that women are valued for their reproductive capacity; their bodies can also be weapons of resistance. Secondly, their grassroots organising challenges the notion that women's politics is best channelled through formal institutions. It is a radical alternative

to the male-dominated social and political cultures in Palestine. In other words, gender equality tackled solely through legislative or formal guarantees changes little in the daily lives of women where they experience 'other forms' of violence, including from religious traditions, domestic violence (Farr 2011; Holt 2003).

In the North of Ireland, many accounts of republican and loyalist women's participation tend to focus on their actions during the course of the conflict, not on their post-combat experiences. The important, yet limited existing research on their post-war experiences however uncovers insightful narratives and experiences. While cited as playing a much lesser role than their counterparts in republican groups, loyalist women are now the subject of increasing research regarding their transitionary experiences (McEvoy 2009; Potter 2014). In general, loyalist women carried the guns, loyalist men used them (Alison 2004), and so women's roles within loyalist organisations mirrored the traditionalist patriarchal social structure (Potter 2014: 9). Sandra McEvoy (2009) finds that loyalist female combatants were marginalised not only by their political opponents but also by their male comrades who deliberately restricted their participation in the subsequent peace process, thus creating a 'structural barrier' to further political participation. The absence of combatant women at the bargaining table, according to McEvoy, ensures that peace agreements are unrepresentative and therefore risk being untenable. That said, in the aftermath of the ceasefires in 1994, the PUP[33] (the political wing of the UVF) actively promoted women's issues and female membership within the party and is one of the few parties in the North of Ireland to adopt a right to choose position for women's reproductive rights.

Studies of republican women in conflict transition thus far reveal a gender differentiation within their communities around the issue of prisoner releases whereby communities treated them rather differently, as *female* ex-prisoners (Alison 2009). Likewise,

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[33] Progressive Unionist Party – political wing of the Loyalist militant Ulster Volunteer Force.

Sara McDowell (2008) asserts that republican commemoration since the advent of peace has continued to 'project a hyper-masculine interpretation of the past (and present)' (2008: 336), while Fidelma Ashe (2009) illuminates how gender justice and gender equity have been side-lined, reinforcing men's positions as leaders in the community and 'reaffirm[ing] male hegemony in communities in the conflict transformation period', thereby resulting in processes which 'privilege male interpretations of the past' (2009: 310). Recent research suggests a back-peddling by the republican leadership with regards to the position of women in the aftermath of the GFA (O'Keefe 2013). This certainly raises pertinent questions regarding women's political activism within the republican movement as it radically shifts away from 'revolutionary' standpoints towards a more mainstream position. Given the dearth of attention to republican women and their post-war experiences, this research represents an important intervention in the field of women and conflict transition in the North of Ireland. In sum, this thesis seeks to build upon the burgeoning and important field of combatant women and post-war scenarios by broadening out the scope to encompass the entire transition experiences of republican female combatants.

Peace, Security and Equality: Feminist Theoretical Interventions

Much of the recent scholarship on peace and security studies is rooted in early feminist IR theory which undertook a critical feminist approach to mainstream IR studies (Enloe 1989; Peterson & Runyan; Steans 1997; Sylvester 1994; Tickner 1992; Whitworth 1994). Early IR scholars such as Sandra Whitworth, Cynthia Enloe and Ann Tickner went beyond merely demanding the inclusion of women and instead worked as diligent exponents of the ways in which particular gender orders are utilised in order to underpin the dominant political structures of IR. Prevailing power structures utilise and mobilise masculinities and femininities in particular ways which serve to legitimise and consolidate a particular vision of peace and security which serves their own interests (Whitworth 1994: 26).

In order to understand the varied and uneven positions of women and men in conflict transition, we need to examine the gendered practices, meanings and discourse utilised by mainstream approaches. Feminist IR scholars are centrally concerned with problematizing androcentric definitions of security. As women are generally marginal to state-centric power structures, many feminist definitions start with the individual and/or community rather than the nation-state or international political system (Tickner 1997). Security is re-conceptualised as multidimensional and multilevel to include a broader definition of what constitutes violence - physical, structural, cultural and ecological (Sylvester 1994; Tickner 1992, 1997)

By interrogating how gender pervades all aspects of militarism at every level, Enloe (1990) exposes how links between patriarchy and militarism fundamentally shape women's lives and inform androcentric interpretations of gender roles, peace and security. Echoing much of these sentiments, Tickner argued that the business of war, International Relations and conflict transformation is primarily devised and conducted from the perspective of men and masculinity (Tickner 1992: 5). In particular, women's role in state security amounted to little more than that of the "protected", defended by men and the state (1992: 28). According to Tickner, gender inequalities fundamentally inform traditional norms within IR and security studies resulting in a system of 'protectors and the protected' (1992: 128). In challenging the highly state-centric conventional approaches, Tickner advocates a multi-dimensional approach to security, broadening definitions to include not just military wars but also domestic violence, environmental security, rape and poverty. Genuine security requires not only the absence of war but also the elimination of unjust social relations (Tickner 1992: 128). To overcome this, feminist theories must go beyond injecting or 'adding' women's experiences (Tickner 1992: 18) and instead involve a transformation of existing unequal gender relations.

Building upon the highly influential work of Whitworth, Enloe and Tickner, there is now a vast body of feminist work challenging the androcentric discourse and meanings of peace and security. The existing state of knowledge provides incredibly useful concepts and categories, offering valuable insights into how women re-conceptualise peace. Given that feminists take a broad approach in defining conflict and violence as all forms of exploitation, marginalisation, and oppression (Reardon 1993: 71), it is unsurprising that feminist visions of peace also conceptualise peace in more profound ways. A common distinctive characteristic of feminist visions of peace is the consensus that peace is not merely the absence of 'conventional violence' but is a broader tackling of all forms of violence and discrimination (Anderlini 2007; Bouta et al. 2005: Cockburn 2004; Karam 2001; Kelly 2000; Moser 2001; Pankhurst 2008; Porter 2007; Reardon 1993). In many respects, the emphasis on social justice provides a theoretical link between women's pursuit of peace and their struggle for emancipation, arguing that a genuine peace 'is the antithesis of exploitation, marginalisation, and oppression. Ending discrimination against women and achieving peace are mutually interdependent, virtually inseparable goals' (Reardon 1993: 71).

Of particular importance to feminists is the work of Galtung (1969) and Lederach (1997) which distinguished between a negative and a positive peace. While the former adheres strictly to conventional ideas around ending armed conflict, the latter encompasses structures and cultures of violence which pervade the so-called peace time period. In many respects the linking of peace and social justice not only responds to the prevailing narrow trend within traditional, male-dominated approaches, it also highlights the 'invisible violence' daily experienced by many women (Caprioli 2004). As a consequence of feminist centralising of social justice, the struggle for peace is conceptualised as a struggle for humane and equitable social conditions, particularly in areas of poverty, exploitation, education, housing and ecological well-being (Anderlini 2007; Reardon 1993). Despite the importance

of advancing the linkages between peace and social justice, such theorising however tends to function within a dichotomous frame of masculine values of ending armed violence and feminine values of social justice and ethics of care.

Regardless of dualistic problems, a vast body of work documenting the many instances of violence against women in the aftermath (and of course during) war challenges the prevailing discourse of 'post-conflict' or a 'return to normal' (Pillay 2001). Female insecurity and exposure to various acts of violence during the so-called 'peace time' indicates the androcentric bias within mainstream conflict resolution processes, particularly levels of sexual violence which remain high in the aftermath of war-time violence (Handrahan 2004; M'Cormack-Hale 2012: 8). 'Post-Conflict' is therefore reconceptualised by feminists as a period of continued violence and insecurity for women (McLeod 2011: 599), where they remain socially, politically and economically marginalised and exposed to various forms of physical violence, which paradoxically appears to increase in the aftermath of war (Cockburn 2013; Karam 2001; Kelly 2000; Krog 2001).

Drawing on the idea of a continuum of violence (Cockburn 2004; Moser 2001) and seeking to broaden the definition of violence away from that solely associated with conventional war, Pillay (2001) identifies four underlying causes involved in post-war gender violence: inequality of power, the social acceptance of violence, the social construction of masculinity, and economic power, all of which she terms as 'structural violence'. An awareness of 'structural violence' therefore challenges the traditional notion of peace and alerts us to the ways that states and/or groups can exercise power and domination over others without recourse to weapons (Cockburn 2001: 17). Jacobson (2013) points to significant evidence illustrating that in the aftermath of conflict, patriarchal forces are at work to disempower and marginalise women active in a myriad of roles throughout the war, so much so, that what is presented as 'peace' is in fact what Pankhurst (2008) terms a 'gendered

peace'. For women therefore, there is no post-conflict as such; there is no 'aftermath' (Meintjes *et al.* 2001).

While feminist scholarly interventions expose the myopic masculinity within the structures and discourses of mainstream peace and security studies, they also need to remain attuned to the differences between women in how they visualise peace and security. If we are serious about including women's perspective and experiences of war and conflict transition, then highly generalised narratives based on gendered assumptions provide limited understandings of how differentially positioned women visualise peace. 'The actions, insights and experiences of war women comprise a differentiated politics that some feminists now investigate in the spirit of bringing all manner of gender politics and women into the study of international relations' (Sylvester 2010: 609). In the North of Ireland, the literature pertaining to women and conflict transition remains incredibly light on female combatants and their unique standpoint. This is the 'differentiated politics' which Christine Sylvester (2010) refers to.

While there is a broad consensus among feminists regarding the androcentric bias within mainstream definitions of peace, there are vast differences in how women's security can be conceptualised and realised. Notwithstanding the reformulation of peace, away from state-centric concerns to a more human-centred approach, the prescribed action from some feminist scholars is the equal participation of all citizens within existing structures and discourses (Anderlini 2007; Porter 2007). Sustainable security, they assert, is far more likely when gender equality and human rights are considered within institutional approaches through the discourse of 'human security'.

Critical feminists however caution against such strategies citing the gender neutrality of its discourse, the role of the state as a structure of inequality, and the unavoidable

generalisations regarding women as a homogenous group with similar needs (Caprioloi 2004; Ellerby 2013; Hudson 2005, 2009). At the heart of this school of feminist thought is a scepticism to any notion that the state or formal institutions are capable of providing women's security, given that all are implicated by virtue of their role in delivering a 'negative' peace. Much of traditional, male-dominated security theory assumes that security of the state is a pre-condition for security of the individual. Many feminists have called for a more 'bottom-up' approach arguing that gender inequality itself is a direct cause of outbreaks of armed conflict (Caprioli 2000; Enloe 2005; Hudson 2009). In many respects, 'security threats include not only war and international violence, but also domestic violence, rape, poverty, gender subordination, and ecological destruction' (Sjoberg 2010: 4).

Furthermore, a generic rights based approach is criticised as an insufficient guarantee of women's security and equality. Research has demonstrated how women's security is systematically violated in both the public and private spheres, and that legal equality in the public sphere cannot lead to women's security without equality in the private sphere (Caprioli 2004: 412; Cockburn 1998). In addition, there are consequences for representing women as a group with similar needs and interests under the rubric of 'human rights' as it masks differences within that 'group', failing to recognise multiple and overlapping identities (Caprioli 2004; Hudson 2005, 2009). Despite institutional declarations of rights and equality, critical human security feminists caution against highly generalised approaches and the pitfalls of essentialism. In particular they argue that while most democratic countries ostensibly provide equality to all citizens, few, however 'can argue that all citizens of democracies, regardless of race, socio-economic status, sex, religion, etc., benefit from equality' (Caprioli 2004: 416). Such inequality at differing levels experienced by differentially positioned women breeds structural violence, a primary impediment to women's security (Caprioli 2004; Ellerby 2013). While many feminists laud formal

affirmations of equality and human rights, there is a real danger that 'collapsing femininity and masculinity into the term 'human' conceals the gendered underpinnings of security practices. The term 'human' is presented as though it is gender-neutral, but very often it is an expression of masculine' (Hudson 2005: 157). In other words, women's and men's security are assumed to be identical (Caprioli 2004: 411).

While these approaches provide a major contribution to how peace and security are conceptualised away from the needs of the state towards the needs of people, they fail to address how combatant women conceptualise peace and security. Laura Sjoberg argues that a critical reformulation or redefining of traditional notions of security occurs through explorations of new or previously neglected subjects, including combatant women (2010: 4). Recognising and exploring the experiences and needs of overlooked groups such as female soldiers and combatants adds new insights to ongoing debates regarding human security as well as highlighting the limitations of anchoring approaches in highly generalised or universal accounts (Fox 2004). As feminist scholars continue to contest and debate reformulations of peace and security, the existing body of work on women in the North of Ireland has yet to explore the visions of peace from female combatants there. This thesis seeks to redress this shortfall.

Conclusion

A critical exploration of the current literature pertaining to women and conflict transition demonstrates vast knowledge gaps owing to the relative lack of attention to combatant women. I am not suggesting that the pursuit of ending wars or the meaningful participation of women within existing frameworks is not a legitimate objective. It is deeply problematic however, when those visions and objectives gain a hegemonic grip and assumes universality among women's experiences, needs and interests. This chapter questioned the primacy of

feminist interest in this type of activism compared to interest in combatant women. The main argument of this chapter centred on the gaps produced by the hegemonic normative understanding of 'women waging peace' and the limits of the 'fix-all' solution of women's institutional inclusion. Its hegemonic status means we can miss out on other informative and useful perspectives and experiences of differentially positioned women. By bringing combatant women into view and taking their lives and experiences seriously, we are adding standpoints which allow for a more holistic examination of the ways in which *all* women organise for peace and equality in post-war scenarios. Moreover, 'if we fail to pay close attention to women - all sorts of women - one will miss who wields power and for what ends' (Enloe 2014: 9). If we are serious about examining all manifestations of patriarchal power in conflict transition, then the experiences of republican women can build upon existing research and add significant new insights to ongoing debates regarding women's post-war political organising.

The immense focus afforded to top-down approaches leaves little room for those who wish to pursue a more transformative political agenda using power from below. As the euphoria which initially greeted SCR 1325 gives way to a disenchanted evaluation, it is an opportune time to explore alternative perspectives and standpoints. In particular, given that the GFA's institutional guarantees of women's rights and equality failed to produce any substantive changes in the North of Ireland, a suitable moment arises in which to examine other spaces of women's political activism. This chapter concludes that the existing feminist research over-relies on analysing pool of women's peace activism and perspectives. In short we need to extend our interest to the exploration of republican women.

Chapter Four-Women and the Irish Peace Process

Introduction

The signing of the GFA in 1998 was met with a widespread sense of relief and sanguine optimism that the Troubles[34] as they had been prior to the agreement were finally over. Undoubtedly, the formal process which produced that agreement was top-down and male-dominated. While some assert that women and gender were not issues for the formal peace process (Ward 2006), others have argued that women and gender equality were both visible and meaningfully included within the formal peace process, due largely to vibrant civil society activism and the participation of the NIWC within negotiations (Deiana 2013: 400; Fearon 2000; Ward 2005). Despite the widespread elation among many feminists towards the GFA and its potential to deliver gender equality, a consensus of contemporary appraisals concur that it produced limited results, where little has changed for women in the North of Ireland (Cockburn 2013; Cowell-Meyers 2008; Deiana 2013; Murtagh 2008; O'Keefe 2013; Side 2009). Among the widely-lauded triumphs of the GFA was the commitment to gender equality and a formal recognition of women's right to political participation.

In the aftermath of the GFA however, the euphoria and optimism expressed by many feminist groups and women's organisations (but not all) gave way to a bleaker post-agreement society. The application of liberal notions of equality within formal structures consistently failed to live up to their promise (Cowell-Meyers 2008; Deiana 2013; Murtagh 2008; Side 2009). The rhetoric regarding a more gender equal society remains unfulfilled, with many concurring that there is little substantive change in the lives of women (Cockburn

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[34] There is a vast amount of academic and mainstream accounts relating to all aspects of the Troubles. For debates regarding the roots of the conflict, see Colin Coulter's (1999) *Contemporary Northern Irish Society*, Brendan O'Leary and John McGarry's (1995) *Explaining Northern Ireland*, and Jenifer Todd and Joseph Ruane's (1996) *The Dynamics of Conflict in Northern Ireland*. For an entire overview of both the Troubles and the peace process, see Fergal Cochrane's (2013) *Northern Ireland: The Reluctant Peace*.

2013; O'Keefe 2011, 2013). In sum, the elite-centred and male-dominated peace process effectively failed to produce the transformative change expected by many feminist groups and women's organisations. This chapter explores the peace process over the last twenty-five years. The objective of the chapter is to first, contextualise this research study of republican women in conflict transition and second, to provide the reader with an overview of the main events and elements which comprised the North of Ireland's formal peace process.

The main story here is one in which the vast majority of citizens are excluded from any meaningful input to the formal peace process. Despite the numerous efforts of differentially positioned women across the North to radically alter the prevailing state-centric agenda, the top-down, male-dominated approach effectively produced a peace with little social or political transformation for women. The chapter first examines the period covering the tentative moves to end armed conflict in 1988 right up the first round of political party negotiations in 1996. These formative steps towards a ceasefire were clandestine and exclusively male, a pattern which dominated the entire peace process. I then move on to examine the ways in which various groups of women (non-republican and republican alike) organised in order to broaden the narrow, state-centric agenda to encompass issues which directly impacted upon women. The following section deals with the GFA negotiations. Despite the presence of the NIWC, the 'inclusive talks' was a wholly male-dominated affair, primarily focused on state-centric concerns regarding military weaponry, political institutional design and state security. While the agreement did make reference to women's equality and their right to political participation, such affirmations were largely aspirational and rhetorical. Low levels of women's formal participation, high-levels of violence against women, the absence of reproductive rights and their concentration in low-paid, precarious labour reveals that little has changed for women in the North of Ireland. Given the style and substance of the formal peace process, such a downcast conclusion is therefore unsurprising.

The Beginning of the End of the 'Long War'

If the 'Troubles' represented the 'long war' then the formal peace process which emerged in the early 1990's proved equally as enduring in terms of its longevity. It is over twenty-five years since the first meeting between Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams and SDLP[35] leader John Hume[36]. While many cite the 1981 Hunger Strikes as a seminal moment in turning republicans in an 'un-armed' direction, certainly Sinn Féin's decision to drop its policy of abstentionism in the South of Ireland in 1986 was indicative of the party's future intentions (Bean 2007; Maillot 2005; Moloney 2002). While Sinn Féin's electoral gains were relatively modest (10.2% in 1982 Northern Ireland Local Assembly elections), the upsurge in popular support for the party caused much disconcertion within the mainstream political system. The threat of Sinn Féin overtaking the moderate SDLP as the main nationalist party was a daunting, yet quite a real prospect. In response, the Dublin and London governments signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985, ostensibly giving Dublin a role in the 'security affairs' of the Northern Ireland state. In reality, the agreement was more about stemming the rise of Sinn Féin by attempting to boost the popularity of constitutional nationalism. Unionists and Loyalists were incandescent with rage over granting such a role to the government in the Republic of Ireland[37].

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[35] Social and Democratic Labour Party; a moderate, constitutional Irish nationalist party based in the North of Ireland.

[36] Republicans claim that John Hume met three representatives of the IRA in 1985, some three years before Adams. http://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/8349

[37] While there is an historical antagonism between unionists in the north and the state in the south, granting the southern government a say in the affairs of the northern state was viewed as apocalyptical and affirmed their long-held suspicions of the intentions of both the Dublin and London governments. In addition, the Southern state's apparent lack of zeal in pursuing IRA personnel in their jurisdiction ensured that accusations of harbouring terrorists were also levelled against the authorities there.

Talks between the leaders of Sinn Féin and the SDLP are widely cited as the beginning of moves towards a peace[38]. Notwithstanding the fact that these talks remained a complete secret until 1992, they nevertheless paved the way for future contacts. Moreover, it was concrete evidence that some within the republican leadership were attempting to move out of their militant straitjacket and build alliances with other Irish nationalists, in what would be later dubbed the 'pan-nationalist front'[39]. The seeds of what would become the peace process, however, were shrouded in secrecy, with the citizens of the North excluded and unaware of the content of these discussions. It undoubtedly set the precedent for the way in which the peace process would evolve, characterised by clandestine talks, hidden agendas and 'constructive ambiguity'. In addition it was clear that it would be mostly men who were doing the negotiating.

Despite these tentative engagements by republicans, armed conflict continued, although at a lower level than the intensity of the early 1970's. The early engagements between the republican leadership and John Hume (SDLP) indicated awareness by the former that outright military victory by the IRA was highly unlikely. While the strategy of the IRA in the 1980's was to 'sicken the Brits' as opposed to militarily defeating them, the IRA's military capacity had significantly diminished due to longer prison sentences, infiltration by state informers and a general war weariness. Unquestionably, by the late 1980's Britain had militarily and politically contained the Provisional republican movement (Bean 2007: 183).

It would be folly however, to write the IRA off as a spent force. In the early 1990's, it launched a ferocious bombing campaign in England, from mortar attacks at the heart of

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[38] Although they are less known, Sinn Féin engaged in talks with the Catholic church in 1986, possibly even 1985. A participant in this research confirmed her role as part of the republican talks team which met the Catholic church several times prior to the John Hume discussions in 1988.

[39] Ed Moloney's (2002) *A Secret History of the IRA* contains fascinating insights into the ways Adam's outmanoeuvred many hard-line republicans in order to pursue his peace strategy while largely preventing a large-scale split. That said, Adam's wholly rejects many if not all of Moloney's assertions and findings in the book.

government at Downing Street to massive car bombs in the financial heartland of London's

Docklands. In addition, there was renewed use of the lethal car-bomb in major towns and

cities across the North of Ireland. By this time, loyalist paramilitaries had upped their

campaign and by the early 1990's, they began to 'out-kill' their republican counterparts,

suspecting (accurately) that republicans were war-weary. The escalation of loyalist

paramilitaries, coupled with high levels of infiltration by state informers and the controversial

use of the SAS[40], ensured that by the early 1990's, militant republicanism was 'in essence,

being brought to a standstill' (Frampton 2009: 83).

In 1992, Hume and Adams re-engaged in talks and decided to publish the contents of

their discussions, declaring that an internal Northern Ireland solution without an all-Ireland

dimension was unviable. The Hume/Adams Initiative called for dialogue and engagement

between all parties to the conflict. While whole-heartedly rejected by unionists, loyalists, it

did however contain enough grounds for cautious optimism in the Dublin and London

Governments. They opted to pursue their inter-governmental engagements, culminating in the

Downing Street Declaration (DSD) in December 1993. The DSD stated that the future of

Ireland, north and south could be decided by concurrent referenda in both jurisdictions, and

crucially, they recognised the right of Irish nationalists and republicans to pursue a united

Ireland by 'non-violent means' (Hennessey 2000). In sum, the declaration stated that the

British had no selfish, strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland; partition is a

statement of reality. In addition, the Irish government recognised that Northern Ireland's

status could only change when a majority there wish so (Cochrane 2013: 131).

Despite the largely indifferent and lukewarm republican reception, 1994 would see a

continuing shift within the republican movement towards ending armed conflict. There were

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[40] Elite British Army regiment. Their widespread use of lethal force against republicans, often in controversial circumstances, led to widespread accusations against the British government regarding a 'shoot to kill' policy against republicans.

a number of reasons for this. First, the military campaign was stalled; with membership of the IRA declining. It is argued that by the early 1990's vast swathes of the IRA were compromised due to British infiltration and informers (Maloney 2002: 458-461). Second, the Sinn Féin leadership under Gerry Adams had successfully built up a previously unthinkable nationalist alliance involving republicans, the SDLP, the Irish Government and the hugely influential Irish-America. A new Irish nationalist front would present an alternative strategy for pursuing a united Ireland, therefore strengthening the case that armed struggle was no longer required. And finally, the period in question witnessed a burgeoning of various peace processes in other seemingly polarised and intractable conflicts. In particular, given the strong links between republicans and the ANC and PLO respectively, peace processes in South Africa and Palestine-Israel would augment the sense of optimism that a deal in Ireland might also be possible (Frampton 2009).

On 31st August 1994 the IRA announced a cessation of military operations; their loyalist counterparts followed on 13th October. Despite the initial euphoria which greeted both ceasefires, political progress was snail-paced. Given their expectation of all-party talks in the immediate aftermath of the IRA ceasefire, republicans were dismayed to find demands and pre-conditions regarding the decommissioning of IRA weapons and the ambiguity of the permanency of the IRA ceasefire stifling progress (Dixon 2001: 245-247). Unionists wanted a three year 'decontamination' period for Sinn Féin before they were invited into talks (Cochrane 2013: 143). While deemed by unionists and the British as a reasonable demand to demonstrate republican *bona fides* regarding the ending of violence, republicans viewed it as stalling tactics and accused the British government of pandering to a unionist agenda. The fact that the British government relied on the voting support of unionist MP's at Westminster in order to remain in power only served to exacerbate republican suspicions that the peace process suffered due to the political numbers game at Westminster.

From a feminist perspective, the primacy afforded to IRA weaponry and the complete lack of attention to 'other' security issues such as domestic violence is indicative of the androcentric nature of this process. As levels of military violence decreased significantly during this time, statistics for reported cases of violence against women in the period of 1996 to 1999 more than doubled, from 6,727 in 1996 to 15,304 in 1999 (Fearon & Rebouche 2006: 295). The number of deaths related to domestic violence also rose sharply in the pre and post-GFA period. It is clear that the male architects of the peace were firmly guided by androcentric concerns and so devised a fittingly pertinent agenda. While projecting a façade of an inclusive process determined to bring about peace for all, it is clear that it bore all the trademark characteristics of a male-dominated, state-centric model, wholly inept for recognising, yet alone tackling other forms of violence.

In order to overcome the decommissioning issue, US Senator George Mitchell was brought in to mediate. His report in 1996 advocated a 'twin-track approach' of decommissioning alongside talks. While the British government rhetorically accepted the report's recommendations, they chose to announce elections, a prominent unionist demand, for May 1996 as opposed to immediately commencing peace talks. Republicans were enraged, interpreting elections as yet another delaying tactic. Elections appeared to be the final straw as the IRA ended its eighteenth month long ceasefire on 9th February 1996 with a massive car bomb in London's Canary Warf, the financial district[41]. Despite the announcement of the IRA's 'return to war', the armed actions during this period would differ greatly from the previous campaign of 1969-1994.

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[41] Although elections were viewed as the final straw which broke the ceasefire, undoubtedly, preparation for this huge bomb had begun the previous year, long before the Mitchell report. Ed Moloney states that the South Armagh brigade of the IRA was tasked with preparing the bomb and argues that the size of the bomb actually disguises the military weaknesses of the IRA. South Armagh is viewed as a republican strong-hold, with little susceptibility to British infiltration. The choice of South Armagh is indicative of the fact that the British had successfully infiltrated the Belfast IRA and its entire bombing team located in England (2002: 442-444).

According to Darby and Mac Ginty, 'republican violence was no longer about driving Britain out of Ireland. It was now about gaining entry into a political process in which all of Northern Ireland's parties would discuss political arrangements for the future' (2000: 72). The majority of IRA attacks occurred as car bombs in England, therefore avoiding a renewed confrontation with loyalist paramilitaries in the North. Even compared to the 'acceptable level of violence' of the late 1980's, the renewed IRA campaign comprised of a lower quantity of violence but an increase in the 'quality' of that violence. In other words, day-to-day shootings and small bomb attacks were replaced by 'spectaculars', typically comprised of huge car bombs in London and other English cities such as Manchester throughout 1996 and 1997[42].

In addition to the renewed, albeit restrictive IRA campaign, serious street violence occurred during controversial Orange parades throughout 1996 and 1997, particularly at Drumcree in Armagh and Derry city producing some of the worst rioting since the outbreak of the Troubles. Despite the violence, the election of Tony Blair in London and Bertie Ahern in Dublin resulted in a new pragmatic approach to solving the fledgling formal peace process. Announcing the commencement of all-party talks, beginning in Autumn of 1997, the Blair government gave republicans a window of opportunity to participate. The conditions were an end to IRA violence and their signing of the Mitchell principles of non-violence in order to secure a place in the autumn talks (Dixon 2001: 262). The IRA duly responded and announced a re-instatement of their ceasefire in July 1997. While the more hard-line DUP abstained from the talks viewing them as treachery, the UUP remained in which was remarkable given the absence of IRA decommissioning. Under the auspices of Senator George Mitchell, the talks culminated in the signing of a negotiated agreement on Good Friday 1998.

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[42] Thiepval Barracks in Lisburn was bombed in October 1996 after the IRA managed to drive two car bombs into the base, killing Officer James Bradwell and injuring scores more.

Formal politics dominated the peace process, ensuring that the influence of women was largely muted (Ward 2006: 150). In addition, this attempt to finally resolve the Troubles was unsurprisingly dominated by competing ethno-nationalisms, and so presented little room for feminist issues (Murtagh 2008). Given the dearth of women within institutional politics, it was clear that it would be mostly men doing the talking. This is not to suggest that women accepted such marginalisation. On the contrary, from the moment the Hume/Adams talks became public knowledge in 1992, differentially positioned women across political, social and economic fissures began organising in their own ways to counter the male-dominance and to ensure that women's voices were heard.

Women Organising for Peace

Notwithstanding the androcentric nature of the mainstream narratives of both the Troubles and the peace process (Ashe 2009; Coulter 1999; Rooney 2006; Zalewski 2006) there does exist a relatively sizable literature documenting women's roles during the Troubles. Explorations of women and the conflict in the North of Ireland reveals multiple roles, including informal peace-making (Cockburn 2007, 2013; Hammond-Callaghan 2011; McWilliams 1995), community and civil society groups (Cockburn 1998; Hackett 2004; McIntyre 2004; Persic 2004), formal peace negotiations and formal politics (Fearon and McWilliams 2000; Hinds 1999; Murtagh 2008; Rynder 2002; Side 2009), street activism and protest (Aretxaga 1997; Ashe 2006) and as armed combatants (Alison 2009; Dowler 1998; O'Keefe 2013).

In terms of the peace process, explorations reveal a pattern of differentially positioned women organising in the face of male marginalisation. Women active within loyalist paramilitaries felt alienated from the entire peace process. Despite the inclusion of the smaller, loyalist parties, the PUP and UDP, loyalist women were effectively excluded by their

own male comrades (McEvoy 2009). Using gender stereotypes as a structural barrier, loyalist men utilised a discourse of women's subordinate and supplementary contributions to militant loyalism in order to restrict their participation in the peace process. In other words, if men were the main actors in war, it surely follows that it would be men who would decide the peace.

In the aftermath of the Hume/Adams talks, working-class republican women established Clan na mBan and began organising to ensure that their voices and demands were not marginalised from any future peace talks. The absence of any reference to women within the Downing Street Declaration only exacerbated their concerns and augmented the sense of urgency for republican women to organise (Ward 2006: 152). In particular, their objectives were to push any peace process beyond the traditional confines of simply 'ending armed actions' and to instead pursue an agenda of peace with social justice, particularly focusing on women's role in a post-war society (Hackett 1995; O'Keefe 2013; Sales 1997; Ward 2006).

Feminist cross-community initiatives are often lauded as evidence of women's capacity to work together across deeply divided societies in pursuit of a common good (Cockburn 1998; McWilliams 1995). In light of these deep divisions and fragmentations, a new approach emerged in the late 1980's which broadly stems from what Yuval-Davis terms 'transversal politics'. It is a politics where differences in identity are acknowledged and respected yet the category of gender remains a fundamental block on which active engagement can occur across mutually beneficial issues (Cockburn 1998). Transversalism can be understood as a type of intersectional praxis which attempts to move beyond a primary, divisive single identity, 'empathy and mutual respect help women identify ways to build cross-community alliances in conflict zones' (Yuval-Davis 2011: 110). During this time, the broader women's movement was organising around the issue of any forthcoming peace negotiations. Members of the Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement and the

Belfast Women's Collective, both of which deliberately eschewed republican or loyalist identities, began agitating on women's right for inclusion in peace negotiations *as* women (Cockburn 2013; Mulholland 2001). In 1996, at a time of both great potential and peril for the North's burgeoning peace process, the NIWC emerged as a political force claiming to represent *all* women in the North or Ireland. They were viewed by many as an ideal model of transversal politics (Murtagh 2008; Porter 2000).

Frustrated at the lack of visible women within the formal political system and evolving peace process, the NIWC formed as a corrective measure to the gender deficit, claiming 'that women could add something to the peace process that men could not' (O'Keefe 2013: 159). The NIWC energised around notions of female solidarity (Ashe 2009: 164), urged women to put aside their differing identities in the cause of a unified sisterhood, and focus instead on their shared concerns regarding the absence of women's voices. Due to their non-position on the constitutional status of the state, the NIWC were guided in the belief that the presence of women was in itself enough to bring a different perspective to the debate (Fearon & McWilliams 2000). Retreating back to a very liberal, and ostensibly a rather essentialist standpoint, the NIWC astutely eschewed any conflicting identities such as national, religious or class in order to prevent a fragmentation of the gender solidarity. Instead they focused on 'unity issues' such as childcare, the Working Families Tax Credit or employment issues; 'points where little difference existed' (Little 2002: 170).

While side-stepping the constitutional question in such a polarised society as the North of Ireland may be deemed pragmatic in order to appeal to women 'on both sides of the divide', the party also deliberately evaded key issues of division among women and feminists, namely women's reproductive rights. The NIWC felt that such a 'divisive' issue would undermine the very foundations of its support base. Their support for state institutions indicated that they were viewed as sites of political potential for the improvement of

women's lives. In doing so, and in despite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the NIWC failed to recognise that the state is also a site of violence, particularly against women (O'Keefe 2013). The NIWC has attracted, and continues to attract, vast academic and mainstream attention, much to the detriment of the attention afforded to other women. According to Eilish Rooney (2006) the women depicted, constituted and claimed by the dominant discourse are of course women who appear to be uncomplicated by sectarian or class tensions. The NIWC certainly personified this 'uncomplicated' identity perfectly.

The coalition was deemed a significant expression of feminist politics in the North by some (Ashe 2009: 167), while others took issue with its politics of avoidance (O'Keefe 2013). Notwithstanding the debates regarding the NIWC, it nevertheless successfully carved out a political niche with an agenda based on human rights, equality and inclusion, specifically focused on creating a culture of dialogue and accommodation (Fearon 1999; Murtagh 2008). The coalition are probably best remembered for their role in the GFA negotiations, where they added significant contributions and inputs to the negotiations, acted as a 'conduit between otherwise intransigent parties and ensured at least some attentions to gender issues' (Jacobson 2000: 191). In sum, there is ample evidence of women right across a variety of positions acting in order to broaden out the narrow, state-centric agenda into one which could have some meaningful input to women's lives.

The GFA Negotiations: A Largely Male Affair

Formal negotiations between the various political parties began in 1996, with international mediation playing a crucial role. The dearth of women in formal politics and the outright exclusion of a grassroots input ensured that negotiations were a largely all-male affair despite the presence of and attempts made by NIWC to alter this. Even Sinn Féin, which prided itself for its 'progressive gender stance', had few front-line roles for women during negotiations

(Chapter Seven). Progress was slow and tedious; it took months to establish the ground rules and vague agenda, before talks on the major substantive issues even began (Cochrane 2013). In marked contrast from previous efforts to resolve the conflict in the 1970's and 1980's, the main architects of this peace process, the British and Irish governments, went beyond previous approaches of involving just the mainstream, larger political parties. On this occasion they went out of their way to include smaller political parties, the PUP and the UDP, both linked to loyalist paramilitaries. By doing so, the two governments inadvertently created the window of opportunity for the participation of the NIWC, comprised of women from NGO's, trade unionism and academics, among others. Although only managing a 1.03 per cent share of the electorate, the endeavours to get smaller loyalist parties involved in the talks ensured that the NIWC had two delegates.

The main talks occurred in the period of October 1997 to March 1998. The word 'talks' however is highly euphemistic as most of the parties refused to negotiate 'face to face'. After years of stagnation, a deadline of Good Friday was set by the chairperson, George Mitchell. In the final push, international intervention from Bill Clinton as well as the active presence of both Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern encouraged high expectations that a deal could be done. In addition to the political pressure, generous funding packages from the EU (Tonge 2014) and other international bodies sugar-coated the arduous task of power-sharing by sworn adversaries. For unionists, the main issue of concern was IRA arms and the unionist demand that IRA arms be handed in prior to Sinn Féin's involvement in government. A personal intervention by Tony Blair on the issue of IRA arms appears to have settled unionist uncertainties and having coming close to the brink of collapse on many occasions, an agreement was finally reached on Friday 10th April 1998.

Formal politics in Northern Ireland is often noted for its domination by men and low levels of electoral representation of women (Little 2002; Ward 2006; Wilford et al. 1993).

The NIWC suffered much chauvinistic abuse within the Northern Ireland Forum, were subjected to heckling, jeering and male bully-boy tactics, and their alternative, 'feminine' style of politics was deemed ineffective (Fearon 1999; Murtagh 2008: 35). Kate Fearon (1999) succinctly captures the vast levels of antipathy and hostility towards the NIWC, whereby the women themselves were deemed 'lightweights' and their actions were dismissed as non-political. Within the zero-sum ethno-national/sectarian politics of the North, unionists in particular were suspicious and dismissive of the NIWC's discourse of reconciliation and dialogue. Moreover, the perils of adopting the reconciliatory role presented an opportunity for some to dismiss *all* women as non-actors in the conflict. This was summed up memorably and quite crassly by the DUP's Peter Robinson, now the Northern Ireland First Minister, who declared that 'they [NIWC] haven't been at the forefront of the battle when shots were being fired or when the constitution of Northern Ireland was in peril' (Fearon 1999: 16). In other words, the NIWC, like many of those women who pursue peace through multiple methods, were not taken seriously as political players. Furthermore, research by Kimberley Cowell-Meyers also uncovers levels of resentment among women in other political parties regarding the vast levels of attention afforded to the NIWC, accused as 'Janey-come-lately' and of overshadowing the work of other women established for years prior to the emergence of the NIWC (Cowell-Meyers 2003: 86).

While an incredibly complex and highly ambiguous document, the Belfast Agreement or what it is more commonly referred to as the GFA, can be summed up as containing four key arrangements. First, the constitutional position of Northern Ireland can only be changed with the consent of a majority of its citizens. Second, a united Ireland can only come about through a majority of citizens north and south of the border. Third, all citizens of Northern Ireland have the right to identify themselves as British or Irish, or both. Fourth, the Irish

Republic drops its territorial claim over the state of Northern Ireland and defines the Irish nation in terms of people as opposed to territory.

The GFA also sets out the new governance structure for the North of Ireland and its relationship with the rest of Ireland and the British isles. The Northern Ireland assembly, comprised of 108 locally elected representatives, is predicated on the basis of providing political power to both nationalist and unionist political representatives. Based on a consociation model, weighted assembly majorities demands that 60 per cent of all MLA's, comprising of 40 per cent of both nationalists and unionists, must be in support of proposed legislation. MLA's also elect a First and Deputy First Minister, again balancing power between nationalism and unionism. The remaining ministerial roles are then allocated on the basis of parties' electoral strength, using the d'Hondt formula. The North-South Ministerial Council was established to allow cooperation between the British and Irish government, along with the main political parties on issues of mutual benefit to both parts of the island.

Of particular note to feminists and women's groups, Section 75 of the agreement imposes a statutory duty on public authorities to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital, status and sexual orientation, between persons with a disability and without, persons with a dependent and without, and between women and men generally (Side 2009: 70). The agreement, however, was heavy on institutional reform and design but incredibly light on wider political, economic and social relations. In particular, despite Section 75, it had little to say about any future relations between women and men. The GFA was essentially concerned with removing weapons of war and replacing them with weapons of words within an institutional setting. It was an exercise in conflict containment as opposed to conflict resolution. Moreover, it presented no radical transformative potential to positively change the lives of women, or

tackle the other forms of insidious inequality and violence which pervades much of northern Irish society.

While the peace process and specifically the political negotiations embodied all the trademark characteristics of an elitist, male-dominated process, the GFA is extoled by some for the ways in which women of various political shades formed strategic alliances in order to ensure that women's voices and interests were represented at the talks (Fearon & McWilliams 1999; Mulholland 2001; Murtagh 2008). Much has been written on the role the NIWC played in 'representing women' at formal negotiations but equally, thanks to the sustained and imaginative efforts of the women's sector and many other civil society organisations, the GFA contained significant clauses on the twin rights agenda; equalities and inclusions (Cockburn 2013: 159; Mulholland 2001: 173). It is important also to recognise that others present a rather less benign account of the GFA negotiations, which some characterised as the classic 'old boys club' which saw republican women and non-republican women alike excluded from them (for example see O'Keefe 2013; Rooney 2006; Ward 2006). In particular, the widely celebrated commitment to gender equality remains as it was intended - aspirational.

From Euphoria to Despair? Women & the Aftermath of the GFA

Despite the outright exclusion from any meaningful input during negotiations, the people of Ireland 'would have their say' by referendum. The GFA was put to the people of Ireland on both sides of the border. The electorate in the South of Ireland were essentially voting on a change to their constitutional claim to the territory of the Six Counties of the North which was overwhelmingly passed. The vote in the North however was not so clear-cut. While the majority of people did support the agreement it was also apparent that a sizable section of the Unionist and Loyalist community was vehemently opposed to it. Fudged during much of the

negotiations, the issue of arms decommissioning once again restricted political movement in the aftermath of the GFA. Attempts to establish an Executive were hampered by Unionist demands of IRA decommissioning prior to Sinn Féin's participation. From a Unionist perspective, the release of hundreds of paramilitary prisoners and the prospect of a critical reformulation of the police augmented their belief that the gains of the peace process were firmly tilted in favour of republicans. Given the two year deadline for paramilitary decommissioning was fast approaching without any sign of movement, 'the post-agreement euphoria and optimism had been sapped by problems of implementation and concerns over security related issues…..the decommissioning issue had grown into the greatest obstacle to the process' (Darby & Mac Ginty 2000: 84-85).

Unsurprisingly, the years of 1999-2002 were characterised by serial suspensions of the Executive to prevent a collapse in the face of the political standoff regarding decommissioning, describe as something of a 'dysfunctional devolution' (Cochrane 2013). Within this dysfunctional devolution, women were very much the minority player within the new Stormont Assembly. The first assembly elections of 1998 returned a mere 14 female representatives out of 108. While arms decommissioning vexed the establishment of the Executive, the twelve-member Executive was finally established on 2nd December 1999. Of the twelve members, only three were women. Although both the Executive and Assembly would be short-lived owing to numerous British government suspensions, these formative post-GFA steps indicate that for all the rhetoric regarding equality for all and women's right to political participation, the actual reality of politics in the North of Ireland was very much 'business as usual'.

The post-agreement landscape was one which limped from crisis to crisis. The years following the GFA were marked, not by a spirit of co-operation and reconciliation, but by animosity and mistrust. The new political institutions were consistently dogged by mistrust

between unionist and republicans, particularly over the issues of arms decommissioning and the acceptability of the police to republicans. Incidents such as the alleged Sinn Féin spy ring at Stormont in 2002 finally collapsed the shaky political institutions[43]. Direct rule from Westminster was reinstated in October 2002, prompting a second set of political negotiations with a view to restoring devolved government. By 2006, the GFA political institutions had been suspended for almost four years. Sinn Féin and the DUP's increasing electoral fortunes, at the expense of the more moderate SDLP and UUP parties respectively, only exacerbated the ongoing political inertia. In order to overcome the seemingly implacably entrenched positions, political parties reconvened at St. Andrews in Scotland in 2006 in order to iron out the ambiguities in the GFA. Mirroring its GFA predecessor, these new negotiations were solely focused on policing, justice and paramilitary arms, with not a single mention of gender equality or women's rights.

The negotiations culminated with the St. Andrews Agreement in October 2006, which paved the way for the restoration of power-sharing in the North. With the NIWC now disbanded, the St. Andrews talks were distinctly male-dominated and focused solely on the principles of consociation between the two largest parties, Sinn Féin and the DUP. Within this elite-fashioned, male-dominated process, it was not surprising to find that gender equality receded as a political priority (Deiana 2013: 403). While the equalities between competing religions, that being Catholic and Protestant is legally enforceable, all other equalities are not and remain aspirational (Cockburn 2013). One could argue that gender equality was in fact never deemed a political priority in the first instance, given its lack of political teeth

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[43] Police raided the Sinn Féin parliamentary offices at Stormont in October 2002 as part of an investigation into an alleged republican spy ring. One of those arrested was senior republican Denis Donaldson. In the months following the police raid, Donaldson was exposed as a police informer, working for the state since the mid-1980's. His role as an agent and the lack of hard evidence of the alleged spy ring is but one of numerous murky cases which pervades the conflict in the North of Ireland. In the aftermath of his exposure as a state informer, Denis Donaldson unsurprisingly left his West Belfast home, relocating to a remote cottage in Co. Donegal where he was killed by unknown republicans in 2006 in reprisal for his informant role.

regarding its 'enforcement'. Like the GFA, the St. Andrews Agreement re-affirmed ethno-nationalism as the primary political identity and dealt solely with the typical state-centric concerns. Gender equality and the role of women in society were rendered invisible once institutional power-sharing resumed in May 2007.

As the formal political crises between 1998 and 2007 ebbed and flowed, some feminist and women's groups were energised by the GFA's references to gender equality and women's political participation. While the inclusion of equality and citizenship within the GFA in 1998 drew high praise from many quarters, not least from some feminist and mainstream women's groups, the intervening period since has seen this potential realised in very limited ways (Side 2009: 67). Under statutory obligation, equality provisions were established, 'however, gender equality is generally regarded as separate from and less pressing that equality of opportunity between the two (ethno-national/sectarian) communities. In the post-GFA period, gender equality was gradually unhooked from political agendas which were perpetually dominated by issues directly related to the ethno-national/sectarian divide. The status of women has retreated from political discussion and policy agendas, and a sustained commitment to gender equality is less visible amongst various government bodies and agencies and amongst political parties.' (Side 2009: 71).

The consociation framework adopted by the parties within the GFA is frequently cited as a mechanism for institutionalising ethno-national/sectarian division as opposed to radically tackling it (Coulter & Murray 2009). Consociation through political elites allows communities with conflicting ethno-national/sectarian identities to recognise each other's differing aspirations and reconcile them through, not a dilution of such divisions, but on the basis of sharing power along such divisional lines. Accordingly, ethno-religious divisions become the very basis on which new political institutions are actually premised. From a gender perspective, the primacy afforded to the ethno-national/sectarian divide comes at the

expense of other forms of political activism such as gender or class, which are frequently overlooked as categories of political positions (Hayes & McAllister 2012).

Notwithstanding the rhetorical commitments to increasing women's formal participation, politics in the North of Ireland remains overwhelmingly male-gendered, despite the promise and formal recognition of women's inclusion stitched into the agreement (Galligan 2013: 420). Women's political representation in the North lags far behind the other devolved assemblies in Wales and Scotland. Despite the much-lauded commitment to gender equality within the GFA, women's formal political representation remains at a very low rate, due largely to the lack of designated or mandatory institutional responsibilities for the advancement of women's political citizenship rights (Side 2009: 74). In the last local Assembly elections of 2011, women comprised of 18.5 per cent of those elected. That said, in the context of this study, it is important to remark that Sinn Féin consistently returns the largest number of elected women to the North's Assembly.

While the GFA is lauded by some for ending 'violence', increased levels of domestic and sexual violence and gender discrimination in the aftermath of the agreement only serve to illuminate the androcentric notions which underpin this partial peace. Violence specifically directed against women and girls - rape, trafficking, abuse in the home - also appears to be growing rather than diminishing with the 'peace' (Cockburn 2013: 163). Motions within the Stormont Assembly prohibiting any future motions relating to extending the 1967 Abortion Act to the North of Ireland augmented the view that formal politics could not represent the views and interests of women (Fearon & Rebouche 2006: 292). Social conservatism, particularly in relation to abortion and divorce, remains in place despite rhetorical assurances regarding women's improving positioning. Christian churches in the North of Ireland-Protestant as well as Catholic-still dominate education, social services, family life, and community identity (Rynder 2002: 45). In sum, little has changed for women where they

continue to experience high levels of physical and sexual violence, are concentrated in low-level employment, do the majority of unpaid care and continue to be the most likely to be in poverty (Cockburn 2013; Fearon & Rebouche 2006; O'Keefe 2011: 84). Despite the widespread optimism among many feminists, what emerged in the place of the promised 'equalities and inclusions' agenda of the GFA is in fact an era of 'neo-patriarchy' (Campbell cited in Cockburn 2013: 165).

Conclusion

Over twenty years on from the 1994 ceasefires, it would be folly to suggest that the vast decrease in military violence is not a positive and welcome development. The North of Ireland today is a much better society when compared to the situation of twenty-five years ago. The official narrative dictates that the North of Ireland is a society largely at peace. While such sentiments perhaps ring true when examining 'armed violence', it nevertheless belies the fact that the North of Ireland remains a society deeply entrenched in various forms of social, economic and political violence. From a feminist perspective, the largely unchanged (in some instances worsening) position of women reveals the androcentric nature within the official narrative of the Irish peace process.

Ostensibly, the GFA had promised so much. Despite those who lauded its political potential to deliver equality for all, contemporary northern Irish society displays little of this much heralded social and political change. The agreement stipulated the equality of opportunity for all and the right of women to politically participate. Many feminists and women's groups cited such inclusion as potentially ground-breaking in that it could act as a catalyst for transforming gender relations. Women's lives, particularly working-class women's lives however, continue to be blighted by poverty, unemployment, unpaid domestic labour, low-paid employment, various forms of physical and sexual violence, marginalisation

from institutional politics and positions of public decision-making (Cockburn 2013; O'Keefe 2013). By any measure the northern Irish peace process has effectively failed to deliver transformative and substantive changes to the lives of women. Even some of the GFA's greatest champions are now lamenting its lack of discernible success (Deiana 2013; Galligan 2013; Side 2009).

Of course, none of this should come as a surprise given that the entire process was governed by the staples of standard forms of 'conflict resolution'. The story of the Irish peace process is an exclusionary, state-centred, male dominated process, concerned primarily by the management of conflict between two deeply polarised ethno-national/sectarian blocs. While some feminist and women's groups successfully insisted on an equality clause within the agreement, the male architects of peace primarily paid lip service to it, designating it as aspirational as opposed to fundamental. Despite the formidable efforts to silence and marginalise women's voices and participation, the chapter demonstrates that women, from right across a variety of political spectrums organised to resist it. If anything, the Irish peace process thus far demonstrates the limited capabilities of institutional approaches to both peace and women's equality. Yet many feminist political and social scientists appear wedded to the idea of mainstreaming gender and institutional participation as the optimum strategy for peace and equality. If a genuine peace is to be achieved, then a more radical and transformative approach is required, something largely absent within the process hitherto. The remainder of this thesis explores how republican women have organised over the conflict transition period in pursuit of their vision of peace and women's equality.

Chapter Five - Re-Defining Combatant & War-Time Sacrifice? Republican Women & Post-War Commemoration

Introduction

At the time of field research in 2012 and 2013 there was a palpable flurry of activism among interviewees who were channelling energies into various mechanisms for recognising women's contribution to the armed struggle. Much of these commemorative actions were born out of a collective frustration with their perpetual invisibility in mainstream republican memorialisation. The exclusion of women's war-time contributions which emerges in the transition however is not a new phenomenon and in fact is a long-standing pattern of men's dismissals of women's contributions, from the battlefield to post-war memorials. Women's exclusion from commemoration during conflict transition, like DDR processes, is but an insidious manifestation of a more profound problem which pervades the post-war landscape. Militarised masculine narratives and patriarchal understandings of what is deemed a combatant role and therefore deemed worthy of commemorating, consistently fails to value or recognise women's multiple and vital war-time contributions.

This chapter critically explores the ways in which republican women themselves conceptualise their contributions and sacrifices within armed struggle. It is a narrative which runs counter to the male-dominated post-war memorial landscape. By being attentive to the ways in which they conceptualise their war-time contributions, we not only bring their roles into view but I argue, subvert the patriarchal ways in which war-time contributions are defined. It echoes Megan MacKenzie's (2012) contention that we learn far more from 'asking and listening' to the experiences of women and girls soldiers as opposed to solely relying on top-down processes. I draw heavily from the theoretical well of feminist IR, particularly the work of Cynthia Enloe and Ann Tickner. This chapter not only asks 'where are the combatant

women' in post-war memorialisation but argues that combatant women's experiences, narratives and meanings challenge existing frameworks and discourses, and therefore revolutionises the ways we define combatant and war-time sacrifice. In other words, their struggle during conflict transition is not encompassed by simply 'adding women' to the existing picture but rather by using their unique standpoints to subvert established discourses and definitions in order to challenge the forces of patriarchy.

The chapter begins with an exploration of the ways in which interviewees themselves define their combatant roles and experiences. Emerging from this is a theoretically rich narrative of multiple military roles which challenges and dislodges the limited, masculine definition of 'a person with a weapon'. In addition, interviewees reject the hierarchical dichotomy of fighter/supporter in favour of recognising the importance of *all* military contributions to republican armed struggle. The chapter then goes onto consider the gendered ways in which sacrifice is conceptualised. Interview data displaces the traditional notion of sacrifice in favour of a definition which acknowledges the different and highly gendered sacrifices women endure in order to participate in armed struggle. I then move on to examine the ways in which interviewees believe their contributions have been either diluted or erased completely within republican commemoration. The final section examines the innovative and alternative forms of commemoration by republican women in recent times. It suggests that these 'alternative' forms of commemoration accurately capture their eclectic war-time contributions at all levels of militant republicanism, bringing previously overlooked militant women onto the memorial landscape.

'I Was Involved': Republican Women & the Meaning of Combatant

The 'invisibility' of female combatants in the post-war period is not an innocuous oversight and has major implications for gender relations in the conflict transition period. War-time

narratives are competitive; accurately portraying women's war-time roles will affect their post-war opportunities and those for generations to come (Enloe 2004: 200). Feminist scholars of DDR have diligently documented the perilous losses female combatants endure as a result of their marginalisation in the post-war narrative. First, by dismissing women's multiple roles as armed protagonists, it depoliticises their actions during the war-time period, rendering them as followers as opposed to actors (Mazurana & Cole 2013). Second, the depiction of women and girls as non-combatants ensures that it is males who are deemed to be the main security threat. This is what MacKenzie refers to as a process of 'de-securitising women' (2012: 50) Third, by portraying the war-time roles along normative gender roles, it is unsurprising that the transition away from armed conflict will see a "return to normal", that being a patriarchal order. Unsurprisingly, the post-war narrative remains incredibly mute when it comes to female combatants (MacKenzie 2012).

In addition, female soldiers disrupt the gendered tropes of male warriors and female victim. There is now a significant swathe of literature documenting the varied and multiple ways in which women engage in political violence during armed conflict, displacing the myth of women's propensity for peace (Lorentzen & Turpin 1998; Moser & Clark 2001; Meintjes, Pillay & Turshen 2001; Jacobs, Jacobson & Marchbank 2000). Yet despite this vital interjection there remains significant resistance to recognising female participation in war, firmly guided normative gender typecasting (MacKenzie 2012). This dearth of recognition also extends to academic studies where combatant women remain something of an anomaly. In other words, the rear view mirror assessment of war-time roles tends to promote a rather masculine vision of military roles underpinned by gendered assumptions regarding masculine and feminine roles. Often absent are the voices, experiences and perspectives of combatant women themselves.

Landmark studies of the IRA define a volunteer as a 'rank and file' member of the Army (Coogan 2000; Moloney 2002). According to the previously secret internal manual, entitled *The Green Book*, "Volunteers are expected to wage a military war of liberation against a numerically superior force. This involves the use of arms and explosives. When volunteers are trained…. [they] are trained to kill people. The I.R.A. volunteer receives all his [sic] support voluntarily from his [sic] people." The definition here clearly defines IRA involvement as a sworn member of an Army whose primary role is the direct use of arms in order to wage war against their enemies. While there is no commonly accepted definition of a 'female combatant', the legal discourse within international DDR processes utilise a traditional notion of a combatant is a person who engages directly in armed actions through the use of weaponry prevails (Mazurana & Cole 2013: 205).

This section examines how republican women themselves define and describe their war-time roles. By bringing their experiences into view, their unique standpoint challenges the patriarchal understanding of what it means to be involved in armed conflict. During the course of the interviews, research participants discussed women's roles and tasks within the armed struggle. Of the forty research participants, thirty-one identified as IRA volunteers and invariably recounted various and multiple forms of resistance activities that they engaged in. These included "weapons storage", "weapon transportation", "planting bombs", "shooting", "communications", "robberies", "bomb making", "weapons training", "street patrols", "rioting", "petrol bombing", "engaging the enemy in the street". Most interviewees did not use the term 'combatant', in fact in some cases there was a profound disdain for the word. Republican women, like their male comrades, used colloquial expressions such as 'being involved' or 'became a volunteer' to denote their participation in armed struggle. Patricia is currently a Sinn Féin elected representative in the wider Belfast area and also a community activist. She joined the IRA at the age of fourteen, after lying about her age. Patricia states

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that she did not come from a republican family, her father served in the Royal Navy during the Second World War and many of her uncles also served in the British Army, some receiving medals of honour. Her parents were a mixed marriage, her father a protestant and her mother a catholic. Although stating that she did join the republican movement Patricia is cautious throughout her interview, consistently qualifying remarks around IRA activities for fear of any future prosecution. She was interned in the mid-1970's and spent several years in Armagh jail. She is married with several children. Patricia's description of her IRA roles is typical of the responses across the interviews:

> "The struggle was daily life and death situations. And that went from transporting weapons from one dump to another, to robberies, to attacks in the town, incendiary devices, might be bombs, shooting operations against the British Army and things like that. So you could've had five of those operations in a day. It was quite intense and so for someone to have said to me "a woman's place was in the home", I'd love to meet the man that had the courage to say that. There weren't any I can tell you."

Interviewees articulate a much broader and theoretically richer vision of what military involvement entails. The notion that combatant is wholly encapsulated by a 'person holding a weapon' is not only deemed erroneous by interviewees but it fails to accurately capture the realities of women's participation in armed conflict. In addition to their roles alongside their male comrades, republican women were active in other military roles within the movement. Michelle comes from a family of ten children who lived in the heart of Derry's Bogside area, a predominantly catholic/nationalist and working-class area of the city. Her family has strong republican roots. Michelle's mother is described as a strong republican and many of her uncles were interned during previous IRA campaigns. Michelle was arrested on many occasions and suffered abuse during her detention time. As a self-described 'soldier', Michelle's role finished alongside the armed struggle in 1994 but she does continue to do

some work for Sinn Féin and is loosely involved in some local community organising. She is married with children.

> "So from 1971 onwards, I would have been involved, [in] any type of role at all really, women's action groups, internment, and then into 1972 and Bloody Sunday. I was a teenager then. I just couldn't be somebody that stood by and watch [sic] what was happening on our streets……..I carried on my part in the conflict, whatever had to be done or whatever was asked of me, irrespective of the role. But this was what it was about being an active republican and this was my life."

When asked what 'these roles' comprised of, Michelle described a myriad of military actions including weaponry transportation, training camps and direct armed actions. An 'active republican' in the armed struggle according to Michelle requires far more than simply the role of armed volunteer. Interview data depicts a narrative of women engaged in various and multiple roles within the republican struggle. Michelle's description of 'doing whatever had to be done….irrespective of the role' indicates the lack of personal status attached to any particular roles by republican women. Moreover, the variety of roles occupied by women actually informs the ways in which they define a combatant role.

'Theresa' is a mother of three children and a grandmother. She grew up in the working-class, republican district in Belfast. Her mother died when Theresa was quite young and being the only girl she took up the role as primary care-giver within her home, a role she termed 'head of the household'. She describes her childhood household as completely 'male-dominated'. Theresa recalled memories of Irish culture and some nationalist events such as commemorations in the 1950's and early 1960's. Although Theresa would go on to be a volunteer in the IRA right up to the late 1990's, her early activities encompassed other military roles:

"I had done a few small things; let's call it that, a few bits and stuff of carrying things from one place to another. But I wanted in [to the IRA] and I wanted to be able to do more. It so happened that I kept weapons in the house, explosives and guns. But you see there were GL's[44] held in my house so I knew about the weapons and how to take it apart and all of that and that was another reason I wanted in there because I had the skill already. And then I was involved in a printing press but I said that I'm getting involved in the 'RA[45] but they wouldn't let me because of my kids. And I said sure what's the difference because I was *already* involved." (Emphasis in the original).

Theresa's extract is highly significant and presents vast insights into the ways in which female combatants conceptualise their involvement in armed struggle. While the male narrative centres on making a distinction between fighter and supporter, republican women attempt to blur the rigid demarcation of such roles. Theresa's demands to male republicans that she be allowed join the IRA as a full volunteer is premised upon her belief that she was already involved in militarism by virtue of her other roles such as weapons storage, gun lectures and weaponry knowledge. Her frustration in asking 'what's the difference' reveals a mind-set among republican women that the ring-fencing and categorising of roles into militant and non-militant ones did not reflect their realities. In other words, the notion of fighter/supporter is a male-imposed dichotomy, which according to interviewees, denigrates and devalues women's entire vital war-time contributions. In particular they are adamant that roles normally deemed as 'support' were as important as the role of armed fighter.

Eileen's first memories are of her house being raided by the RUC in the 1950's and early 1960's. Both her parents were active and senior republicans; her mother was killed in the 1970's as a result of the armed conflict. Along with republicanism, Eileen recalls a very

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[44] Stands for Gun Lectures, which in the early days of the Troubles were held in houses of IRA members or sympathisers in cities and towns in the North.
[45] The 'RA is a colloquial shorthand for the IRA, used extensively within working-class republican communities.

socialist household and a belief that capitalism was as much the enemy as was British imperialism. Her entire life has been dominated by republicanism and armed conflict. From the early 1970's until the late 1980's at least one member of Eileen's immediate family were either interned or imprisoned. At one stage in 1971 her entire family was incarcerated, either through detention for questioning and internment. After she was released from internment in the mid-1970's she got married and then her husband, also an active republican, was immediately interned. While Eileen agrees that armed struggle needed to come to an end she is profoundly dissatisfied with both the ways it ended and the political and social dispensation which has come about in its aftermath. She has no ties or links to the Sinn Féin party. She remains a committed socialist republican active in many community groups in West Belfast and at the time of interview joined the socialist republican group éirígí. Eileen explains the importance she places on all military roles.

> "Now yes you need guns and explosives and all that equipment but you see without those women and those houses, it would have been impossible to carry out a war. If you're in guerrilla warfare, you don't have bases so where do you operate from? People's houses, so without those women, and those women have never been acknowledged properly for what they gave and sacrificed."

The common theme across the interview data is that the established understandings of combatant roles need significant expanding in order to bring into view all those 'other' militant roles in which women engaged. Orla grew up in a working-class, republican district of Belfast and was a young girl when the conflict erupted in 1969. Her father and her brothers were active republicans, all of whom served varying periods of detention as internees and prisoners. Her childhood of the 1970's was absorbed in armed conflict and in the aftermath of the 1980 and 1981 hunger strikes she joined the IRA at the age of sixteen. Orla was arrested and imprisoned for her IRA activities some time afterwards. She emerged from jail in the

1990's and was supportive of the efforts by the republican leadership to end the conflict. In the aftermath of the negotiated agreement in 1998 however she grew disillusioned with electoral politics and is critical of the political and social outcomes from the Stormont government although she remains a committed Sinn Féin supporter. Today her political activities are located in her local community centre where she is a community worker providing crèche, residents groups, senior citizens, women's groups, men's groups and cross community organising among others.

> "To me if you let your house be used you're the very same as the rest of us. I mean some people had this idea that if you weren't a Volunteer, if you weren't in jail, then you weren't good enough…….maybe not good enough but if you were a volunteer you were up here (participant gestures upwards). But to me if you played a part then you were the same as everyone else. And those people in the support roles will never get the recognition which is a shame because without them nothing could have happened; Volunteers needed safe houses, places to store weapons; without them it couldn't have happened."

Orla's extract reveals the attitude among some towards what they saw as the 'lesser' roles which fell outside of direct armed actions. While interviewees also use the distinction between volunteer and other military contributions they are stressing the importance of both roles in terms of their overall contribution to the republican struggle. It suggests that interviewees depart from the rigid masculine vision of a military role in favour of stressing the vital contributions of all roles. Perhaps the best illustration of this hierarchical distinction between 'fighter/supporter' resides in the discourse of women as the 'backbone' of the struggle.

"Women Were Not Just the Backbone": Blurring the Lines of Fighter/Supporter

One of the most famous wall murals in the North of Ireland is that of IRA Hunger Striker Bobby Sands. It is located on the gable wall of Sinn Féin's office on the Falls road and is now a permanent memorial. At the top-left hand corner of the mural is a quote from one of Sands' many prison writings: "Everyone, republican or otherwise has his or her own particular part to play. No part is too great or too small". The message depicts a communal (the imagined community as both local and national) resistance to British rule that involves many related and dependent cogs which sustained the functioning of the republican machine. The use of the words 'his or her' is hailed as highly significant by republican women, demonstrating the parity of roles in their collective resistance. The burgeoning commemorative landscape in the conflict transition period however bears little discernible resemblance to the equality of republican roles as espoused by Sands. The notion of women being the 'backbone of the struggle' (O'Keefe 2013) is a long-standing phrase within republican discourse and caused mixed emotions among interviewees. I argue that labelling women as the 'backbone' represents the hierarchical ordering of roles within republican memorialisation which defines combatant roles along normative gender understandings of male/actor and female/supporter.

The idiom that 'women were the backbone of the struggle' is used by a sizable minority of interviewees; the others however, clearly despised such a description, viewing it as degrading, pejorative and erroneous. This latter cohort argued that republican memorialisation not only largely fails to reflect women's role as frontline fighters, but increasingly their contribution is re-written solely as that of backbone supporters. Anne grew up in the Lower Falls area of West Belfast and is currently a senior Sinn Féin member in Belfast. Growing up in a staunchly working-class community she recalls a hard yet relatively happy childhood, in which she lived in a two-up, two-down terraced house. She vividly

recalls the loyalist burnings of 1969 since her family was evacuated to the relatively safer Andersonstown area for quite a while. Her father a protestant and her mother a catholic and recalled that religion or ethno-national difference was rarely discussed. Politics in the house prior to the Troubles centred mostly on socialism and trade unionism. The eruption of armed conflict in 1969 saw Anne engage in various roles including rioting, weaponry transportation and she quickly joined the republican movement as an IRA volunteer.

> "There were girls involved in all of that [armed struggle], more or less written out of history. But a lot of young girls like myself, we took the same risks. I'm not being really brave here or god look at me, I'm the best rioter in the Falls. But women are not just the backbone, they're the knee bone, the hip bone, every bone of this movement. That used to annoy me about being [labelled] the backbone; women are in this organisation on an equal footing throughout the body of this organisation, not just the backbone."

Anne's testimony is highly significant in that it depicts women as operating at all levels of the military, something widely shared by other interviewees. In addition to the lack of visibility afforded to women's role as armed activist, the issue of women's invisibility is compounded by the complete lack of attention given to other vital roles in sustaining an armed campaign. The IRA's *Green Book* makes specific reference to the status of those in 'supporting' roles: "[armed] resistance must be channelled into active and passive support with an on-going process through our actions……..of attempting to turn the passive supporter into a dump holder, a member of the movement, a paper seller etc., with the purpose of building protective support barriers between the enemy and ourselves, thus curbing the enemy's attempted isolation policy." From this leadership document there is a clear delineation and status between the armed volunteer and those who may act as 'dump holders'. According to the *Green Book*, those in the 'support' roles appear as merely a 'protective barrier' between the real actors, that being the IRA and its armed enemies.

Christine grew up in a family of seven children and wanted nothing other than a career in nursing. The eruption of armed conflict in 1969 saw Christine and most of her family engage in armed actions as republicans. A number of her brothers and her father spent periods of detention under internment or serving sentences in jail. Her father was previously interned in the 1950's for his part in the Border Campaign. Christine was interned in 1973. Today she is a Sinn Féin member and community activist. She is married to a former prisoner and has several children. Christine, like so many other interviewees advocates for the recognition of these roles as valuable military contributions:

> "Yes there should be recognition and especially for those who looked after weapons, volunteers, held meetings, all these unsung heroes. There were women active and weren't caught and something needs to be done and that is actually a form of discrimination."

Christine's assertion that the lack of attention to women's multiple military roles does not represent a mere oversight or blind-spot but is in fact a form of discrimination against republican women. Gemma is currently a senior Sinn Féin officer in Belfast who previously sat on the party's Ard Comhairle. She comes from a republican family that was consistently brutalised and harassed by the state, according to her. Gemma describes her childhood community of West Belfast as a 'war zone'. Her best friend was shot dead by the British Army in the mid-1970's, a catalyst that would lead her to join the republican movement in the 1970's. Outside of republican politics, Gemma's time is focused solely on her grown up children. Gemma echoes Christine's thoughts:

> "You have all these women who never joined the IRA as such but who without the war could never have happened. These women were unbelievably brave and it is never talked about. So there are lots of women who played those vital roles and there needs to be some sort of way of recognising them."

The theme emerging from the interview data suggests that the demands for recognising women other military roles outside of volunteer is an attempt to correct the erroneous and undervalued narrative of women as supplementary. Interviewees use the distinction of fighter/other roles as a statement of reality, in that both roles were different. Crucially, unlike their male comrades, they argued that both sites of military resistance were of equal importance to the republican struggle. Karen is currently a senior Sinn Féin elected representative and comes from Belfast. She joined the IRA in her teenage years and spent many years in jail for her republican activities. After her release in the late 1990's Karen worked in an Ex-Prisoners organisation as well as in other roles including community organising and to the promotion of the Irish language. She is married with children.

> "It's important then that the role of women is not lost and people see *all of the roles* (emphasis in the original) that women played. What I'd like to see is the acknowledgement of the women in the support network who may not have been active volunteers but all of that active support that the republican movement couldn't have survived like letting us use their homes because men didn't take those risks. These are women who were not volunteers but did provide that vital back-up support and they were almost nearly always women who did that."

Notwithstanding their use of the dichotomy of 'fighter/supporter', they depart from their male comrades in demanding recognition of those other roles in order to reduce the hierarchical lines which separate them. Feminist IR theorists have explored the use of the gendered dichotomy of 'protector/protected' as a justification for waging war (Enloe 2014; Tickner 1992). The assumptions underpinning such tropes finds expression in the exaltation of male bravery while at the same time emphasising the vulnerability of the female bystander. The creation and imposition of a 'fighter/supporter' dichotomy is also deeply problematic for two reasons. First, it fails to adequately reflect the war-time contributions of republican women

which are spread across a vast array of roles. And second, the separation and hierarchical ordering of 'soldiering' and 'supporting' roles is highly gendered and invariably reifies and privileges the male narrative of war. Such a depiction places women in the corridors and backrooms of the battlefield. The prevailing masculine definition of a combatant enforces a dichotomous classification which categorises women as supplementary parts of the armed struggle. At the heart of such hierarchical ordering is the notion that supportive roles, and therefore women's roles, are not 'real' forms of combat. Instead interviewees blur such categorisation by emphasising the importance they place on *all* military roles. Republican women reject such categorisation as elitist and instead articulate a valuing of roles within the entire military struggle.

Feminist IR theory argues that male consolidation of power in the aftermath of armed conflict often occurs as they gain the status of heroes in the post-war appraisals, presenting positions of authority (Enloe 2014: 121). The reassertion of traditional masculine and feminine roles in the post-war phase is often the point of significant losses for women (Ni Aolain 2011: 41). Patriarchy sustains itself by privileging particular forms of masculinity while simultaneously keeping women in subordinate roles (Enloe 2014). It is clear from the data that republican women use the fighter/supported distinction in the same ways their male comrades do. The call for the broadening of the combatant definition by interviewees however is the distinct point of departure which separates them from their male comrades. The interview data here mirrors the findings from Dowler (1998) in which former IRA women speak inclusively of all republican military roles, rather than exclusively focusing on the 'fighter role'. During her research in Belfast in 1998, Dowler finds a pervasive attitude among republican men that their role (as frontline fighters) eclipsed and superseded all other military roles. In particular the research reveals the austere criteria used by men in defining a 'combatant'. While men state that 'we [men] were the ones in the front lines……out there

every night on patrol' (male republican cited in Dowler 1998: 172), interviewees in this research define IRA involvement as something far broader and eclectic, encompassing the diversity of roles women played within the republican movement. By examining the experiences of combatant women, we are not only bringing their lives into view, but we can also produce a more accurate account of women's war-time military contributions. In doing so, I suggest, we can also challenge the rather limited prevailing definition of a combatant. The data and discussion advanced here concurs that the dominant notion of combatant utterly fails to reflect the realities of republican women's war-time experiences.

The evidence here strongly suggests that the persistent conflation of combatant with the handling of a weapon is a rather limited and inadequate definition. By taking the perspectives of republican women seriously, I argue that we acquire a broader spectrum of vision in order to encapsulate *all* military roles involved in the waging and sustaining of armed conflict. The persistent labelling of 'combatant' as a person with a weapon effectively diminishes women's multiple and vital war-time contributions, projecting a masculine post-war narrative that the real actors in armed conflict are mostly male. By taking the lives of combatant women as a theoretical starting point, we quickly expose the patriarchal assumptions which underpin such narrow definitions. I conclude that the rich narrative of female combatants such as that of the interviewees here and their demands for recognising *all* of women's war-time contributions presents a formidable challenge to the prevailing definition of combatant.

'A lesser species of revolutionaries?': Women & Armed Struggle

Most existing research indicates that women's involvement within the IRA was 'the result of a combination of female insistence and male recognition of the necessity of having some

militarily trained women' (Ward 1989: 259)[46]. While women did vastly populate the support roles, interviewees resolutely assert that all ranks of militant republicanism were flooded with female recruits. All interviewees felt that they played an 'equal role' alongside their male comrades within the IRA. As one interviewee remarked to me, "the nearness of death is a great equaliser". Geraldine is from Belfast. She is a former member of the IRA and is currently a Sinn Féin activist. She is also a mother of three grown up boys. As a child her earliest memories is the burning of her family home which resided in a predominantly protestant/loyalist part of Belfast. Although 'Geraldine' does not recall political discussions in her home as a child she was keenly aware of the republican history in her family. Her mother was a prominent republican from Donegal as was her father who hailed from the city of Derry. Both parents were 'active' in the 1940's republican campaigns. During the recent conflict, 'Geraldine's' family were heavily affected by the violence. All four of her brothers joined the IRA. Her husband, also a militant republican died in a republican feud in the latter years of the conflict. She joined the IRA in the early 1970's at the age of sixteen and was interned twice.

> "To be honest, during the struggle and the Brits on the streets, man and woman was
> equal……but any time at all and whatever you were going out to do…….I always remember
> being treated as equal as any volunteer in the movement."

During her interview, Eileen was never reticent about speaking frankly and criticising the republican movement. Here though, she herself believes that men and women were equal within the ranks of the IRA:

> "Well when you there in the streets and you were a volunteer operating, we were treated the
> same, that's how I felt. So you weren't treated any differently when it came to do anything

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[46] Explorations of gender and women within the IRA is beyond the scope of this chapter. For a more comprehensive study, see Miranda Allison's *Women & Political Violence* and Theresa O'Keefe's *Feminist Identity Development and Activism in Revolutionary Movements.* The latter is exceptionally thorough in examining women's motivations, roles within the IRA as well as the dearth of women at the leadership level.

on the streets. I never felt that women were left to make the tea; I always felt like an equal within the movement."

The extracts above were widely shared by the majority of interviewees. Ostensibly they felt they played an equal role alongside men. This is not to suggest however, that the republican movement was some feminist utopia immune from the pervasive forces of sexism and patriarchy. On the contrary, a feminist analysis of the interview data actually indicates a perpetual struggle waged by women to be included as armed activists within the IRA. According to interviewees, women had to struggle to be involved as volunteers within the IRA, consistently encountering a patriarchal wall of reluctance among the male-dominated leadership and membership. Christine came from a family of seven children and wanted nothing other than a career in nursing. Although she does recall Irish language lessons occurring in her family home the eruption of armed conflict in 1969 would see Christine and most of her family engage in armed actions as republicans, with many of her brothers and her father spending periods of detention under internment or serving sentences in jail. Her father was previously interned in the 1950's for his part in the Border Campaign. Christine was interned in 1973. Today she is a Sinn Féin member and community activist. She is married to a former prisoner and has several children.

> "At the start it was the women looking after the men because they were looking after the barricades and keeping the area safe. So the women made the tea and all of that. But with regards to when the [British] Army came in, then women got involved, you know rifles went into prams. When more men were arrested women took over and in many respects women were at the forefront of the campaign because the majority of men were being arrested so it was women who led a lot of the departments, were very much involved, like you always had girls in the street for scouting and carrying and taking away but from the '70's women played a real part but there was still that sense among the [male] volunteers that women

should really keep their own place. Like [sic] they're good for carrying stuff but in the end it wasn't like that, women became fully trained and well trained."

Christine's extract uncovers a common theme across most interviews revealing that the inclusion of women within the IRA stemmed more from a logistical requirement for the 'reserve army' to fill the depleting ranks in the aftermath of continuing losses due to arrests. It suggests that the shift in thinking among the leadership (and the wider membership) regarding women's role in the IRA resides not in an ideological awakening towards gender equality but more with the resource demands in a period of accelerating and intense armed conflict. In addition to the use of the reserve army, interviewees describe their resistance to such exclusion, by demanding their role in the IRA.

Patricia: "Women were encouraged to go into the Cumann na mBan[47] and the thing about that which bothered me, and no disrespect to them but they had their own structure different to the IRA structure. I was as able and equal any man. And if I'm going to die carrying a gun then I'm not going to die carrying a gun for a male comrade, or I am not going to be arrested for carrying a gun and serving 10 years after *he* had shot somebody with it. If I go to jail or if I die then it'll be under my own probation to be a very active member."

Interviewees depict an organisation which clearly adhered strictly to very patriarchal definitions of masculine and feminine roles within a militant movement. While rhetorical espousals from the leadership regarding the revolutionary nature of their struggle spoke of liberation and freedom for all, that vision of liberation would be firmly limited to a nationalist ideology. The male-led leadership were reluctant revolutionaries when it came to women's emancipation. Linda recalls an astonishing IRA meeting from the early 1970's:

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[47] Founded in 1914, Cumann na mBan was a female auxiliary force, providing supporting roles for the Irish Volunteers, which became the IRA in 1919. Each subsequent manifestation of the IRA since retained Cumann na mBan as an important part of armed republicanism, yet it is consistently deemed by male IRA volunteers as a supplementary role. Initially, the Provisional IRA operated along strict gender lines whereby males occupied the ranks of the IRA and females were restricted to Cumann na mBan. Stemming directly from the demands of republican women, rules barring women from the IRA were changed in the early 1970's.

"We had a lot of debates internally. The republican movement that I joined was a very male-dominated movement and we had a lot of battles. I remember being at one meeting where somebody mentioned a motion where any woman that got pregnant, she was to be dismissed immediately. So I just got up and said 'what do you mean she's to be dismissed, if she still wants to be in the republican movement then that's her choice'.....now if she wanted to stay in or take a leave of absence then that's fine too. But you see here was I saying 'what about the volunteer that got her pregnant, is he getting dismissed?'....so you were fighting this war but also the war with the Brits. But you knew the undercurrents of the men were very old fashioned. Some men regarded the women, because of the split between the IRA and Cumann na mBan, as a kind of lesser species of revolutionaries and things like getting women on the same training camps as men or going on the same operations as men, women had to fight for that, had to prove themselves so that was always in there."

Notwithstanding women's success in entering the male-dominated realm of armed conflict, overt sexism and patriarchal norms attempted to strictly limit women's political mobility. It is clear from Linda's extract, and others, that women's reproductive role coupled with the gendered division of domestic labour would be utilised as a mechanism to curtail women's agency. The interview data indicates that they were hard fought for and won by the demands of women themselves. It clearly suggests that the years of the Troubles saw militant republicanism operate firmly along distinctly patriarchal gender roles:

Emily: "Because in general there is a male attitude towards women which is dominant within the movement which makes all these changes [female IRA volunteers] all the more remarkable, amazing. It is a very male-dominated organisation the IRA and a lot of thinking is entirely male-dominated. The fact that women got to play a part in the struggle was only because certainly women fought to play a part and it wasn't straight forward."

Siobhan is currently a Sinn Féin activist who also works as a therapeutic councillor in Derry city. She grew up on the Creggan estate, a working-class area of small, terraced houses built

to meet the growing demands for housing in the 1940's and 1950's. Although her family had no republican history, the eruption of the armed conflict would see Siobhan along with many of her brothers and sister engage in armed actions, many of them entering jail on multiple occasions. She is married with children and lives just outside Derry city.

> "At the start, there was some thinking around that women had a certain life span and the thinking was that women will join the IRA when they are young and single. They will meet a man, marry, have children and then they'll leave the IRA. So the thinking was that women have a certain life span so what's the point in training them up so women……em (sigh)….. but when I got to 18 that wasn't our notion and were sort of saying "No, we're as good as the next man", plus the fact, if someone went out and took a shot and shot a Brit or an RUC man and you were arrested taking the weapon away then you were getting charged with that killing."

Siobhan's extract echoes Linda's and that of many others regarding the value placed by men on women's 'mothering' role. References to the "life span" of revolutionary women suggests that men saw women's inclusion as a temporary affair, all of which would be brought to a satisfactory conclusion when these rebel women 'realised their real true role'; marriage and motherhood. It indicates that regardless of their contribution to armed struggle, there remained a virulent patriarchal attitude among many male republicans that women's 'true' role in the national project was mothering.

The struggles of republican women to enter the IRA as volunteers reveal a highly gendered organisation, imbued with pervasive sexist and patriarchal attitudes and cultures. The entry of women within the ranks of the IRA stems from two separate issues. First, the struggle for women's participation as armed fighter resides in the activism of women themselves and second, it appears that the depleted ranks of the IRA, due to hundreds of arrests and lives lost in combat, created a logistical need to replenish the declining number of

volunteers. In other words, I suggest that the male attitude towards women that their role as an IRA volunteer was something of a temporary action; the need to call up the 'reserve army'. While the notion of women's actions as temporary is utterly rejected by the women themselves, the data suggests that long before we arrive at the commemorative actions in the transition period, republican women were perpetually struggling for inclusion, recognition and equality within the republican movement. Interview data clearly indicates that the battle for recognising and valuing women's contributions in post-war commemoration is in fact a continuity of struggle by women against sexist and patriarchal norms within the republican movement.

The Meaning of War-Time Sacrifice

Sara McDowell (2007) argues that the use of commemoration by republicans is to not only challenge the state's version of the conflict but is also bound up in efforts to recognise past sacrifices. It is however primarily the male architects of commemoration who decide what sacrifices are to be remembered. Invariably the sacrifice invoked by republican memorialisation concerns those who gave their lives for the cause-the patriot dead. While the interview data substantiates such an interpretation, it also uncovers other sacrifices, sacrifices that republican women paid *as women* in order to participate in armed struggle. What I argue in this section is that dominant definitions of sacrifice are in fact highly gendered and do not reflect the sacrifices endured by female combatants. Once again, we see that the inclusion of excluded or marginalised voices such as republican women not only shed light on their unique experiences, but by doing so we also problematise what appear to be stable and universal concepts (Steans 2003).

Research on female combatants from across the globe consistently finds that women are required to sacrifice much more for their involvement in armed struggle due to normative

gender expectations (Alison 2009; Hale 2001; Ibanez 2001; MacKenzie 2012). Prevailing gender typecasts ensure that many female fighters make conscious choices not to identify themselves as fighters to avoid social stigma, particularly in the highly visible DDR processes (Anderlini 2007; MacKenzie 2012; Mazurana & Cole 2013). A strong theme among interviewees is that women sacrificed both more and differentially to men in order to play a part in the armed struggle. According to former IRA volunteer Patricia, who is now a Sinn Féin councillor:

> "In the eyes of my community, I mean you had to earn respect. And to command respect
> from them and maybe even take more risks to get the recognition so [sic] that you deserved
> to be looked upon as equal to the male IRA volunteer. And you yourself have come across
> the lack of history in written form of anything that is on paper to state the women's role
> within the struggle. And of course there is resistance to acknowledging women's role
> because it goes against the stereotype of what a woman is and they see a woman as a nurturer
> and a life giver rather than a life taker."

Patricia's extract is insightful as it reveals the 'resistance' to acknowledge women's role as an armed fighter, and again uncovers a pervasive patriarchal understanding within republican memorialisation that women's 'true role' is that of life-giver and mother. It is also important to bear in mind that right from the outset of the Troubles, the male-led leadership were reluctant revolutionaries when it came to the idea of 'allowing' women into the ranks of the IRA. It once again suggests that while men were automatically guaranteed status by their volunteer role, women had to continuously prove and earn that respect due to gendered role expectations. Women's battle for recognition as volunteers appears to have been a constant political struggle. Research of female combatants from other regions blighted by conflict reveals a pattern of social stigma informed by patriarchal understandings around women's domestic roles, particularly in the aftermath of war. In El Salvador families and sometimes

whole communities shunned returning female fighters as punishment for transgressing normative roles and neglecting 'traditional responsibilities' such as motherhood (Ibanez 2001). Research data here mirrors the strains experienced by female republicans due to normative gender expectations, so much so that some withdrew or decreased their republican militarism. Karen, a former IRA prisoner who now works for Sinn Féin explains:

> "Family relations died while I was in jail…….because being in jail was not seen as right for someone who is a mother, so I decided that I couldn't put my family through all that again. And so my role as a mother, I decided to step back because women do have to sacrifice more to take part in the struggle."

While Karen states that she herself decided to take 'a step back', the interview data in fact indicates that it was patriarchal forces and cultures which forced or certainly pushed Karen into what would be deemed more gender appropriate roles. As women and girls engage in armed actions, they are deeply engaged in gendered, militarised acts that in large parts seek respectability in the eyes of communities that support the armed group (Mazurana 2013: 161-62). This reveals the deeply problematic relationship between women and nationalism which operates under the guise of a collective resistance based on egalitarian efforts by women and men. In reality however, patriarchal norms, particular around masculine and feminine role expectations, exert themselves and shape gender relations, even in times of war. The pressures of gender expectations and the menace of social stigma are still prevalent and palpable today. Orla, a former IRA prisoner who now works solely as a community activist states:

> "I have a wee girl now and I didn't actually tell her until about 6 months ago that I was in jail. But she sort of had an idea. Her daddy is also an ex-prisoner and she knew about him so she sort of asked me a few years ago but I brushed it off because she was only six or seven then to understand. It was just hard…. [pause 3 seconds]….. I wasn't embarrassed or

ashamed of it because I'm not, but a few months ago a girl that my daughter goes to school with told her that I had been in jail. And she was grand with it but she was also like "no but you're my mammy"…you know…..couldn't really get her head around the idea that her *mammy* (with emphasis) would have been involved because her daddy is also an ex-prisoner….like it's ok for daddy to go to jail but maybe not mammy."

That it is "ok for daddy to go to jail" indicates that despite female participation in armed struggle, the post-war landscape reveals a dogged belief among many within republican communities that jail, armed struggle and political violence remains the exclusive and normative preserve of men. As discussed in an earlier section of this chapter, women's 'mothering role' is consistently used as a mechanism for limiting the political agency of women within the republican movement. In conflict transition, patriarchal expectations act to suppress women's post-war narrative. The attempts to silence their voices demands that women sacrifice their war-time stories and roles in order not to rock the patriarchal boat. Normative gender expectations which reassert themselves in conflict transition ensured that many female combatants are expected to suppress their combatant experiences. Many others echo that sense of frustration in having to downplay their combatant role in order to fulfil the normative gender expectations during conflict transition. It once again reveals that even in cases where social and political norm are suspended or even challenged by female participation in armed conflict, traditional gender expectations continue to inform and shape women's post-war experiences:

Michelle: "Now when I was arrested, which was hundreds and hundreds of times, my family would tell my son that I was gone off here or there because I didn't want him knowing about any of this."

Patricia: "I have four children and only one of them would have any republican inclinations, the other three wouldn't. I mean I have one daughter who really doesn't like any of that thing

about my past. She wants the mother figure that she's always known as opposed to Patricia who was in the IRA."

Theresa: "You were used to living twenty-four hours like they could be your last. Like I always had to have, I lived my life like that so I would have always had the kids clothes ready in certain places just in case I was arrested or delayed and so as a mother you always had to have contingency plans and it's only come out in the last two years that my sons were very resentful for my involvement as their mother."

Interview data indicates that wider gendered expectations remained, with clear tensions between the roles of militants and mothers. Despite the blurring of normative gender boundaries during armed conflict, it is clear that republican women faced multiple barriers and endured many gendered sacrifices in order to participate in armed struggle. Republican commemoration unquestionably reflects this prevailing gender order where recollections of the conflict regress to normative gender roles as described by interviewees. Much of the traditional republican commemoration hitherto does little to disrupt such erroneous narratives.

The dominant concept of 'sacrifice' is the sacrifice of life or martyrdom within republican commemoration. In particular the sacrifice of ten Hunger Strikers who died in 1981 has tended to dominate the republican memorial landscape in the conflict transition period. While fully agreeing with such a definition of the Hunger Strikers as those who 'paid the ultimate sacrifice', republican women interviewed advocate for a broader understanding of sacrifice. In particular the sacrifice of women's child-bearing years for the sake of their involvement in armed struggle was introduced as a prominent theme. Helen, a former IRA prisoner whose "biological clock had stopped by the time I got out of jail" strongly urged me to bear in mind "women's child-bearing sacrifices" when writing up this research. Helen stated that she had no regrets regarding her decision to join the IRA, a choice which

ultimately deprived her of a mothering role. However, the complete lack of attention paid by the leadership and the wider republican commemorative efforts to such sacrifices is felt as hurtful to many republican women here. Helen's sentiments were also shared passionately by those women who did have children of their own in later years.

> Patricia: "I went into jail when I was 17 and got out just before I was 22 so I still had child bearing years ahead of me and did. There were women who went in there later in life and came out unable to have children as a direct effect of the war and those sacrifices are never fully recognised or given that sort of credit……you go into jail if you're 29 or 30 and get ten years then……you know you didn't have babies when you were 40 back in the 1970's. There are lots of women that ended up childless, who were active members of the republican movement who are now childless because of their commitment to the struggle and incarceration during their child bearing years and that is never recognised which is completely unacceptable."

Janette was born and raised outside of Ireland yet came from a strong Irish republican family. Her earliest memories are of her grandmother teaching her the Irish language and Irish political history. As the conflict intensified in the early 1970's, Janette relocated to the North of Ireland where she joined the republican movement, occupying many differing roles. While her Irish background was prominent, her politics prior to the early 1970's were firmly socialist. She was heavily involved in the establishment of the Sinn Féin Women's Department and at one stage served on the Sinn Féin Ard Comhairle for many years. She is married and remains a Sinn Féin activist, community activist and a part-time salaried health care provider.

> "Women were an after-thought. One of the cruel factors for women who got long sentences meant that they couldn't have children and that wasn't the sentence that the men got, men could still have children after they got out. Now that was a biological fact but it was also an

incredibly *cruel* biological fact and this is a conjecture on my part but I'm sure for some

women, they heard their biological clock ticking."

Janette's reference to women being an "after thought" once again illustrates that women were in fact far from equal within the republican movement. The feeling of 'equality with the men' as described by the vast majority of interviewees does not stand when faced with the ways in which their unique sacrificial experiences are completely excluded. The differential jail sentences as described by Janette reveals the ways in which interviewees were critically aware that their years of incarceration were fundamentally different to their male comrades by virtue of the incarceration of their child-bearing years. For some women, their loss of the opportunity to have children meant that time in jail amounted to a double sentence. Niamh comes from a strong republican family in Derry and is currently a Sinn Féin activist in the city. She joined the republican movement as a teenager and spent four years in Armagh jail in the late 1970's. Her home was the target of persistent house raids for state forces. As her family members were republicans, many of her brothers were both interned and jailed. Upon her release from jail, Niamh resumed her IRA roles and eventually ended up going 'on-the-run'. She is married with children.

"Many women missed an opportunity to procreate and you never hear about that talk, but I often think about things like that and I still see women today who were in jail with me and they were ten years older than me and when they got out of jail, it was too late for them to meet a partner or to have children; too old. And people don't often think about that, that some people made a bigger sacrifice than others did, including myself."

The gender-blindness within republican commemoration indicates a clear lack of attention towards women's needs and experiences within the commemorative process. Once again, the dominance of a masculine vision of what constitutes 'sacrifice' extenuates a narrow and partial vision of the war-time landscape. The 'hidden history' of women's child bearing

sacrifices is undoubtedly a painful personal issue but it is also a deeply political issue. By conflating 'sacrifice' solely with either martyrdom or imprisonment, women's unique sacrifices are supplanted by a one-size fits all approach, rendering them excluded. In other words, the masculine definition of sacrifice, much like their vision of a combatant, becomes a seemingly universal and stable category. Invariably, such categories are also presented in commemorative format as gender-neutral. The distinctive standpoint of republican female combatants, I argue, broadens and de-masculinises prevailing conceptualisations of both combatant and war-time sacrifice. It illustrates the need to move beyond merely 'adding' women to existing frameworks in favour of radically altering the ways in which war-time sacrifice is conceptualised. The price paid by many women for their participation in armed struggle was significantly different to men, with some sacrificing their child-bearing capabilities. Adhering to prevailing definitions ensures that such as experiences are overlooked and remain hidden. This chapter hitherto finds that the contributions and sacrifices of republican women are neither recognised nor valued by the wider republican movement, despite the success women had in managing to enter the ranks of the IRA as volunteers. The persistent de-valuing of women's war-time roles is probably best illustrated by their exclusion from the post-war republican commemorative landscape.

Republican Commemoration & the 'Invisibility' of Women

Commemoration plays a significant and deeply influential role in the shaping of collective memories and dominant narratives of war-time roles and events (Rolston 2003). It is however as much a process of forgetting as it is remembering (Forty & Kuchler 1999). 'State formations, political parties or movements, and other social agents are all involved in constructing versions of the national past and national identity, selecting from or reworking the repertoire of stories and symbols to fashion effectively useable public memories for their particular ends and purposes.' (Ashplant et al. 2000: 16). In other words, commemoration is

never an objective mirror accurately representing the past; architects of memorialisation are motivated and informed by specific political ambitions as they 'imagine the nation' (Anderson 1983).

While various forms of republican memorialisation existed during the Troubles (typically parades, murals and a small number of plaques), the transition period under examination here witnessed a rapid increase, with a high percentage of memorials for every one of the 294 IRA volunteers who were killed in the conflict (McDowell 2008: 345). Republican commemoration today is prolific and manifested in monuments, murals, republican plots in cemeteries, ceremonies and annual commemorations, parades, wreath laying, graveside orations, sporting events, festivals, song and music (Graham & Whelan 2007). The vast number of murals, memorials and plagues, indicates the value afforded to the use of prominent public spaces by republicans (and loyalists also) in order to tell their version of the war. Many memorials list IRA volunteers and civilians who died at the hands of the 'British State' constructing a vision of oneness and unity between the armed IRA and the community on behalf of which they vowed to fight for (McDowell 2007).

Despite this spirit of collective resistance where 'everyone has a part to play'[48], republican commemoration has traditionally privileged certain military roles over others. More often than not, the male protagonist dominates the commemorative landscape with a notable relative absence of militant republican women (Graham & Whelan 2007; McDowell 2007; O'Keefe 2013). Such a gender-blind vision of war-time participation led to significant levels of frustration among interviewees who felt that their contributions were not accurately reflected in the vast majority of commemorative projects. Theresa voices her frustration at the lack of recognition:

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[48] This is a famous quote from the highly revered republican Bobby Sands, who died after 65 five days on Hunger Strike in 1981.

"Did we not count? *Do we not count?* I just feel there have been too many women who are just forgotten about or who have not ever been recognised or given any recognition for all the work she [sic] done. If you were active you stayed away from these big do's [social functions], you avoided the limelight if you like. So I'm a wee bit resentful, but that resentment comes from the fact that I know so many, so many brilliant women who never received recognition nor ever will get that recognition."

Siobhan echoes those sentiments, indicating the androcentricism which pervades republican commemoration:

"There has been (interviewee sighs) how would you say this……I need to be very diplomatic here. There have been a lot of books written about the [republican armed] struggle, and sometimes if you listen to some of our [commemorative] songs and I think if I hear the words 'son, father, husband' once more then I'm going to squeal because you'd nearly think that women played no role at all in the IRA."

Both extracts are typical of the responses across the vast majority of interviews, all of whom are linked by a profound sense of frustration, resentment and in some instances anger. Irish rebel songs or ballads as indicated by Siobhan play a significant role in republican commemoration. Their importance is augmented by the fact that these songs are prominently performed at social functions and pubs in republican areas. Lorraine Dowler's extensive research in West Belfast in 1998 found vast levels of frustration among republican women at the male dominance and bias within songs and ballads. Of the seventy-four republican songs analysed by Dowler, she found just four made reference to women's roles in armed struggle. Echoing the experiences of interviewees here, Dowler's research reveals similar anxieties regarding the erasure of women's stories from the republican struggle. Most interviewees here are consistent in stating their belief that the leadership was doing its best to include women within its commemorative work. Despite such affirmations, there is a common theme

of resentment and frustration at the lack of attention to women's war-time contribution. This is particularly noticeable across the interviews when examining the ways in which the prison protest is now recalled in commemorative format.

The prison protests of the late 1970's and early 1980's remains a dominant focal point for republican commemoration. Although republican prisoners, both male and female, were incarcerated in various jails across Britain and Ireland, the focus of the prison protest resided in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh[49] which housed male inmates and Armagh jail which housed female inmates. A first hunger strike involving both men and women collapsed in December 1980, a second Hunger Strike in 1981 which lasted for more than eight months resulted in the deaths of ten men in the H-Blocks. The twentieth anniversary of the hunger strike in 2001 witnessed a plethora of acts of republican memorialisation regarding the prison protests, and today remains a prominent feature in the republican commemorative calendar.

Many local commemoration committees were formed in 2001 across Ireland to commemorate the Hunger Strikes, mostly populated by male ex-prisoners. The Falls Cultural Society produced many elaborate memorials to the IRA's 'D' company which operated in the Lower Falls area close to Belfast city centre. The Conway Mill project is another which engaged in Irish cultural events but is 'equally bound up in Sinn Féin party politics (McDowell 2007: 731). Many local '81 committees[50] engaged in tree planting ceremonies, mural painting and sporting events. The Upper Springfield '81 Commemoration Committee

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[49] Long Kesh is located a few miles South-West of Belfast, near the city of Lisburn. It was a former RAF base but its Nissan huts were used as an internment camp and jail by the State in the initial years of the conflict. In 1976, the H-Blocks were opened on the same site which was then renamed the HMP Maze by the British Government, a title republicans (and some Loyalists) reject.

[50] During the prison protests of the late 1970's and early 1980's relatives and supporters of the prisoners established local Relatives Action Committees locally throughout Ireland under the overall banner of the National H-Block/Armagh Committee in order to agitate and organise public support for the prisoners. The first RAC was established in Easter 1976. In 2001, republicans attempted to mirror the structural organs of the 1981 model in order to commemorate the hunger strikes of 1981. These commemorative committees were established in localities within towns, cities and villages right across the island of Ireland. Deemed by republicans as a 'year of commemoration', 2001 witnessed hundreds of diverse local events to remember the hunger strikers culminating in a national rally in Casement Park in West Belfast in August 2001.

engaged in large scale acts of commemoration including (unofficially) renaming streets and roads after some of the hunger strikers. Again this group was also comprised of mainly male ex-prisoners. These efforts to 'republicanise' West Belfast also included the erection of new statues and the opening of new memorial gardens (McDowell 2007: 731). Interviewees are deeply frustrated at the lack of attention given to their prison struggles in Armagh contrasting sharply with the immense focus on men's. If the Hunger Strike commemorations of 2001 endeavoured to 'republicanise' West Belfast, then the data here indicates that such memorialisation also masculinised the landscape of West Belfast.

Edel is a lifelong republican and lives in West Belfast. Edel's family has no republican history and her engagement with republicanism was very much a self-guided journey. She joined the republican movement in the late 1980's although she was already politicised in terms of feminist and socialist politics through her time at university. Although stating that she still supports the Sinn Féin party electorally, she is no longer a formal member of the party. She works as a full-time community activist in West Belfast. She is married with children.

> "There was an event recently on women's contribution to the prison protests and [named female speaker] was speaking and then there were two [named male speakers] but she gave a lovely ten minutes speaking [sic] about the comradeship in Armagh and what happened there. But then the rest of the two hours was the [two male speakers] experience of the prison protests. No gender balance at all……. I was livid at the end of it and I couldn't voice this anger because I felt it would diminish the stories of the male speakers or the deaths of the Hunger Strikers. When I said it [male domination at event] to some people on the way out of the event, nobody else had noticed. To me it is glaring, and it glares that there is something missing…….a whole section missing that is not acknowledged."

At the time of interview Gemma had recently attended the national hunger strike rally and was shocked at the dearth of attention given to women's contribution:

> "Women's stories haven't been told and even when you look at the Hunger Strikes you need to keep reminding people that three women were on Hunger Strike. At the recent national rally for the Hunger Strike in Monaghan, the speakers never mentioned women once, not once, not their role in the Hunger Strike or the war and so there has been a complaint put into the *Ard Comhairle* over that. So no, women are not getting the recognition."

The pattern across all interviews contradicts their earlier assertions that women were equal to men when it came to the ranks of the IRA. Their struggle for recognition in commemoration is not new but merely represents a new terrain of patriarchal resistance to women's military participation. Bernie works for Sinn Féin as a constituency worker as well as being involved in a number of local community groups in Belfast. Like so many other interviewees, Bernie's family biography bears the scars of armed conflict. Bernie was interned in the early 1970's. She was released in the mid-1970's but found herself back in Armagh jail because of her IRA activities. Bernie was involved in the prison protests of the late 1970's and early 1980's during her time in jail.

> "Women have just been wiped out of history and even with regards to the Hunger Strike and that. Some people are making documentaries or writing books about it, and it's like Armagh didn't exist and that can be very frustrating. I know we were only on it [hunger strike] for nineteen days and I cannot take away how long the men were on [it], but sometimes it gets a wee bit frustrating because it's like "were we not in Armagh and were women there not on Hunger Strike?""

Bernie's thoughts typify those of other interviews, suggesting critical levels of awareness regarding their 'invisibility' in commemoration, something particularly lucid when it comes to the prison protests. The perennial question among most is 'were we not in Armagh on the

protest also?' The dominant narrative within republican commemoration suggests that women were not really there during the war. All interviewees agreed that republican acts of memorialisation during the conflict transition period are not reflecting their experiences or contributions in a meaningful or accurate way, despite the fact that most also stated that 'the movement was doing its best' to include women. The data here regarding the exclusion of women within commemoration indicates that while all interviewees state that they played an 'equal' role alongside the men, the memorial landscape in the transition suggests that this view was not shared by the vast majority of men. It appears that the struggle for women to be recognised and included within commemoration in the transition period is in fact a continuity of their war-time struggle to be recognised and included as 'equals'.

The example of the Hunger Strikes perfectly illustrates the muted stories of women's experiences in Armagh when contrasted with the amplified male narrative of the H-Blocks. The interview data here substantiates existing research which argues that women's war-time contributions are rarely considered worthy 'celebrating'. Wall murals have played a prominent commemorative role in republicanism from the hunger strike period onwards. An analysis of over 500 republican and nationalist murals in 1996 revealed that just six made reference to armed republican women (O'Keefe 2013: 102). It is reasonable to conclude that republican commemoration in the past fifteen years eagerly pays homage to a war fought by male combatants. Interview data here substantiates existing research which argues that there is a dominant masculine image prevailing in republican commemoration (Graham & Whelan 2007; McDowell 2008). The image of the male militarist literally looms large. In Derry city cemetery a ten-foot high black marble stone statue was erected in 2001 to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Hunger Strikes. The figurative sculpture depicts a masked man in military uniform, wearing dark glasses and a beret brandishing a gun. This caused much annoyance and offence to many republican women who felt their contribution to the prison

protest, and by extension to the overall struggle was omitted (McDowell 2008: 343). The towering statues represent a vision of combatants as militarised masculinity (Graham & Whelan 2007). This trend continued with similar statues erected in republican strongholds throughout the North of Ireland in 2001, despite the disquiet and protestations expressed by republican women.

It is important to state at the juncture that I am not suggesting that all republican women are absent from republican memorialisation. The Price sisters, Marian and Dolours, were both given life sentences in London in 1973 for their part in an IRA bombing campaign, the very first Provisional IRA bombs in England of the Troubles. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the two sisters were in fact the team leaders for that bombing campaign. Mairead Farrell was shot dead by the British army (SAS)[51] in Gibraltar in 1988 during an attempted bomb attack on British military targets there, specifically a weekly British military parade. Mairead had previously spent time in Armagh jail for her part in a bomb attack on the Conway Hotel on the outskirts of West Belfast. Dorothy Maguire and Maura Meehan were shot dead by the British Army in the Lower Falls on October 23rd 1971. At the time of their deaths, they were engaged in 'Hen Patrols'[52], scouting streets for the presence of state forces in order to warn active republicans in that area. As the British army entered Clonard Street, just off the Falls road, the women attempted to warn republican by sounding the horn of their

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[51] The SAS-Special Air Services is an elite unit of the British Army. Although formed during the second World War as a regiment, thereafter the unit was widely used for clandestine activities, Including what the British army describes as 'covert reconnaissance, counter-terrorism, direct action and human intelligence gathering'. In the North of Ireland, the SAS gained a fearsome reputation among republicans stemming largely from the SAS use lethal firepower in order to counter militant republicanism. The 1980's in particular would see a sharp rise in the so-called 'shoot to kill' incidents in which IRA members would be killed by the SAS in disputed circumstances. The charge levelled at the British by republicans was that it effectively used the SAS as judge, juror and executor.

[52] In the early 1970's the British army began night-time incursions into republican areas, some of which were designated by locals as 'No-Go' areas for state forces. For the most part these incursions were for house raids and arrest operations and became known as 'Duck Patrols'. In reaction, groups of republican women began patrolling the streets in order to alert the community and active republicans of the presence of state forces. They became known as 'Hen Patrols'.

car. The British army responded and shot both women dead. Other Cumann na mBan volunteers such as Anna Parker and Anne Marie Pettigrew were killed when the bombs they were transporting for IRA volunteers exploded prematurely.

When we examine this cohort of republican women, it is interesting to see the ways in which some are prominent in republican commemoration while others are barely visible. Mairead Farrell is relatively prominent in public memorials such as murals, quotations and her name is often placed alongside the names of other prominent republicans such as Bobby Sands during commemorative speeches and political speeches. This is somewhat similar in the case of the Price sisters. Although they parted their ways with the mainstream republican movement due to ideological differences[53], they remain widely 'celebrated' for their 'successful'[54] bombing operation in London, despite their arrest and imprisonment.

The cases of others, such as the volunteers of Cumann na mBan who also lost their lives, remain largely invisible. It appears that when women do come into view within male-led republican commemoration, they are those who were acting in accordance with the roles traditionally associated with being a 'combatant'. Those in the support structures which also gave their lives barely elicit a mention. It suggests that when female combatants are included,

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[53] Marian and Dolours were given two life sentences and immediately embarked on a hunger strike for repatriation to a prison in the North of Ireland. They endured 167 days of forced feeding by the prison authorities. Upon their release in the early 1980's, Marian was relatively inactive politically but did emerge in the 1990's as a vociferous opponent of Sinn Féin. In November 2009 she was arrested and detained in connection with the killing of two British soldiers at Massareene Barracks, outside of Belfast. She was charged with inciting support for an illegal organisation. She endured daily strip searches, among other brutalities, sparking a widespread campaign for her release. All charges were eventually dropped in 2012. Her supporters described the entire episode as a convenient form of internment and state abuse. Like her sister Marian, Dolours emerged as a formidable opponent of Sinn Féin in the 1990's. She was a regular contributor to *The Blanket*, an online journal which heavily criticised Sinn Féin. It is widely known that Dolours mental health suffered, undoubtedly caused by the many years of abuse during her hunger strike, among other issues related to the conflict. She died in January 2013 at her home, evidently as a result of the toxic effect of a mix of prescribed sedative and anti-depressant medications.
[54] I use the word 'successful' to denote the ways in which IRA volunteers would appraise this operation and in no way should be interpreted as a way of disregarding the pain caused to the hundreds who suffered horrific injuries and the man who suffered a heart attack directly as a result of the bombs. This operation in particular is still hailed as a heavy blow against the British by republicans, despite the capture and jailing of the bombing team.

they are included on men's terms and conditions; tacked on to a format which adheres to a masculine definition and occurs within an established commemorative discourse. Republican commemoration reflects the long-standing view that women's contribution is valued only when it fits into the patriarchal vision of combatant. Commemoration is therefore a reflective manifestation of a much broader trend which sees women's contribution appraised positively by men when it occurs on their terms and definitions.

In addition to the formal processes of commemoration, interviewees describe other informal instances of male domination in the post-war narrative. Anne states that "men have this primal thing to be recognised, to be applauded, to be promoted", sentiments widely shared across the majority of interviews. Sara McDowell (2007) asserts that commemoration is deeply enmeshed within spatial politics, arguing that the republican movement is preoccupied with territory and space within its many forms of commemoration. A key theme across most interviews are the ways in which public space, typically bars and clubs within republican communities are dominated by what the interviewees term as "men's loose talk", again reinforcing a masculine conceptualisation of male heroics and acts of valour during the Troubles. Ruth, a former IRA volunteer and now both a Sinn Féin and Community activist, describes the 'loose talk':

"We see it at republican functions, the loose talk from men is unbelievable and you'll never find a woman doing loose talk about what she did during the war. Part of the problem is that women tend to do what they do and then they move onto the next job. And men are more able to talk about what they did and a lot of women don't. There are women living in houses with their children and grandchildren and they probably did more in the war than some of these men who are doing the loose talk. And it is these women that we want to draw out because their role and their contributions need to be marked and need to be recorded. If you

were to listen to what's being said in the bars and that, sure you'd think it was only men who

fought the war."

The term 'loose talk' was a colloquial phrase used by republicans during the Troubles to

describe how careless conversation in bars and clubs about republican activity could easily be

intercepted by undercover British state agents. It is interesting to hear the phrase now being

used by the women to describe this informal hegemonic storytelling. It is a theme present

throughout most interviews:

Christine: "A lot of the men sit around tables, shooting their mouths off about what they say

they did in the struggle."

Anne: "I think women's contributions needs to be continuously recorded because there are

thousands of women out there who have a story, but men will come forward and have no

problem blowing their own trumpets."

Bernie: "You see men have no problem talking about themselves, while women aren't full of

themselves."

Commemoration is as much about power relations in the present (and future) as it is about

recalling the past. Interview data suggests and substantiates existing research, that the male-

led commemorative project is deeply imbued with masculine concerns regarding the pursuit

of personal status or positions of power (O'Keefe 2013). The dominance of the male

narrative sequesters important public realms within republicanism, such as clubs, bars and

social functions, transforming them into masculinised spaces. In doing so, spatial control is

exerted along gender lines which invariably re-enforces the notion of a male public and a

feminine private. Dowler (1998) argues that public arenas such as pubs, social functions and

nationalist drinking clubs remain male-dominated in ways which depicts the public realm as a

masculine space. Kelly is a life-long member of the republican movement and although she

deliberately avoids stating if she was or was not a member of the IRA, she does recount her involvement in rioting, street agitation and Sinn Féin. She currently works as a HR manager for a Women's Centre in Belfast, she works for Sinn Féin as well as being a part-time councillor in social services. Her father was a former British Army soldier and she recalls his anxieties regarding their presence on the streets of Belfast when they first arrived in 1969. While her family had no republican or nationalist history prior to the eruption of armed conflict in 1969, her sisters and brothers joined the republican movement during the course of the armed conflict.

> "It is very still much a male-dominated organisation [so] that you have to keep going
> "where's the women?" From my experience, men find it easier to talk about their
> achievements even within the republican movement. So men would boast and joke about
> what they did in the war where the women don't."

O'Keefe suggests that there is a pervasive link between hegemonic masculinity and men's endeavours for personal glory and hero status. Collective hero-worship as a memory work for societies in transition, sustains the nation by reminding its members of their place within it and the assorted roles they are expected to perform (O'Keefe 2013: 100). She argues this status is not afforded or sought by women themselves. Eileen, an ex-prisoner who now works solely in community activism states her frustration:

> "So I really like that thing that Bobby Sands says about everyone having their own part to
> play so I hate this attitude, especially among the men. They love to boast about what they did
> and you'd think only the men fought the Brits. They didn't, it's only women don't boast
> about it, women did it because it was the right thing to do. They didn't do it and then go out
> and herald it, "look at me, aren't I great."

Commemoration is often cited as a type of 'symbolic warfare' or 'war by another means' (Graham & Whelan 2007; McDowell 2012). According to McDowell, memorialisation not

only constitutes war by other means, it also serves to reproduce the wartime gender order/regime where it is men who decide who, what, where and when to commemorate (2008: 340). It is clear that that majority of republican commemoration was guided by a rigid adherence to a narrow, masculine definition of combatant, exalting the male protagonist and recasting women as 'supporters'. The male-led commemorative processes continually sees women's roles pushed to the background, effectively dismissing their vital war-time contributions as supplementary. The use of a gendered discourse regarding 'women as the backbone' perfectly illustrates this regression.

The issue at stake here extends far beyond the field of post-war commemoration. The dearth of women in post-war memorialisation is in fact a long-standing struggle by republican women to be recognised as meaningful actors and participants to the conflict, regardless of the *type* of role undertaken. Feminists consistently argue that the struggle against patriarchy is a daily struggle; its omnipresence requires a relentless struggle of resistance by women at all times. The struggle by republican women to alter the commemorative landscape is not something unique to the conflict transition period. In fact it represents a continuity of political struggle to have their voices, activism and interests as part of the republican agenda. Just as they had previously resisted sexist and patriarchal attitudes within the republican movement, the realm of commemoration in conflict transition sees republican women reorganising to ensure that their war-time contributions are recognised and valued.

Re-Writing Themselves Back Into History

In order to reinforce the agency of interviewees it is important to document the many ways they have responded to *and* resisted their exclusion within mainstream republican commemoration. During the conflict years, particularly in the late 1980's, women established

multiple spaces to ensure recognition of their contribution to armed struggle as well as articulating positions on other political and social issues. Republican women were writing and publishing their own stories in magazines such as *Women's News*, a Belfast feminist magazine, *The Captive Voice*, a republican prisoner's production, and a short-lived yet incredibly powerful publication *Women In Struggle* which was published by the Sinn Féin Women's Department. *The Captive Voice* ran many articles and editorials relating to women's issues, including the use of pornography by male prisoners, domestic violence and the exploitation of women, all of which are indicative of the tone of debate ongoing within the republican movement (Power 2010: 159). In the aftermath of the 1994 IRA ceasefire the Falls Women's Centre produced a video documentary entitled *'What Did You Do in the War Mammy?'* based on interviews and testimonies from female Volunteers. The years of conflict transition, particularly in the years surrounding the negotiated settlement, this discernible women's voice was not as vocal as it had previously been.

In 2012 and 2013 however, there was a reinvigorated effort, reflected in the burgeoning commemorative activism by interviewees at the time of fieldwork, as stated in this chapter's introduction. Much of this activism, a prolific output of various projects, began in 2006 when republican women began to re-organise in order to counter their lack of visibility within republican commemoration. The *Irish Republican History Museum* which contains many references and exhibits of women's wider contribution to the struggle opened in West Belfast in 2007 and was the culmination of years of work by former prisoner Eileen Hickey. Another of her initiatives in documenting women's history culminated in the 2011 publication of *In the Footsteps of Anne*, a vast collection of personal testimonies of female ex-prisoners. The book covered the stories of women located across a myriad of eclectic military roles. In 2007, the Women's Garden of Remembrance opened in the grounds of the Roddy McCorley Society, a prominent republican club located on the Glen Road in West

Belfast. The memorial garden's significance cannot be overstated. Roddy's remains the epicentre of much republican activism, both informally as a social club and formally through acts of commemoration, press conferences and exhibitions, among others. The use of such a prominent public republican space for the women's garden of remembrance presents a huge victory for republican women. The garden is also used as a focal point for women's commemorations and other events such as International Women's Day.

In addition to the activities described above, republican women are now organising on an all-Ireland level to ensure that future commemoration relating to the prison protests captures as many experiences and perspectives as possible. At the time of writing vast efforts were underway to create a digital database for all republican women ex-prisoners.

> Bernie**:** "We do not have a comprehensive data base and so what we done is sent out a wee survey thing to as many as possible. So we had an idea to contact as many women as possible and get their feedback and see if anything could be done for them."

Ruth is currently a Sinn Féin activist and community activist in the Falls area of West Belfast. She also served previously as a local elected representative. Ruth was born and reared in West Belfast and comes from what is traditionally described as a republican family. Her father was interned in the 1940's and her mother was also a senior republican. Pictures of republican martyrs from previous IRA campaigns were prominently displayed within the family home. The Irish language was also widely spoken in the household. Both parents spent some years of the early 1950's 'on-the-run'. With five brothers and three sisters, she recalls a happy childhood mixed with a strong sense of republican identity. Ruth joined the IRA in the early 1970's.

> "I'm involved in a focus group [female ex-prisoners], because even in 2012 there is not even a database of female prisoners, nothing. And part of that, statistics don't exist for the women

nor no in-depth study done on the women as there has been on the men. That's why the focus group was set up. Basically we were told that if the women's story is to be told, then we're the only ones that are going to tell it. But within a few weeks we received over 450 names and I feel women are crying out for this and so many tales are to be told. My own thing that I want is a definitive thing like a library, living history type."

While the idea of compiling a data-base on female prisoners and the establishment of female ex-prisoners groups initially started in Belfast, the research reveals similar endeavours in Derry and other cities and town on both sides of the Irish border.

Michelle: "We've started this women's ex-prisoners group here in Derry. Well we formed it about two months ago after I got a phone call to come up to the women. Like in the office next door, all the photos in the room are all of men so I left them a note saying "was there no women in the struggle?" so we formed this group to make sure that the women's role was being recognised."

Linda: "We worked on the book of women ex-prisoners and we talked to everyone, and you were conscious and explaining yourself as you were taking the stories and we knew that there were hundreds of women out there. Like a big, detailed, extensive oral history could be what is needed. Do one with women and then one with men or whatever but that would be a fascinating look at the whole conflict as opposed to just one particular group in society. But there shouldn't be any hierarchy about who gave the most, because it was a big movement of people and there are lots of people out there sitting silently, forgotten about. Some people were very emotional because this was the first time they'd ever told anyone about their experience, you know like stories of strip searches and we're being given this story and they're upset so it was difficult at times. For some people it came out easily while for others it didn't. But women had the power to write their own stories."

In addition to these efforts, interviewees also described the ways in which they are attempting to highlight *all* of women's war-time contributions. In 2014, new wall murals emerged

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capturing women's roles as armed fighters, their roles in Cumann na mBan (both located in Derry) and equally as important, other roles such as that of providing safe houses and weapons storage (This mural was painted in Ballymurphy, West Belfast in 2014). In 2012, a mobile exhibition entitled *'Women In Struggle'* which documented women's multiple contributions to the republican struggle toured towns and cities across Ireland. At the entrance to the *Irish Republican History Museum* in West Belfast, a large stone plaque lists all those women, both IRA and Cumann na mBan, who lost their lives in the armed conflict. These recent efforts indicate a willingness to act in order to bring in view the entirety of women's roles.

All interviewees argued that these 'new' forms of commemoration not only corrected their exclusion as volunteers but that they were also processes capable of bring women's other militant labour into view. Street drama and plays are gaining increasing importance in articulating women's stories and experiences. *'Unbroken'*, the story of IRA volunteer Mairead Farrell began touring Ireland in 2013. According to Cynthia Enloe, most masculinised war museums don't have much to say about widows. They have even less to say about the wives of male soldiers, banished from the murals and display cases (2004: 204). Republican women countered such exclusion with a play entitled *'Just A Prisoner's Wife'*. It documents the struggles and sacrifices of women whose partners were incarcerated, and continues to tour Ireland periodically.

> Gemma: "But there are improvements and last week we had a play called *'Just a Prisoner's Wife'* written by women and it gave people a whole new perspective and you can get it out that way, women's story that is and you had male prisoners saying that they never thought of it like that."

In 2012 I attended an innovative audio and visual exhibition in West Belfast called *'Voices Interned'* which documented the experiences of republican women during state raids

on their homes and the incarceration of their loved ones as a result of the conflict. The *'Voices Interned'* project was unique in that it combined recorded oral testimony, re-enactment through drama, and photographic exhibits in order to communicate the emotions, feeling and experiences of the past. According to the project's director, Geraldine Gallagher, the exhibition unlocks a section of women's history that is hidden from view, and not only offers an opportunity to the participants in the process but also an opportunity for the spectator to 'walk in their shoes' and experience their experiences. The use of drama, story-telling and exhibitions are alternative commemorative mechanisms which allow for a more accurate encapsulation of women's multiple war-time contributions; a more inclusive and broader type of commemoration. In addition to their own semi-autonomous memorial activism, it is clear that they are also having some success in re-shaping commemoration within the broader republican movement. In recent years there has been a marked increase of awareness within the broader republican movement regarding women's role in armed conflict. The recent centenary of the foundation of Cumann na mBan in 1914 added fresh momentum to this ongoing burst of commemorating women. Across Ireland (and some in Britain) events such as lectures, commemorative parades and new wall murals marked this important mile stone. The relatively high level of attention to Cumann na mBan by the overall republican movement is in marked contrast to its previous neglect throughout the previous four decades. The moderate success of women in shaping the commemorative spectrum and agenda are indicative of the political agency and mobility among republican women as they continue through conflict transition.

It is clear that much of the work around commemorating and recognising women's contribution to the armed struggle stems directly from women themselves taking action. They are spurred into action out of a sense of deep frustration at their lack of visibility within the overall movement. Whether this is a fleeting moment or the turning point towards a more

serious effort by the republican movement to recognise women's various contribution remains to be seen. The interview data, coupled with their increasingly eclectic and prolific forms of memorialisation, I argue, displaces the masculine definition of combatant and expands our spectrum of vision of military roles in times of armed conflict. Moreover, it brings combatant women into view in a way which reflects their realities and experiences. Their commemorative emphasis on *all* roles disrupts the male-imposed 'fighter/supporter' dichotomy and ultimately challenges the erroneous narrative that in times of war, it is men who are the real actors

Conclusion

Women's multiple roles and vital war-time contributions are rarely recognised or valued by male-led movements. The patriarchal understanding of what is deemed a combatant role erases women's contributions while simultaneously devaluing their military labour. Their exclusion from the post-war commemorative landscape is a very public and trumpeted message that when it came to times of great peril for the nation, women were not really there. When women do appear in commemoration, it is only when they do so in accordance with the masculine discourse and definition of a combatant. The hierarchical distinction between 'fighter and supporter' re-enforces the trope that it is men who are the real heroes of the battlefield. The data contained in this chapter challenges such a distinction by calling for recognition of the importance and value of all women's military endeavours in their entirety. By doing so, I argued, they are effectively subverting the patriarchal definition of a combatant by blurring the highly gendered lines of distinction between fighter/supporter in favour of a far broader understanding of the multiple ways in which women militarily contribute to national armed struggles.

The recent output of women's commemorative activism demonstrates how innovative mechanisms of memorialisation are capable of encapsulating and valuing women's multiple militant roles of resistance. While this chapter clearly indicates the ways in which women are marginalised, both during and after war, it also documents the ways in which combatant women react and resist to struggle against such reversions. The struggle contained in this chapter is not exclusive to the period of transition as such, but are in fact a continuity of struggle against sexist and patriarchal attitudes which date to the very birth of the provisional republican movement. Conflict transition is in fact a new tier of patriarchy which republican women have a long-standing history of resisting. This chapter reveals that while it is incredibly useful to ask 'where are the women', it is not enough to simply 'add women' to prevailing war-time narratives. The actions of the women in this research suggests that the resistance to women's marginalisation resides not in 'adding' their views within existing frameworks and discourses, but by struggling to alter prevailing definitions through their unique perspectives and actions. Their commemorative struggles contained in this chapter indicate that combatant women are concerned with far more that merely increasing their 'visibility' or as an 'add on'. The chapter concurs that they are interested more in the ways in which their perspectives and experiences can subvert existing institutions, discourses and cultures in order to resist the forces of patriarchy which attempt to side-line and silence their post-war narratives.

Chapter Six - Conceptualising Peace & Women's Equality in Conflict Transition

Introduction

This chapter critically explores the ways in which republican women conceptualise peace and women's equality. It uncovers a post-war vision which demands the eradication of imperialism, patriarchy and capitalism as the pre-conditions for a genuine peace and equal society for all. Prevailing feminist visions of peace in the post-war period predominantly adhere to a strictly gender only axis, rarely, if ever citing multiple forms of oppression such as imperialism or capitalism. Privileging a definition of peace which largely leaves imperialism and capitalism untouched neglects the diverse ways in which women are mobilised and politicised during times of war, effectively reverting feminist theorising of peace back to inept generalisations regarding women's homogeneity. The narratives in this chapter not only confront the androcentric misnomers regarding the 'post-conflict' status of northern Irish society, but also challenge many prevailing feminist visions of peace and equality. In order to understand the post-war visions of *all* women, this chapter argues for a shift away from highly generalised accounts, in favour of a more discerning and accurate approach which encompasses a holistic vision of a feminist peace.

The formative sections of the chapter explore the ways republican women define peace from an anti-imperial and anti-capitalist position. The narrative uncovered here envisions peace as British disengagement from Ireland, conceptualising 'occupation' as the antithesis of peace. The chapter then moves onto examine the ways in which neo-liberal capitalism, particularly social inequality and fiscal austerity is cited as a major barrier to a genuine peace. The findings in these sections pose some fundamental questions regarding the assumed homogeneity among women within dominant feminist theories of peace. In the latter

part, the chapter examines the ways in which interviewees define women's equality in the context of securing peace. Of particular note, not a single interviewee mentions women's participation within institutional frameworks as a means of visualising women's equality. Emerging from the narratives contained in this chapter is a threefold struggle against British imperialism, neo-liberal capitalism and patriarchal oppression. In sum, the chapter illustrates a clear detachment between prevailing global feminist thinking on peace and the lived realities of republican women. This chapter demonstrates the need for careful feminist attention to the unique plural standpoints of differentially positioned women in place of highly generalised accounts.

Republican Women: Visions of Peace and Equality

A common distinctive characteristic of feminist visions of peace is not merely the absence of 'conventional violence' but a broader tackling of other forms of violence and discrimination (Anderlini 2007; Bouta et al. 2005: Cockburn 2004; Karam 2001; Kelly 2000; Moser 2001; Pankhurst 2008; Porter 2007; Reardon 1993). To broaden this however, feminist theories must go beyond injecting or 'adding' women's experiences (Tickner 1992: 18) and instead involve a transformation of existing unequal gender relations. Feminists envision peace as a complex of specific political, economic, and social changes that make the world in some part more just, endeavouring to achieve a set of humane and equitable social conditions (Reardon 1993: 4-5). Genuine peace and security requires not only the absence of war but also the elimination of unjust social relations (Tickner 1992: 128). In many respects, the emphasis on social justice among feminists provides a theoretical link between women's pursuit of peace and their struggle for emancipation, arguing that a genuine peace 'is the antithesis of exploitation, marginalisation, and oppression. Ending discrimination against women and achieving peace are mutually interdependent, virtually inseparable goals' (Reardon 1993: 71).

At the heart of many feminist visions of peace is the contention that women are largely united by their commitment to social justice, fairness and equality for all. In addition, women, by virtue of their shared gender, can find common ground and enter into strategic alliances in order to pursue a feminist peace (Anderlini 2007: 9; Porter 2003, 2007). Moreover, when it comes to the business of post-war formal negotiations, women as a group are assumed to have an inherently *different* approach to peace than men. As an excluded 'group', women bring different perspectives to the talk's agenda, enhance the democratic legitimacy of the entire processes, actively promote co-existence, tolerance, participatory democracy, transparency and non-violence dialogue as the ways for securing a meaningful and sustainable peace (Anderlini 2007; Fearon 1999; Hoewer 2013; Hunt & Posa 2001; Porter 2007; Ward 2005, 2009). While many scholars preface their studies with an acknowledgement of diversity among women, such rhetoric quickly gives way to more generalised accounts where the 'women' under exploration are pre-dominantly those who position themselves as outside of war and warring identities.

The dearth of attention to other forms of women's oppression ensures that the prevailing narrative represents a partial vision of women and peace. The issue here is that the points of commonality between women appear to trump the significant points of difference. It is on this basis that many feminist scholars continue to treat women as a homogenous category, neglecting important fissures of difference. Women do not necessarily speak with one voice on issues of war and peace (El-Bushra 2007: 135), and instigating highly generalised claims risks conceptual violence (Cohn 2013: 2; Wibben 2011). If we accept that women undertake multiple and diverse war-time roles, then surely it follows that their post-war visions and struggles will also reflect that diversity. Yet the prevailing feminist meaning of peace and equality largely adheres to generalised discourse of women as a monolithic groups with universal needs, talents and interests. Any attempt to generalise about war is

bound to demean the experiences of individuals caught up in it (El-Bushra & Mukarubuga 1995). In the field of peace-building and post-conflict social reconstruction, there are huge risks in over-generalising and thereby failing to understand the dynamics of power inherent in each situation. We need a definition of peace which encompasses the *totality* of women's needs and interests' (El-Bushra 2007: 143-144).

"No Link to England": Republicans at Peace?

When asked if the North of Ireland is a place at peace all research participants were unequivocal in answering 'no'. Despite the many claims that the North is a society making steady progress through a successful conflict transition by senior republicans, international political figures, mainstream commentators and some academics, the republicans here offer a rather different appraisal. Anne, a former IRA prisoner who now works solely for Sinn Féin typifies most of the responses:

> "Well there are no soldiers on the ground and that's what we're used to. So peace to me means a thirty-two county all Ireland. Now that hasn't happened yet but peace to me has no link to England so it's confusing to say the North is at peace."

As republicans, interviewees state that they fought an armed struggle with the objective of removing a British imperial presence in Ireland in order to create a unified all-Ireland nation-state. While the pre-dominantly male republican leadership talk of a society at peace, there appears to be a profound disconnect between that and the narrative expressed here:

> Niamh: "Nothing has changed, they're not away, the Brits are not away. The struggle, albeit now a political struggle, is still there and remains until they go. So it's very important that, and I have no intentions of stopping, it is important that young people get in and fulfil the roles and carry on until the Brits are gone."

Niamh's extract exhibits the widespread contention among interviewees that the "Brits", that being British occupation, remain and so this fundamentally contradicts the notion of a society at peace. Interview data indicates the distinction between ending armed actions against the British state and the ending the struggle against occupation. For interviewees, a genuine end to war can only be brought about by eradicating what they see as the source of Ireland's problems. In other words, the core principle for peace is British withdrawal, not silencing weapons. Cathy was born and reared in a large town close to the Irish border. She comes from a republican family and in her teenage years joined Sinn Féin during the 1980 and 1981 hunger strikes. She is the chairperson of the local Sinn Féin cumann as well as being involved in a number of community groups. She also volunteers for a local organisation which provides vital services for people with special needs. Cathy is single and has no children. Her thoughts here are typical of those from others interviewed:

> "I was always more interested in getting the British out of our country as opposed to wanting peace so that goal of getting them out and staying out is still there because we haven't achieved that yet. So that is what peace means to me and we can't have peace until we get the Brits out. So there is potential for conflict to start again and that is why you have these dissident groups. So let's remove the British and then we can get on with other issues around social justice, redistribution of wealth and justice and fairness for all, equality for all."

Republican women interviewed conceptually collapse the struggle for peace into the struggle for a British withdrawal from Ireland, both are inextricably linked. Peace is visualised as an outcome which can only be derived from the removal of British jurisdiction over the North of Ireland. The collective priority for republican women is not 'peace' for the sake of ending armed violence, but peace via the establishment of an anti-imperial reality. Cathy's description that she was 'always more interested in getting the British out' indicates the ways in which interviewees conceptualise imperialism as the antithesis of a genuine peace.

Reifying those women who rally around a single identity of gender in order to oppose and prevent men's violence and wars, provides a limited form of analysis when applied to combatant women. For most interviewees, peace is conditional on the ending of imperialism as opposed to ending armed actions. In other words, the post-war motivation for republican women is the ending of occupation as opposed to pursuing a 'peace' as something motivated by an abhorrence of violence by virtue of their gender or femininity. Republican women do not necessarily want to end violence, they want to end occupation.

The post-war vision held by interviewees is a continuing resistance to what they see as imperial rule in Ireland. Those who define peace in gendered terms only neglect the multiple ways in which those, such as combatant women, conceptualise oppression in far broader terms. Many prevailing feminist approaches state that all women are united through their commitment to social justice, fairness and equality for all (Anderlini 2007: 9; Porter 2003, 2007; Reardon 1993). There is a collective belief in the transformative power of women when acting as a single category, and it remains the prevailing prescription in dominant feminist visions of peace. The problem is that the points of commonality appear to trump the significant points of difference. Departing from the universal sisterhood script, interviewees stated that ending occupation is a fundamental pre-condition for the creation of a meaningful peace in Ireland, not opposition to military violence. Given their republican politics the statements above are unsurprising but they are nevertheless powerful in that first and foremost, they conceive of 'peace' in a manner which differs significantly from prevailing feminist definitions.

It is important to contextualise the data and discussion in the current feminist trends in the North of Ireland, where many academics (Deiana 2013; Hoewer 2013; Ward 2009) as

well as feminist NGO's such as Hanna's House[55] have thrown their political weight behind

SCR 1325[56]. The resolution passed in October 2000, was the culmination of a valiant and

determined transnational women's campaign, and is widely hailed as a landmark event for

feminists and women organising for peace. The importance of SCR 1325 resides in the fact

that many diverse strands of feminism, including liberal, Marxist, radical and socialist believe

that the resolution's discourse and strategies possesses the political potential to deliver their

vision of a feminist peace. The global tide of optimism which followed the resolution also

buoyed many feminist approaches to peace in the North of Ireland. The widely-lauded, yet

short-lived women-only NIWC, coupled with the gender equality clause of the GFA, ensured

that the discourse of the resolution resonated broadly with vast swathes of divergent feminist

thought. SCR 1325 has been critiqued however, for promoting a particular discourse or idea

of what it means to be a woman or what is considered appropriate feminine behaviour, which

can be used as a rationale to privilege certain voices and exclude other (Gibbings 2011: 532).

The resolution primarily creates a reified type of female activist without unsettling the current

imperialist intervention projects. The pursuit of peace, as SCR 1325 envisions it, fails to

imagine women playing a role in changing the rules of the game or the way in which the

game is understood (Orford 2002).

There is an implicit conflation of gender with women, who apparently hold 'softer'

and more peaceful qualities (McLeod 2011: 600). In other words, the language of the

resolution appears to hold sway with those women who retain an uncritical stance towards

existing structures, with little room for those wishing to advance a more radical,

transformative agenda. This becomes deeply problematic in the North of Ireland where much

of the current feminist literature calls for the inclusion of women within all existing

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[55] Hanna's House is an all-Ireland "active feminist community working for a non-violent, just society that embraces diversity". For more see http://www.hannashouse.ie/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1
[56] Full text of the resolution available here http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/

structures. In particular, SCR 1325 is used as a political mechanism for such endeavours (Deiana 2013; Hoewer 2013; Side 2009; Ward 2004, 2009). This presents a major problem for republican women who hold critical and adversarial positions in relation to many existing structures, particularly Stormont and policing, despite the zealous embrace of state institutions by Sinn Féin. Janette and Eileen are typical of those holding robust critical and oppositional stances:

> Janette: "I found myself being quite critical of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) and all of
> that [institutional participation] because I just thought the GFA was just of a repeat of a lot of
> Sunningdale[57] and if it wasn't good then [to deliver republican objectives] it won't be good
> now. And I found it wholly frustrating."

Eileen expresses her sense of the profound contradiction in supporting the very 'partitionist' structures which republicans vowed to dismantle:

> "They [Provisional republican leadership] say 'there's another way, Stormont's the way',
> well my whole involvement in the republican movement was to smash the state. I thought as
> a republican movement that our objective was to get rid of the British state and get to the
> Republic. When people now say 'Brits Out' it's not about Brits on the streets, it's about
> smashing the British state. And no matter how much they dress the Stormont thing up, the
> British still occupy six counties of our nation and I still cannot get round that. I'll never
> accept Stormont and I don't see any difference between taking seats in Stormont or Leinster
> House…they're all partitionist."

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[57] The Sunningdale Agreement was signed at Sunningdale, Berkshire, England in December 1973 and was an attempt to establish a power-sharing Northern Ireland executive comprising of moderate nationalists and unionists along with a Council of Ireland body. While the agreement came into effect in 1974, there remained formidable unionist and loyalist opposition to it, manifesting in the Ulster Workers Council Strike and a General Strike in May 1974. The mass loyalist participation in the strike virtually brought the state of Northern Ireland to a standstill. Although loyalist paramilitaries, notably the UDA, were widely believed to have been heavily involves in orchestrating it, neither the British Army or the RUC intervened to end the strike actions. Falling far short of their stated objectives of a united Ireland, the provisional republican movement rejected the notion of power-sharing out of hand and continued their armed campaign.

When Eileen speaks of 'Brits out' today she refers to the political and economic occupation as opposed to a military one as such. Emily also succinctly sums up this position: "despite the peace process, the Brits are still here and very often you realise the war is not at an end; in a sense military action is at an end." These extracts are typical of most interviews and reveal the prominent role that occupation and imperialism plays in their definition of peace. Advocates of SCR 1325 in Ireland such as Hanna's House and those within academia (Deiana 2013; Hoewer 2013; Ward 2009) energise around the notion of increasing women's participation within existing structures as a means of pursuing peace. Invariably, their contention presupposes that all women hold favourable and uncritical views of the status quo and are content to work within existing political structures in order to pursue change from within. Many interviewees spoke of the need for *transformation* as opposed to *participation* within existing structures. The resolution is critiqued for its lack of recognition of global capitalism, imperialism and (neo-) colonialism as structures of inequality, which restricts women's agency with regards to ending wars and conflict' (Pratt & Richter-Devroe 2011: 495). In other words, the dominant feminist vision which energises around SCR 1325 suffers from a vast deficit in its capacity to reflect the anti-imperial visions of peace as expressed by combatant women. Despite its language of inclusivity, there is little room in the resolution for those who deviate from the allocated 'uncritical' script.

There is palpable confusion and discomfort, even among those interviewees most supportive of the republican leadership, in accepting the prevailing discourse of a 'society at peace' given that the partition of Ireland remains unaltered. This is perhaps most pronounced when dealing with the issue of policing. Again, the oppositional stance on police contrasts with those held by feminists with uncritical, or at least neutral, positions on state violence and the police. Despite the fact that Sinn Féin signed up to accepting the PSNI in 2007, interviewees have huge difficulties accepting the PSNI, whom many see as no different to the

force it replaces, the much derided RUC. For many, policing in the North still retains the vestiges of imperial links and the PSNI remains a partial force of unionism:

> Gemma: "There is a lot of difficulty in the peace process [for republicans] too; the ceasefire, great, the GFA was great…I could live with that but there were other things. Handing over the weapons….. (pause three seconds) …..I remember crying over it. Policing, policing which was a *huge* issue (emphasis in the original), I was tortured over that but I knew from earlier in the talks that the policing thing was going to happen no matter what. Emotionally the second phase of the struggle [peace process] was more difficult…..the decommissioning, the policing….and we lost a lot of people over that issue. Like even now I sit in meetings with the police and I feel like a traitor, like I'm doing something I shouldn't be doing."

The text of SCR 1325 reaffirms 'the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building'. Stressing women's talent for peace-building assumes a link between non-violence and femininity. Gemma's frank statement regarding her distress and emotions towards the decommissioning of IRA guns and weaponry illustrates the perils of reifying certain 'types' of women over others. Foregrounding those who oppose or reject violence effectively side-lines those, such as combatant women, who see the use of armed struggle as a legitimate form of resistance. The ubiquitous image of 'weeping women' in the field of war hardly fits Gemma, who is upset and cries over the decommissioning of lethal IRA weaponry. This again illuminates the importance of shifting away from generalisations which postulate women's meanings of peace as simply the antithesis of violence. Over-emphasising women's opposition to violence and war through universalised visions of peace reverts to perilous forms of generalisation which are wholly inadequate for accurately capturing the visions of *all* women.

> Siobhan: "See if people rang the RUC, or the PSNI now as they like to call themselves, and they didn't respond and all that then we'd be onto them. So we are saying to people, 'look if

we want to live into a normal society then we're going to have a police service as opposed to a police force'. So there is still a lot of mistrust and it is changing slowly. I staff the [Sinn Féin] centre on a Thursday night and there's people coming in looking for republicans to sort this or that out and we're having to say no we can't do that, you'll need to ring the police and people saying "no way, don't trust them". But it is going to take a long time to achieve a real impartial police force."

Siobhan's extract provides an insight into the republican appraisal of the 'new' police force. Like so many republicans, Siobhan sees little or no difference between the PSNI and the much-despised RUC. When asked to elaborate on why she continues to call the police the RUC she replies, "because nothing has changed, it's the same people using a different name". Bernie explains that "there are still plenty of peelers[58] who are on a war footing, who don't like change, don't want change". It is clear that many republicans continue to view the police as hostile, partial, unionist, and ultimately part of British imperialism in Ireland.

Orla: "I mean we get people in here [community centre] every day with lots of complaints about anti-social behaviour or whatever and the answer given to them is "go to the peelers" and they go "I wouldn't phone the peelers".......it's odd. I don't think the message is getting out there. People are just expected to have blind faith in them [the republican leadership]. So it's a hard pill for people to swallow."

The resistance to engaging with the PSNI as described by both Orla and Siobhan, and others, indicates how large sections within working-class nationalist/republican communities, continue to regard the police with mistrust and disdain, undoubtedly a residual effect of the Troubles (Jarman 2004: 430; Maillot 2005). Despite the resounding declarations of a new

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[58] "Peeler" is a colloquial republican name given to members of the RUC and now the PSNI. Peeler refers to a member of her majesty's constabulary, that being a police officer. The name is derived from Sir Robert Peel who founded the Royal Irish Constabulary in 1814 and also developed the Metropolitan Police Act in 1829 which proved to be the foundation for the modern police force in Britain. The continuing use of the term by republicans indicates their linkages between imperialism and the local police in the North of Ireland.

dawn for the North of Ireland within the mainstream discourse, in many respects, the fundamentals of the conflict remain unchanged.

In addition, ongoing issues around growing sectarianism and contested (often violently) issues regarding parades, flags and emblems appear rooted in the historical legacy of British imperialism. Orla, a former IRA prisoner who now runs a community centre in a working-class community in Belfast:

> "Have a look around this community and you tell me where the peace is. We're surrounded by so-called peace walls, held to hostage and hemmed in during hundreds of Loyalist marches every year, people are losing their jobs, benefits, services are being cut, women are coming to us with issues of domestic abuse, alcohol abuse. Now the British Army are off the streets and Sinn Féin are in power and that's great……but there are still issues on the ground with the new police, real issues with that new force. So really, on a ground level, what has really changed for the people of this area in the last fifteen years? What peace? I don't see it."

Orla's extract is tightly packed with multiple and overlapping issues and is the archetypical statement which runs right across most interviews when exploring the peace, or lack thereof. It is clear that a genuine peace process according to them involves far more than the cessation of 'conventional' armed violence and a negotiated settlement at a formal level. The vision of peace here is a broad one, encompassing macro historical processes of imperialism right down to the immediacy of domestic and gender-based violence on an everyday level. Orla's reference to being 'hemmed in by so-called peace walls' refers to the vast segregation of residential homes, particularly in Belfast city. Housing segregation illuminates the widening divisions in the North more than any other.

> Linda: "Has anything really moved on? Look at the peace walls…..where is the community and peace between Catholics and Protestants? Because if we were really in a post-conflict

society, then you wouldn't have these peace walls and people who live there would tell you that if those walls came down tomorrow, they'd be tortured on both sides."

Latest research indicates that 35-40 per cent of Catholics and Protestants live in communities divided along ethno-national/sectarian lines (Hughes et al. 2007). In particular the physical division between opposing traditions appears to adhere to lines of social class, with disadvantaged working class areas significantly more likely to be highly segregated than more affluent areas (Shirlow 2001). Research on segregated communities reveals daily experiences of fear, anxiety, suspicion and a sense of threat among residents, transforming physical barriers into psychological barriers among citizens of the North (Hughes at al. 2007; Shirlow 2001). Alarmingly, despite the announcements from the upper echelons of the political classes regarding a society at peace, residential segregation has actually increased since the signing of the GFA in 1998 (Hughes et al. 2007). In the aftermath of the 1994 ceasefires, interface and communal violence increased significantly, with some claiming it as the worst rioting period since the early 1970's (Jarman 2004: 421).

Republican women maintain that issues of growing sectarianism, like many of Ireland's political and social ills, stem from the partition of the country. These ongoing issues only serve to augment their belief that a true and lasting peace can only occur within a united Ireland, free from what they see as 'imperial interference'. The data and discussion advanced this far indicates the pitfalls of homogenising women's visions and meanings of peace. The dominant feminist vision of peace is a narrative which at best, can be appraised as partial. Despite the welcome acknowledgment of combatant women by academics and mechanisms such as SCR 1325, most feminist visions suffer from inattention to how differentially positioned women envision peace and equality. Many prevailing feminist definitions can be read as universalistic, generalised and implicitly essentialist. Foregrounding only those who

fit the prescribed notion of 'peaceful women' invariably marginalises those who define peace beyond the confines of gender only.

"Despair & the Dole": Positive Peace in the Context of Neo-Liberal Capitalism?

While the affirmations regarding a united Ireland and British withdrawal as the primary pre-condition for a genuine peace is unsurprising, it nevertheless reveals something of a distinct departure from prevailing feminist visions. Moving interviewees beyond their united Ireland vision of peace, they were invited to visualise what a genuine peace means to them. All of them included an anti-capitalist, pro-equality and social justice vision of a positive peace.

Joanne was born and still lives in a small, rural village close to the Irish border. Hailing from a strong republican family, armed conflict and political debate was a familiar feature of her household life. The political talk in her house is described as being critical of both the political establishment in the South and in the North. In the early 1990's she was elected as a local councillor but resigned due to the conflicting demands of her paid job, her children, and the demands of constituency work as a councillor. She remains a committed republican and member of Sinn Féin. She lives with her husband, a republican ex-prisoner and their children.

> "Peace first and foremost means that people are not killed and nobody is going to prison. I would like to see a united Ireland but there is no point in having a united Ireland if it is going to be run like the Twenty-Six Counties. Because I feel that the government there disgusts me and it is not right with people living on the breadline. James Connolly's vision of an Ireland that is equal, for men, women and children being treated properly because that is so important, that is real peace."

Joanne's extract is concerned first and foremost with ending "occupation". The latter part of her extract links that national struggle with a socialist one, particularly her reference to republican socialist James Connolly. Peace is the ending of partition but it also means the

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radical transformation of peoples' material living conditions. Many interviewees exhibit a critical awareness regarding the transformative potential of a united Ireland as a political starting point, not an end in itself. There is no evidence in the data of 'blind faith' in the idea that a united Ireland represents the elusive panacea required to address Ireland's many political and social ills. Removing the yoke of imperialism therefore represents formative steps in a broader political struggle towards creating a society in which the most marginalised must feel the benefits of a genuine peace. Here the data is theoretically consistent with the idea of positive and negative peace. In simple and succinct terms, Galtung (1969) states that while the latter refers to the absence of direct and observable violence, the former denotes the eradication of structural violence such as poverty and cultural violence which allows such violence to be rationalised or normalised. Galtung's definition of a positive peace, therefore, expands the very narrow definition of violence solely as direct violence to include what is considered 'normalised violence' and this appears to be the definition most commonly held by the republican women. According to Bronagh:

> "What's the point in having a united Ireland if people live in poverty, live with injustice, I
> couldn't see myself being happy with a united Ireland while people were still living in slums
> in this city. It is also about harmony and social justice and that is all about people living in
> peace. That is what peace means to me, you know."

According to Emily "peace has to have some indication as to how the lives of the masses has changed for the better; while people are being harassed and exploited, you can't call that a peaceful society". When asked to elaborate further, she clarifies that "harassment by the peelers and exploitation as workers by the capitalist system". Eileen outlines her frustrations at the lack of peace for working-class people:

> "Peace is about changing society and we need to try and change things that'll improve
> peoples' quality of life and what you have now are these myths that things are better now.

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Look at all these young people going to school, battling through all of that, going to university and what have they got at the end of it all? Despair and the dole. Suicide is increasing and will get worse. People were led to believe that you can get money from anywhere and this whole Celtic Tiger nonsense. Look at all the bankers, where governments bailed out banks and enforced cuts on people. So what is peace? The North certainly is not at peace, I don't think so. Yes there are no troops on the streets, you don't have street battles going on everyday but to me there's more to peace than just ending armed struggle."

Colin Coulter (2014) argues that the official narrative of the north of Ireland as a post-war prosperous and progressive society, fails to square with the hardships and realities of daily life for many. Eileen, like so many other interviewees, endure and experience a rather different social and political world than that described by the elite architects of peace, uncovering the partiality and myths which ungird the mainstream discourse. While the removal of the 'British presence' in the North is unsurprisingly a pressing concern, capitalism and the salience of social class remains prominent among interviewees. The 'violence' of global capitalism, seen most overtly in the wielding of cuts to vital services and in state funding of failed banks, illuminates the limitations and shortfalls in the prevailing feminist concept of peace. The vision of peace articulated here requires far more than the measures of increasing women's visibility or the active participation of a select few within existing institutions. On the contrary, republican women's views are that existing institutions and structures are actually complicit in the 'post-war violence' by virtue of their role in the administration of austerity and vast levels of inequality.

Linda: "I would love peace to have meant that we were sitting here in an Ireland that was trying to deliver some sort of socialist politics. That is what I see as peace, that we are all in to try and make life better for everyone in this country, that's what I'd love to see in peace."

Janette: "Even when we do get a thirty-two county republic we're going to have to realise that it's Angela Merkl and the IMF that is running the show now and that uniforms and guns are not going to be as important as pounds and euros. I mean look at the state of the South of Ireland and that can be very depressing. Now people are looking at banks as the new enemies; they don't need uniforms, they just wear suits. So when you look at citizens bailing out banks, why did that happen? So now it's like more than Brits out, it's also big business out and all these people and all of what is happening with our brothers and sisters in the developing world."

It is interesting to see how some interviewees depict transnational capitalism as similar in effect to the British army, that being a foreign force of oppression and occupation. Once again interviewees are critically aware that the goal of a united Ireland is meaningless if the capitalist system of inequality and austerity prevails; removing the British from the North of Ireland does little to disturb the powerful position of banks or bodies such as the IMF. While their formative meaning of peace is viewed within a strictly nationalist ideological outlook, their conceptualisation of a genuine peace is also shaped by a class perspective. Republican women see the exploitation of capitalism, unemployment, economic austerity as the anti-thesis of a genuine peace.

The current global crisis in capitalism has inflicted devastating austerity cuts on services and provisions which are vital to working-class communities. Republican women here connect the daily personal struggles of women in working-class communities to national and global forces of neo-liberal capitalism. In particular, many interviewees see these cuts not only as class based but also gender based:

Linda: "Particularly now with this right wing Tory government and you have Sinn Féin implementing right wing conservative politics. You have these austerity cuts coming in and we already have high levels of poverty here and high levels and instances of abuse, suicide.

All the things that go with a community coming out of conflict-so now we're going to get hit with these huge measures which are aimed straight at the poor. We are going to have a lot of women sitting out there because women do bear the brunt of a lot of the economic burden for the family still. And this will have a serious knock on effect on what women are going to need so I think the various Women's Centres are going to be even busier in the coming years."

Latest research from WRDA found that nearly half of full-time female employees in the North were employed in public administration, education and health, compared with just 23 per cent of men. Overall, women accounted for almost two-thirds of the public sector workforce. Attacks on workers' terms and conditions have also had a gender dimension, as 37 per cent of women worked part-time, compared with just 8 per cent of men, meaning the vast majority of all part-time employees were women. It is women who are mainly on zero hour contracts, with zero sick pay and zero holiday pay.

Prevailing feminist approaches, particularly those utilising SCR 1325, largely operate along strict gender lines only; yet class and gender oppression however, work together rather than separately (Whitworth 1994: 27). The state utilises gender and the gender division of labour with regards to austerity in order to serve its own needs. In Latin America, Safa finds that austerity programs at the behest of the IMF, have deeply devastating impacts on children and women, whereby state subsidies for basic foods are eliminated, government cuts in social services such as health and education reinforce the need for collective action (1990: 356-357). Cynthia Enloe's (2004) examination of the IMF's austerity measures reveals their gendered nature and outcome. She argues that a government's ability to maintain its legitimacy depends at least on the capacity of families to tolerate those measures, specifically on the capacity of women to stretch their budgets, to continue to feed, clothe and care for their families. This may include severe domestic financial management as a well as travelling

abroad as foreign domestic servants, often with the requirement that a significant proportion of their salaries be repatriated back to the home country.

In other words, the politics of austerity is not only class based but also deeply gendered. Interview data concurs with existing research conducted in other 'post-conflict' regions such as South Africa where participants involved in peace-building emphasise the meeting of basic needs such as food and shelter as opposed to the security of the state (Rey and McKay 2001). Peace based upon social justice is rooted in the immediacy of fulfilling human needs (Porter 2003: 257). Formal declarations regarding the North as a 'society at peace' generates a narrative that the current dispensation is universally beneficial for all, yet the evidence here suggest that a genuine 'peace' involving social justice has yet to yield any discernible results in the lives of working-class, republican communities.

While the 'violence' of global capitalism features heavily in the interview data, it is widely absent from many feminist approaches to peace in the north of Ireland. At a special conference on *'Women Delivering Peace & Security'* in 2012, members of Hanna's House concluded with the following recommendations: "women's participation and representation; and gender perspectives on conflict prevention; protection of women and girls; and relief and recovery. In relation to the Good Friday Agreement, participants support the Hanna's House proposal to retrospectively weave UNSCR 1325 into the institutions of the Peace Agreement; to ensure that they set gender targets; and that they have adopted a gender perspective on all of their work"[59] Hanna's House has been at the forefront of the SCR 1325 campaign in Ireland. While all of the above objectives are entirely legitimate, their demands are perhaps more curious by their omissions as opposed to what they included.

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[59] For full conference report, see http://www.hannashouse.ie/PDFs/ezine_Dec2012.pdf

First and foremost, there is little relevance to the lives of republican women. The vision outlined by Hanna's House assumes that women are somehow outside of ethno-national or sectarian identities, and that women's experiences of armed conflict adhere to uniform and linear patterns. Once again, it positions women as outsiders to the conflict, horrified spectators on the side-lines of war. Second, there is nothing with regards to the insidious forms of structural violence administered by neo-liberal austerity, despite the many reports which state that such programs are highly gendered against women (Hinds 2011; Molan 2012)[60]. And third, given the high levels of sexual violence against women in conflict transition, the failure to address women's reproductive rights is perhaps most glaring. Many prevailing feminist visions of peace appear to go out of their way to avoid any fissures among women, producing a conceptualisation of peace that is effectively mainstream, and equally as important, has little to say to republican women. By shedding issues that may potentially divide women in an attempt to obtain unity, many feminist visions of peace actually also serve to exclude women.

Many current approaches do little to rock the institutional boat, leaving the status quo largely undisturbed. Despite their rhetorical declarations of inclusion, it is reasonable to ask, how do prevailing feminist visions address capitalist or imperial structures of inequality? As feminists of all shades take on the forces of patriarchy during conflict transition, evidence in this research suggests that they also need to keep in their sights the vast differences between women. In order to advance the feminist agenda, feminists need to tip the balance towards a more pluralistic vision of women and peace in order to avoid the essentialist *cul de sac* of gender generalisations and assumed commonalities. While the erosion or simple neglect of

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[60] Hinds, B. (2011) WRDA: 'Women on the Edge Report' page 57 http://www.wrda.net/Documents/Women%20and%20the%20Economy%20Section%205%20-%20Lone%20Parents.pdf.
See also, Molan, P (2012) CRC 'Peace Monitoring Report' page 93 http://www.community-relations.org.uk/fs/doc/publications/NIPMR_2012_new_1.pdf

'difference' projects the façade of women as a unified force, it nevertheless presents many points of weakness in that it tackles certain forms of masculine dominance while leaving others wholly untouched.

In addition to insidious forms of fiscal austerity, the lack of a genuine 'peace dividend' is expressed by many. Eileen who joined the IRA in Belfast in the 1970's vents her frustration at the lack of 'peace dividend' for those communities who need it most:

> "When I think of peace I think of something better for the people on the ground and when I look around I don't think it has. They talk of the peace dividend and you look around working class areas of Belfast and Derry. How has life improved for them? It hasn't. Peoples' lives in some regards have gotten worse. Have a look at the Falls today; it is being destroyed by anti-social behaviour and government cuts and lack of investment. For a real peace, you have to [be] actually making improvements to peoples' lives. What we have here is a manufactured peace."

A key component of the formal peace process was the notion of a peace dividend as mentioned by Eileen and others. New-found economic prosperity for the masses would be the key ingredient within the elite-devised recipe for peace. In rather basic terms, when political violence ended, the 'mess of the war' would be swept up, presenting a blank canvass for global capitalists and multinational firms to design a new post-ceasefire economic landscape. According to Colin Coulter (2014) neoliberal economics was a fundamental girder which underpinned the mainstream discourse and approach to 'selling the peace' in the North of Ireland, particularly to those in working class communities. It was essentially a political promise of economic rewards for the abandonment of political violence, that being 'substantial inward investment and job creation' (O'Hearn 2008: 102). During the formative years of the peace process and throughout the negotiated settlement, the strategy to assuage

republican or unionist fears of 'political sell-out' was quite simple; what is lost politically would be adequately compensated for financially.

> Edel: "There are whole swathes of society that are at peace. The areas that were disproportionality affected by the conflict, there is a micro conflict there and that is very worrying. There hasn't been the economic regeneration of West and North Belfast. Unemployment rates in Ballymurphy[61] are the same today as they were in 1994 so something has failed there, seriously failed……social infrastructure is just as poor as it was back then as well. So you know, we [republicans] weren't particularly strategic at those because we were focused on early release of prisoners, policing, all those big things that have traditionally taken the focus while social and economic rights did not."

Edel's comments regarding the lack of peace for those who endured the worst of the war is shared by many other interviewees. In common with other regions blighted by armed conflict, those areas which endured the worst of the violence tend to benefit least from the peace. West and North Belfast remain the poorest parts of the North of Ireland where poverty is markedly concentrated (Horgan 2006). It is unsurprising that the so-called peace dividend 'has accrued not to the poorest sections of society in the six counties but rather to those who already enjoyed considerable privilege' (Coulter 2014: 767). Those areas blighted most by social deprivation are also those which endured the burden of the armed conflict. Current statistics puts West Belfast as the area of highest unemployment in the North, followed very closely by North Belfast. Unemployment claimant percentages put West Belfast at 9.6 per cent, doubling that of the more affluent South Belfast. Statistics indicate that the number of

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[61] Ballymurphy is a working class housing estate in West Belfast. Located at the junction of the Whiterock and Springfield roads, this small network of houses was a major epicentre of violence during the Troubles. It was (and remains) a major source of recruits for armed republicanism as well as being the site of many British army killings. In August 1971, eleven civilians were killed by the British army over a two night period in the immediate aftermath of the introduction on internment. Some of the most exalted republican dead hail from the area, which are commemorated in the scores of wall murals which adorn the gable end of houses there. It is also the childhood home of Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams.

people in the region earning less than £7.50 per hour rose from 170,000 to 195,000 in the decade to 2011 (Coulter 2014: 767).

It is clear that the much promised 'peace dividend' has utterly failed to make significant changes in the lives of those in the most marginalised communities. The primary focus of the elite architects of peace was on the security of the state and related matters, while social and economic issues were left to the fickle market forces of neoliberalism. Given Sinn Féin's declared socialist ideology and their stated opposition to austerity, their central role in the Stormont government has done little to over-turn or resist neo-liberal austerity. In light of this, it suggests that the real issue at stake perhaps, is not the personnel (male or female) charged with steering the state but with the actual institutions themselves. Despite their commitments to an anti-austerity agenda, Sinn Féin in government appears either incapable or unwilling to alter the administration of capitalist economic policies. A genuine peace according to republican women is the overhaul of the existing capitalist structures in order to redistribute the wealth from the few to the many. According to those interviewed, a genuine peace can only exist when the communities who bore the brunt of the armed conflict experience the same services and opportunities afforded to those more affluent communities in the North.

The grim reality of social deprivation in the wake of state-led austerity is cited a specific barrier to a genuine peace. In particular, cutbacks in funding public service are viewed as directly targets against the working-classes and working class women.

Siobhan: "when it [community centre] first started [in 1996] there were 50 people coming through it a year, this year we've had 670 referrals through the doors. A lot of them are people impacted by the conflict and now it's under threat at the minute from funding cuts. The end result will be to re-traumatise those who have already been traumatised. It's going to

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cause more division….and this is only one part of it, there are lots of other things I see. You know so, what's changed?"

When I asked Siobhan to elaborate on what she means when she asks 'what's changed' she replies that "it is like one type of conflict has replaced another."

> Kelly: "How can you have peace if there isn't enough funding for counselling, not enough funding for the health of people, and education and they have to be the key things for looking after people; housing, health and education, I think they should be the focus for politics.

> Fiona: "You have to have equality and we didn't have that when we were growing up. So it is more than just having no violence or no war. We need to make the quality of our peoples' lives much better because if we don't what's the point? So peace is not just the absence of violence, it's about adding on to our society and building a better society for our young people."

While those in positions of state-power decree that the medicine of austerity is a necessary measure, republican women view it as a form of violence and a tenacious obstacle to a genuine peace. Interview data here illustrates the benefits of utilising a feminist standpoint approach which is rooted in the everyday struggles of differentially situated women. Not only do marginalised lives make better starting points for correcting the dominant masculine view, they are also places in which causal and critical questions about the social order are derived (Hartstock 1993). Evidence here stands in stark contrast to the largely masculine narrative of a progressive and prosperous society. The standpoint of republican women reveals a vision of peace as rooted in the synthesis of anti-imperial and anti-capitalist struggles, as well as their pursuit of women's equality.

Women's resistance to global capitalism and forms of colonialism (rather than peace-building *per se*), is not supported by the 1325 agenda (Pratt & Richter-Devroe 2011: 498).

The focus is consistently on participation as opposed to radical transformation, and so the prevailing feminist discourse serves to impose strict limitations on the political mobility and agency of women. Resistance to capitalism and state-led austerity remains a fundamental part of peace as conceptualised by interviewees, which begs the question of how does the resolution's claim of inclusiveness connect with those struggles? This chapter suggests that the more we examine the ways in which women are divided by issues such as imperialism and capitalism, the less relevant dominant feminist visions and mechanisms such as SCR 1325 become.

Republican Women's Conceptualisation of Women's Equality

The UN Security Council released a world-wide statement on International Women's Day on 8th March 2000, setting the foundations of SCR 1325. The statement declared: 'Peace is inextricably linked with equality between women and men'. The statement then goes on to affirm that 'the equal access and full participation of women in power structures and their full involvement in all efforts for the prevention and resolution of conflicts are essential for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. If women are to play an equal part in security and maintaining peace, they must be empowered politically and economically, and represented adequately at all levels of decision- making, both at the pre-conflict stage and during hostilities, as well as at the point of peacekeeping, peace-building, reconciliation and reconstruction' (United Nations 2000).

Undoubtedly many feminist and women's groups behind SCR 1325 envisioned using the resolution as a mechanism to carve out a space in order to radically challenge male-dominance and the status quo in conflict transition. The UN statement of 8th March 2000 was unequivocal in stating that gender equality is inextricably linked to peace. The prevailing trend in the aftermath of the resolution saw vast swathes of feminist scholars demanding the

institutional inclusion of women's informal feminist peace activism as a means of ensuring gender equality (Anderlini 2007; Hammond-Callaghan 2011; Harris 2004; Hunt & Posa 2001; Porter 2003, 2007). Much of the current feminist literature on women's equality and peace in the North of Ireland is distinctly in step with that vision where gender equality is envisioned as 'women's visibility, inclusion and political representation' (Galligan 2013).

SCR 1325 exerts a profound influence over many current approaches towards gender equality in the post-war period. It is frequently identified as the ideal framework for improving gender equality and creating a sustainable peace in the North of Ireland, constituting an important development in enhancing women within the institutional sphere (Deiana 2013; Hoewer 2013; Side 2009; Ward 2009). In the North of Ireland, 'the resolution is intended to foster the creation of a more gender-equal and peaceful society'; the challenge for women is to 'create appropriate structural spaces within a political system to give effect to 1325' (Hoewer 2013: 451). By embedding women's equality within institutional policies and practices, 'it is expected that shifts in cultural attitudes and behaviours will occur, leading to the greater descriptive and substantive representation of women and women's interests' (Galligan 2013: 414). An inclusive society in the quest for peace must ensure full and equal participation of women within formal political structures (Deiana 2013; Fearon 2000; Galligan 2013; Side 2009). Notwithstanding the legitimacy of those who wish to advance such an agenda, it becomes problematic however when it assumes homogeneity by claiming to represent *all* women, thus neglecting the plurality of political standpoints and interests among differentially positioned women.

Gender equality is cited as a fundamental principle of Provisional republicanism (Mailott 2005; Power 2010). For the vast majority of interviewees, the path to peace and women's rights is cited as the eradication of gender-based violence, the increased provision of services to meet women's needs and interests and the right to access reproductive health

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care. When asked to describe gender equality in relation to peace, women's formal participation within institutional politics was largely absent among interviewees. While republican women do see women's role in formal politics as important, most articulated such a view in the context of their continuing activism (Chapter Eight), not in the context of conceptualising women's equality and peace. In addition, not a single interviewee referenced the widely-hailed 'gender equality' provision with the GFA.

Breda joined the IRA in Belfast in the early 1970's and eventually ended up 'going on the run'. She relocated to the South of Ireland where she remains a full-time Sinn Féin and community activist. Her community activism focuses on providing essential services to the young and elderly in a working-class community.

> "Peace to me is equality for all, including women. The North is getting there but it's not at peace. There is peace as such in terms of that [sic] you're not being stopped and searched, not stopping at barriers. There is still people being stopped by the police and homes being raided but compared to the scale before, it is way, way down. So the Brits are gone off the streets, but you need equality among the people, men and women, and certainly that's not there at the minute."

A belief is expressed in the interview data that women achieving equality is a pre-condition for a meaningful peace. Joanne, a former elected representative, articulates her views:

> "Look at what happened after the British left the south of Ireland. Nothing really changed [for women], they changed the name and they changed the crown to a harp. De Valera[62] was supposed to be this big revolutionary and he did serious damage to women in this country,

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[62] Although born in New York, Eamonn De Valera was a prominent political figure in 20th Century Ireland. Having participated in the 1916 Easter Rising, his death sentence for his role was commuted to prison after petition from the United States government due to his citizenship there. He was elected president of the first Dail in 1919, a revolutionary underground government. After the war of Independence in 1921 he rejected the Anglo-Irish treaty as a political sell-out. He would eventually leave Sinn Féin and establish a new political party Fianna Fail in 1926. He would be elected Taoiseach in 1932 and would dominate political life until the early 1960's. As a devout Catholic, De Valera and his governments were heavily influenced by Catholic teachings and were particularly regressive on the position and role of women in Irish society.

him and his cronies. So I do see gender equality as part of the whole peace thing because there is no use in talking about equality if everyone is not going to benefit from it. And there is such inequality for women in this country."

Joanne's extract exhibits the cogent ways in which interviewees see the ending of partition as a major shortfall unless it has women's equality as a fundamental outcome. The ending of partition does not automatically produce women's equality and so the eradication of patriarchal oppression remains a firm pre-condition to a just and peaceful society. When asked to describe women's equality and women's rights, interviewees made little reference to their position within formal political structures and instead projected a vision of equality as an eradication of gender-based violence, the provision of vital services and access to full reproductive rights.

Sandra: "To have peace you have to have women's equality and so you need to have certain services as a minimum. In order for women to access equality we have [here in the Women's centre] childcare, advice units which helps around benefits, housing, domestic violence and we work around immigration also. We also do a whole array of education courses and delivering computer courses. We are also community advocates around issues of suicide, among many other issues. That to me is how you pursue equality for women."

Many women's centres in Belfast provide essential services, space and refuge for women, particularly those in working-class communities. Republican women, including many in this research, are deeply embedded in these centres. The documented experiences of women's exposure to various forms of violence in the aftermath of armed conflict, here in the North of Ireland and globally, undermines the notions of 'peace process', 'conflict resolution' or 'post-conflict'. According to John Brewer (2010), terms such as 'post-conflict' are now widely interpreted as being too vague and inadequate. Brewer argues for the use of a 'post-violence' society, for those regions transitioning from communal violence yet this definition is

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problematic given the fact that violence manifests itself in more ways that simply conventional physical violence. Given the prevailing global trend of increases in post-war violence against women, the self-evident question is, post-violence for whom?

In general, the term 'post-conflict' refers to the period when predominantly male combatants have ceased to engage in 'official' war (Handrahan 2004; McLeod 2011). Feminists reconceptualise 'post-conflict as a period of continued violence and insecurity for women (McLeod 2011: 599), where they remain socially, politically and economically marginalised and exposed to various forms of physical violence, which paradoxically appears to increase in the aftermath of war (Cockburn 2013; Karam 2001; Kelly 2000; Krog 2001). For women therefore, there is no post-conflict as such; there is no 'aftermath' (Meintjes *et al.* 2001). In the North of Ireland, the aftermath of the 1994 ceasefires witnessed an escalation of varied forms of violence against women, indicating that the formal declarations of a peace displayed all the hallmarks of an androcentric peace. The prevailing narrative of a post-war society making steady progress belies the violent reality of women's daily lives in the North. While 'progress' on the de-escalation of military violence certainly holds weight, interview data depicts a far bleaker landscape for women.

> Siobhan: "In most regions where there has been protracted conflict, domestic abuse and suicide rates increase dramatically. People feel dislocated and that's a problem here today; alcohol addiction, domestic abuse. Our abuse rates went through the ceiling [after the 1994 military ceasefires], all types of abuse, physical, sexual, neglect. It's frightening."

> Sandra: "So conflict is still there; domestic and sexual violence against women has not decreased since the ceasefires and GFA."

For all of the official rhetoric regarding a new peaceful dispensation, the data here indicates that in the aftermath of war, violence against women undermines the very notion of a society

as 'post-conflict'. According to the latest statistics from Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland 14,714 women and 14,356 young persons and children received refuge since 1999. On average the PSNI respond to a domestic incident every twenty-three minutes. According to the latest PSNI reports, in August 2014 domestic abuse incidents have increased year on year since 2004/5 with the exception of two years[63]. The period of 2013-14 is the highest level recorded since 2004/5 with 13,078 domestic abuse crimes recorded; an increase of 1,430 crimes on the previous twelve month period. Sandra who runs a Women's Centre in Belfast states that despite the advent of the peace process, their work load has increased significantly in the post-ceasefire years.

> Sandra: "Well today I am the centre manager here in [named organisation] and we have over twenty members of staff and we work with women around domestic violence, sexual violence and to enhance women's lives and to make women's lives better and so we provide multiple services."

> Linda: "Things haven't changed all that much, especially for women. Women are still victims of domestic abuse, victims of violence, women are still struggling to get equality in this society, it's all still there. People are talking about this new era [for women]; it's not there for a lot of people......maybe you see some high profile women who are in [formal] politics but what about all those other women out there."

The so-called 'post-conflict' landscape depicted here is enmeshed with various forms of gender-based violence. Linda's reference to "some high profile women" indicates her belief that a numerical increase of women within institutional politics is largely superficial, and projects a façade that the position of women is improving. Such moves may be empowering for the individual involved but does little to disturb the doleful daily experiences of gender-based violence.

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[63] Notwithstanding the shocking levels indicated here, it is also important to bear in mind that the increases of reported incidents may be linked to the Sinn Féin acceptance of the PSNI in 2007.

The transformation of women's lives and the eradication of patriarchy requires far more than the "some high profile women" within formal politics. Republican socialist feminist Bernadette McAliskey, stated in 1994 that 'when the [British] government are talking about guaranteeing an end to violence, they are talking about the IRA handing over the weapons……they are not talking about making it a criminal offence for a man to beat his wife' (Clár na mBan 1994: 15). It appears that dominant, masculine forms of conflict resolution consider men as security threats only when armed with weapons. The narratives here present points of commonality with existing feminist theorising of peace, echoing the argument of Cynthia Cockburn (1998) with regards to the violence which permeates every aspect of women's lives. Women's equality and rights are promoted here as the provision of services at a community level in order to tackle the scourge of gender-based violence. It highlights the vast disconnect between a select few women in positions of institutional power and the harsh reality of everyday struggles of working-class women.

Violence and armed conflict do not come to an end as a result of a negotiated peace agreement. Rather new forms of violence and social conflict manifest and erupt in other spheres (Jarman 2004: 420). In addition to the other forms of violence explored, the North has witnessed an increasing level of violence against minority groups in society. In particular, homophobic incidents have generally increased year on year since 2006.

> Linda: "Women who are lesbian have to hide their identity a lot because things aren't still very good here for the lesbian and gay community and these women are dealing with the issue of being a woman and the issue of being a lesbian and there is a huge issue around this and it's not being highlighted and that is still here; social stigma and prejudice are still there."

> Janette: "Well I think there is an awful lot of violence due to anger and drink and drug taking; there is violence against gay people but people are more likely to stand up against

this. In my organisation you come across horrific stories and you now realise how endemic these things were in society."

Homophobic incidents for the last twelve months ending in June 2014 are the highest ever recorded since date collection fist began in 2004. In 2014 there were 293 homophobic incidents and 194 homophobic crimes. The dominance of the Christian church teachings in the North tends to be a source of multiple difficulties for the LGBT community. Despite the calls for feminists to remain critically attuned to the different needs and interests of women in the aftermath of war, many current approaches have little to say about women's sexuality. The conservative nature of northern Irish society ensures that the everyday lives of LGBT citizens are far from peaceful. Yet prevailing feminist approaches fail to address these important fissures among women. It appears that the overwhelming objective of many feminists is to accentuate the points of commonality between women at the expense of side-lining salient points of difference, producing a limited vision of peace. While ostensibly such approaches are predicated on obtaining unity among women, it nevertheless has the effect of marginalising those who do not fit with the prevailing prescription.

> Linda: "It's still a huge issue and suicide is a massive issue and suicide is also another thing that you don't see highlighted either is suicide within the lesbian and gay community and so the Falls Women's centre will work with women who are lesbian because they have to hide their identity."

While largely absent from the prevailing feminist discourse on peace, republican women in the Falls Women's Centre, among others, work on a daily basis with women who suffer on the basis of their sexuality. There has been some progress with the establishment of the Equality Commission in the wake of the GFA accompanied by a raft of anti-discrimination legislation. The LGBT community is a strong and vibrant part of life in the North yet the dominance of religious conservatism remains a problem. In addition to homophobic attacks,

violence of various kinds has increased against other minority groups in the North. The PSNI have adopted the definition for racially motivated incidents as recommended by the Stephen Lawrence enquiry as any incident deemed to be racist by the victim. The broad parameters produces a wide scope with the 'Hate Motivation Crime' covering racial, sectarian, faith/religious, transphobic, homophobic and disability incidents. Racist incidents and crimes have increased in the latest twelve-month figures to June 2014 from 830 in 2013 to 1,132 in 2014 while racist crimes have increased significantly from 525 in 2013 to 796 in 2014[64]. Nearly two thirds of the increase in both incidents and crimes is concentrated in Belfast.

In addition to eradicating gender-based violence, many interviewees cite women's reproductive rights as a fundamental part of women's equality. While the struggle for those rights by republican women is explored in more detail in Chapter Eight, we need to document the ways in which republican women conceptualise women's rights as reproductive rights. It is important to state that a sizable minority of interviewees opposed abortion on what they described as a 'moral' principle. Some interviewees such as Eileen simply declared that she 'had big, big problems with it'. Cathy stated that she "was fed up with feminists within Sinn Féin banging on about abortion. When they get up to speak at the *Ard Fheis*, that's when I go for my tea break". The majority of interviewees however, see women's right to choose as a fundamental part of their gender equality vision. Elaine, a senior Sinn Féin member typifies the sentiments of many:

> "Sinn Féin has a very, very strict line on abortion and it's something that I really, really can't get to grips with accepting in any way and I will not rest until it is changed. Because I see the choice issue and being pro-choice as a fundamental part of gender equality, and gender equality is a fundamental part of republicanism so I don't really see how anyone can define it in any other way."

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[64] Again, it is important to note that increased figures could be due to heightened reporting to the police in the aftermath of both armed conflict and Sinn Féin acceptance of the PSNI.

Others describe their activism for women's choice as an important part of their political standpoint.

> Linda: "Even before the issue was raised in the party, I was already active at university on pro-choice issues but a lot of those [male republican] activists didn't get involved. They should've been asking themselves "am I pro-choice here or not" because it is a big woman's issue."

> Edel: "I was a feminist first really and was involved in feminist politics. And of course the conflict was still on-going here and so I became interested in both the conflict and republicanism and I eventually joined Sinn Féin. And it was the Women's Department that gave us an outlet for [feminist] issues, especially issues around choice."

Most of the interviewees who demand women's reproductive rights state that they themselves would not choose to have an abortion but that the issue at stake is the right for women to have a *choice*. Here many interviewees saw the importance of linking women's struggle for reproductive rights with the republican struggle.

> Siobhan: "Now I don't agree with abortion but I do believe that everyone has a right to self-determination. I've no right to shove my opinions down on top of someone else. You can't push your morals on other people."

> Janette: "A woman does have the right to choose. We're not for or against abortion but women have a right to choose what they do with their own bodies. But if you say that a women has to bear a child, like if someone was raped or if you're in a position not to have another child such as living in a violent home or mental instability, well I wouldn't deny the option of an abortion to someone else or the right to decide that for themselves. I might not choose to do it but I shouldn't force my opinions onto somebody else. Now if you have to carry a child to completion every time you conceive then it's almost like rape of another form. You know, "you must have this child". It's almost like sharia law or something."

Approximately half of the interviewees stated that they personally did not agree with abortion but did argue that women as self-determining individuals had a right to choose whether or not to access medical treatment for a termination. Many described the lack of choice for women as being similar to that of an 'enforced pregnancy'. Others described women's lack of choice as akin to the state or others were enforcing laws or regulations upon women's bodies as 'simply another form of occupation or oppression'. Interviewees believed that a woman's right to choose is inextricably linked to self-determination and liberation, and that the denying of a right to choose was another form of oppression.

So while many personally disagreed with the idea of an abortion for themselves, they framed abortion as a self-determination issue which goes to the heart of the Irish republican struggle. According to Aoife, the issue of choice is quite simple; "you could be totally opposed to abortion and that is fine but don't impose that upon me or other people." Undoubtedly the issue of women's right to choose is at the heart of many feminist visions of peace, yet the issue is virtually absent from many prevailing approaches to women and peace in the North of Ireland (Hoewer 2013; Side 2009). Of note, NGO's, such as Hanna's House have also decided to side-line the issue, deliberately eschewing any potential divisions in favour of foregrounding women's unity through common ground. It appears that many existing feminist approaches favour the path of least resistance, side-stepping any issues such as imperialism or abortion which may crack the facade of homogeneity. Such approaches effectively reduces many feminist struggles to a simple demand for women's inclusion as an 'excluded group' rather than examining the many structures and processes which impact upon their daily lives. The lack of feminist engagement with imperialism and capitalism, among others, serves to effectively privilege certain visions and voices over others.

Conclusion

The strength of using the standpoint of republican women in which to conceptualise peace is that it is rooted in their everyday material and social worlds. Their meanings of both peace and equality are profoundly shaped and informed by their daily activities and experiences. In addition, by recognising the multiple standpoints of women we are shifting the emphasis from singular, generalised narratives often associated with 'womenandpeace' (El-Bushra 2007) in the North of Ireland, towards a more accurate and richer depiction of women in their diversity of political struggles. The interview data here differs significantly from the prevailing feminist approach to women's equality which centres on 'inclusion, visibility, and participation' alongside men within institutional politics. The discourse of such visions fails to resonate with republican women, where women's exclusion from male-dominated formal structures appears to reside relatively low down on their agenda for eradicating patriarchy. Moreover, the lack of engagement with imperialism and capitalism by prevailing global feminist narratives presents little space for those who wish to radically transform existing structures and relations.

Of course the findings here are not something unique to this study. The data, unsurprisingly, echoes post-colonial feminist approaches to women's oppression, where feminism is intertwined with the politics of nationalism, socialism, eco-feminism as well as challenging everyday sexism and patriarchy (Mohanty 1988; Spivak 1986). The argument here does not suggest that all women do not suffer under patriarchy. On the contrary, exploring the differences *between* women allows for a richer excavation of patriarchy in all its many manifestations. Oppressive masculinity comes in all forms and guises, including neo-liberal capitalism, homophobia, gender-based violence and imperialism, among others. By exploring the lives of republican women, we uncover alternative visions of peace which many prevailing approaches fail to grapple with.

Championing only those women who refuse identity politics and are located in what Tickner calls 'women's spheres' risks excluding the perspectives of other politically concerned women, such as combatants, from peace processes (Byrne 2013: 16). If mainstream processes of conflict transition were deemed by feminists as gender-blind prior to SCR 1325, then I suggest that the post-1325 discourse, visions and prescribed activism are largely combatant-blind. This chapter concludes that the more we explore the differences between women and their visions of peace, the less relevant dominant feminists visions such as SCR 1325 become. While the post-war period is often referred to as a time of 'de-militarisation', the fact remains that masculinity and patriarchy remain the dominant force (Enloe 2004). In the so-called post-conflict period, streets, homes and bedrooms remain key battlegrounds (Cockburn 1998; Enloe 2004: 224). Rather than depicting the North as a place at peace, primary data here indicates that decreasing levels of military violence are matched with increasing levels of gender-based violence. It is these insidious forms of violence which are identified as barriers to women's equality and a meaningful peace, not solely institutional participation alongside men. The issue now remains as to the ways in which differentially situated women organise to challenge those forms of violence in post-war scenarios.

Chapter Seven - The Limitations of Party Politics: Women's Struggle & the Mainstreaming of Provisional Republicanism

Introduction

In the aftermath of the 1994 IRA ceasefire, the principal republican leaders set out the implementation of a new phase of 'unarmed struggle'. Central to this political departure was the institutionalisation of the republican struggle, shifting from revolutionary actions and rhetoric in favour of more tempered and mainstream demands regarding universal citizenship and rights for all. In particular, with armed struggle largely abandoned, the post-war battlefield generally resided in the 'hard talk' of formal peace negotiations and the pursuit of electoral advances at the ballot box. This chapter explores the ways in which the institutionalisation of Provisional republicanism during conflict transition impacted upon the political struggles of women within the republican movement. Despite the prevailing calls by many for women's inclusion within the sphere of state-centric politics, the chapter argues that the institutionalisation of women's struggle within formal political parties presents a highly limited terrain of feminist political organising in post-war scenarios.

The chapter begins with an exploration of the changing dynamics within the republican movement during the post-ceasefire period as Sinn Féin "professionalises" itself and its wider organisation. I then move on to explore women's experiences of the GFA negotiations, indicating a side-lining of both women and their interests as state power and electoral contests gain primacy. The dearth of meaningful input within the negotiations is further compounded by the ambiguous demise of the Sinn Féin Women's Department. This previously vibrant and prolific feminist outlet appears to 'fade away' just at a time when the overall movement firmly accelerates towards a more institutional standpoint. It suggests that the institutional re-positioning of the party required an overhaul of women's previous

feminist agitation in order to fit with its newfound mainstream departure. The chapter serves as an important caution to those who suggest that gender mainstreaming and women's institutional inclusion provides a sanguine strategy for feminist post-war activism.

'Ceasefire Soldiers': Post-War Republican Politics

By the early 1990's Sinn Féin was attempting to recast itself as a 'respectable party of the mainstream'. The sole focus during the peace process was to increase its electoral strength and gain entry into formal peace negotiations (Frampton 2009: 104). In a succinct summary, 'the IRA went from being a revolutionary movement committed to overthrowing the state to a constitutional party prepared to govern it' (Bean 2007: 135). During this period electoral imperatives appeared to have supplanted ideological purity for republicans (Tonge 2005: 117). Sinn Féin's electoral success has been remarkable and largely uninterrupted in its ascendancy since 1994 and grew in tandem with its movement into the mainstream and into government (Bean 2014: 723). The rhetoric of rights and equality became far more palatable than revolutionary socialism. In doing so, Sinn Féin repositioned itself as a social democratic voice of the centre left (McGovern 2004: 639). In this sense, republicans became constructive critics of the status quo, pointing out its limitations and suggesting improvement, rather than radicals creating a new space for completing their revolutionary project (Bean 2007: 215). Although always leadership-led, republican women state that they joined an activist-led movement that was ostensibly concerned with the dismantling of the state through varied means including armed struggle, mass mobilisation, self-sufficient communities and electoral politics. This section explores the ideological shifts occurring within the republican movement during conflict transition, from the perspective of women within the movement.

In the aftermath of the 1994 IRA ceasefire, the ranks of Sinn Féin swelled with what interviewees described as a 'new type of person', persons who prior to the ceasefire were

beyond the traditional support base of the Provisionals during the Troubles. A term common across interviews is that of 'ceasefire soldiers' or 'ceasefire republicans' which was used to denote these 'new type of persons'. According to Linda:

"ceasefire soldiers were all coming in and who didn't want to know you during the conflict, who would have closed their doors in your face but now it was all respectable to be a republican; [now it is] ok to be in Sinn Féin."

Eileen who joined the IRA in the early 1970's and now works in the community sector recalls a similar change in approach and personnel:

"I could see that they [Sinn Féin leadership] were looking for respectful images and all this [sic] Armani suit brigade. I could see them side-lining people who didn't fit the picture, you had to agree with everything. Things were being taken from the ground and it was now all top-down. Things were centralised and it all had to go through someone else. To me, even at Ard Fheiseanna, there used to be actual debates but now it looked like it was decided beforehand. People who were to speak was decided beforehand and I just didn't like what I was seeing. And so you see the community groups I'm on now, I can say what I like and I can give my viewpoint even though people may not agree with it. Policies and the like [within named group] are from the ground-up."

The quelling of dissent and imposition of top-down structures bear all the trademark characteristics of an institutional political party. The development of Sinn Féin as 'a party ready for government' was problematic; obtaining 'respectability and status' risked diluting, or even destroying, the more radical ethos of the party. (Frampton 2009: 143). Most interviewees affirmed this vast sense of change in dynamic in the post-ceasefire period. While the incredibly frank testimonies of those now outside of the party such as Linda and Eileen are telling yet unsurprising, it is striking to note that most other interviewees still

within Sinn Féin recounted similar experiences. Gemma who is now a senior Sinn Féin member recalls:

> "We were trying to professionalise ourselves because we knew that Sinn Féin were going to be massive. There was a different atmosphere [after the ceasefire], almost like a sadness but at the same time looking forward but always this sadness. I mean it might seem weird to say but we had wild craic back in the days of the conflict when people were sitting around old buildings with nothing, no heating or no chairs. And when the funds did start coming in, that may have put people off, as it was a wee bit too formalised and some people felt left out but we had to become more professionalised with constituency offices and vote management and how you canvass properly, how you run an election properly and everything was changing and so some people felt left out."

Theresa is a lifelong republican and remains a prominent Sinn Féin member. She also recalls a similar pattern:

> "Well I actually found myself having to pull myself back in from feeling bitter because then you had all these people coming on the scene [after the 1994 ceasefire] and you were thinking 'where did all these ones come from all of a sudden'. So you had all these people saying [sarcastically] *"oh I work in Gerry Adams' office"* and I was saying to them "where the fuck were yous [sic] during the war?", god forgive me because we *could not, could not* get women towards the end of the 1980's; we simply couldn't. They were few and far between."

Despite the obvious trauma of the Troubles, there was a strong sense of grassroots and communal solidarity during the years of armed conflict. Gemma's statement reveals a profound sense of tension between a longing for past modes of activism and the need to adopt a more pragmatic approach in order to grapple with the new political realities. The shift towards a more formalised political party brings with it ideological and practical demands.

There is widespread belief across interviews that the party needed to retain more of its grassroots fronts in order to counter those who suggest it is now merely another constitutional political party. Formal politics is often viewed by grassroots activists as a system dominated by wealthy, often white men (and of course sometimes women) vying for power for its own sake and for their own personal gain (Naples 1998: 125), which according to the perspectives of the women interviewed, is the very antithesis of their republican activism. Aoife, a life-long Sinn Féin member describes her experiences:

> "Our *cumann*[65] is now business-like and not enough discussion. These days discussion is happening at a different level and maybe more leadership-led. It wasn't leadership-led in the 1980's. Now obviously we elect a leadership but it feels different for me now; hard to pinpoint. It has been gradual but it is linked to us going towards constitutional politics."

It suggests the erosion of grassroots space is commensurate with the party's increasing shift towards the mainstream. Interviewees are critically aware that as the party accelerates its move to formalised politics, grassroots spaces and inputs are sequestered. The subsidence of revolutionary actions and rhetoric correlated with the movement's ideological transition towards the political realism of state governance. A pertinent example of this lack of internal debate as described by Aoife arose when former IRA member and Sinn Féin Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness met and shook hands with the British Queen during a visit to Belfast on 27th June 2012. From a republican perspective, the notion of a former IRA commander shaking hands with a British monarch was likely to cause anxiety and anger among many rank and file republicans. Twenty-five interviews occurred during and after this event where most participants expressed dismay, frustration and sometimes anger at the way the handshake was communicated with members by the leadership. The lack of internal party

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[65] Cumann is the Gaelic (Irish language) word for branch, association or local unit.

debate and grassroots input to that decision is both potent and unequivocal. Gemma, a senior Sinn Féin member from Belfast sums up the feelings of most at that time:

> "The handshake with the queen, we lost a lot of people over that. That was a bitter pill to swallow. I don't think it should have happened. Now I've brought this up at meetings at the time that I wasn't informed that Martin would be shaking the queen's hand, I was *told* [participant's emphasis] that he would be doing that. Like that whole [consultation] process……the handshake was on, then it was off, it was going to happen, it wasn't going to happen and then two days to go we were told that it was going to happen so we lost a lot of people through that."

It is interesting to note that Gemma's description is almost identical to that of others who recall attending local Sinn Féin meetings right across Ireland. Rather than debating the issue or having any real input, all described the process as one of "being informed", rather than debating or impacting the decision that the handshake would go ahead. This indicates a top-down 'consultation' process.

> Janette: "At the end of the day you have to toe a party line and follow party lines. Like the queen handshake and all that, you probably could not have changed that outcome, it was inevitable."

The lack of a meaningful debate with its grassroots membership is emblematic of the party's embrace of institutional political organising. This process is not unique to Sinn Féin as most parties require its members, and especially its senior party representatives, to toe the party line[66]. Many interviewees however, viewed this style as restrictive given their previous experiences of grassroots politics within the movement.

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[66] A 'whip' is a party official whose primary role is to ensure party discipline in areas of voting on legislation and policy. The whip system is a trademark characteristic of the UK & Republic of Ireland parliaments.

Aoife: "There is a big change now, less discussion, less grassroots discussion and my personal analysis of it is that we have become so embroiled in constitutional politics that everything takes second place and perhaps I am not a very constitutional person and I'm in a party that is so it is a conflict for me. Things are often done because an election is coming, issues should be done because they need to be done."

Janette: "Well there were more radical politics around 1984 and 1985 and developing radical politics around that time. And this is my big problem with constitutional, formal politics and I think this is still a valid argument, is that if you have to keep getting elected again and again, then you have to appeal to the least common denominator; appeal to the most inclusive audience. So I think we aren't as radical as we could be because we have to keep getting elected again and again."

Linda: "That [leadership control] began during the peace process because the peace process was all top-down. You had people deciding the future and drip-feeding everyone else, people within the republican movement were drip-fed. So there is no democratic politics going on within the movement as to what was going to be, you have a few people sitting down and deciding."

Kevin Bean (2007) describes the remoteness of Sinn Féin's politicians and their attempts to restrict debates in the conflict transition period. The erosion of grassroots input may have presented difficulties for rank and file republicans, but undoubtedly the unpalatable measures such as engaging with the British monarchy also offered major political benefits for the leadership in terms of presenting its new post-armed struggle outlook. The changes described by interviewees were strategic measures which prepared the ground for the new post-war politics of the Provisionals. The profound sense of change regarding internal dynamics indicates a distinct shift towards a more leadership-led culture. The principal republican leaders sought to advance an unarmed republican struggle through electoral contests, political rhetoric, media sound-bites and the zealous pursuit of state power. This process of

'professionalization' ensured that the ranks of the republican movement were swelled with 'ceasefire republicans'. These seismic shifts invariably shaped gender relations and the position of women within the movement. In particular, the side-lining of women during the GFA formal negotiations and the ending of the Sinn Féin Women's Department are illustrative of the consequences on women's standing with the movement as a result of its institutional embrace.

'From the Front-lines of War to the Side-Lines of Peace?': Republican Women and the GFA Negotiations

Very elite-centred negotiations, despite their presentation as 'inclusive talks' were the method established for tackling the conflict (Dixon 2002; McGovern 2004; Power 2011). Like all institutional approaches towards resolving armed conflict, negotiations followed a top-down framework, choreographed by elites, manipulating the majority of citizens who were excluded from the process (Dixon 2002). A trademark characteristic of such processes was that, 'women's concerns are still rarely heard, let alone addressed, by policy makers during [formal] peace settlements' (Pankhurst 2003: 155). Given the formalised political and thus exclusionary nature of such talks, it was plainly obvious that the negotiators would be predominantly male (Fearon 1999).

Given their central role in armed struggle, it was reasonable to assume that republican women were well placed to play a prominent role in peace negotiations. When asked about their roles within the GFA negotiations period however, the word 'leadership' is ubiquitous. Phrases such as 'total faith in the leadership'; 'blind faith in the leadership'; '100 per cent behind the leadership'; 'they would not let us down'; 'complete trust in the leadership' are common across the many narratives of republican women dealing with the period.

Helen: "There was a great sense of momentum [during the GFA negotiations]. But the main thing that I recall is a lot of confidence in our leadership."

Fiona: "People have to show leadership and people like Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness have shown leadership."

Ruth: "I did have great faith in our leadership and Gerry Adams in particular. I would have great faith in his leadership and in his analysis."

Michelle: "It was time to end the war and when you had leadership like Martin McGuinness then you knew that there was never going to be anything damaging going to happen because Martin had been with us as part of the struggle. But I was always 100 per cent behind the leadership and I knew they'd never let us down. Total faith."

Joanne: "I just knew it would be alright; I just saw it as another step, another step. I did feel all the nervousness that was all around but I just knew that this was ok, going to be ok. I just trusted the leadership; they were taking a chance so why can't we? But I knew they wouldn't let us down."

Bernie: "Well we all had apprehensions because you were going into the unknown and, I mean, I didn't agree with everything because it was unknown and you didn't know how it was going to pan out. But I had and have great faith in the leadership and I knew they wouldn't let us down but I'm not one of these ones that you know, stick a carrot in front of me and I'll go. I have a mind of my own and my own thoughts so that was difficult too. At the same time, if the movement thought it was necessary to go back to war tomorrow then I would be 100 per cent behind it."

Of the forty interviewees, not a single person identified as having a direct role or contribution to the formal negotiations. In contrast to the notion in Chapter Five that 'everyone had a part to play' during the Troubles, the peace process resided in the hands of a few, mostly male republicans. Ultimately, control of the state was at the heart of the negotiations, and 'macho

men' were at the forefront of those negotiations (Racioppi and O'Sullivan See 2001: 101). Many interviewees switched from providing a personal experience to providing an observational experience. While describing their conflict experiences using "I" or "we", the discourse however switches to a more inactive nature when dealing with the peace negotiations. During this time, many became spectators in their own story. The profound placing of faith in the leadership indicates little or no meaningful input during the negotiations.

Notwithstanding that the republican movement has always (and remains) a predominantly male organisation based on a hierarchical structure, the GFA formal peace talks incorporated a distinct side-lining of women. The secret negotiations which embodied the hallmarks of 'the old boys club' (O'Keefe 2013) demanded a reversion to either tokenistic or more 'traditional' roles for women. Linda, a former IRA member from Belfast who now works solely as a community activist stated:

> "They (republican women) weren't involved, they were secretaries and that's what they looked like; paper carriers for the men. It was men making all those decisions for all of us. Now the leadership have to lead and sometimes take decisions. But the party became more and more centralised and everything had to go through someone else and they had to give it the all clear."

Even those who remained within the Provisional movement and are reticent to be overly critical, echoed Linda's contention that women's role bordered on the politics of optics, or at best 'traditional' back-room roles. When asked about the lack of women at the frontlines of the negotiations, Anne counters such suggestions with an explanation that:

> "There were lots of women behind the scenes who were preparing the documents. And there were women on the Ard Comhairle there along with everybody else. So you know you had

Bairbre De Brun and Dodie[67] and Siobhan O'Hanlon. There were lots of women behind the scenes as well, preparing the way this all shaped up."

Anne's depiction of women's "behind the scenes" work, indicates that the presence of republican women within the talks process invariably fell into normative gender typecasts. It certainly typified the 'women as backbone' discourse (Chapter Five). Edel recalls anecdotes such as how during negotiations women were told to go use the photocopier in order to prevent their political adversaries in the DUP (who resolutely refused to accept republicans in the peace process) from using it. Former IRA prisoner Rosaleen McCorley vented her frustration at the lack of women's input in the formal peace process during a film documentary organised by the Falls Women's Centre in 1995. She believed that while republican women were visible, they are 'seen but not really heard' (cited in O'Keefe 2013: 144).

In addition to the absence of a meaningful role in the talks, most interviewees stated that the top-down model used for the GFA effectively excluded many of their demands regarding the tackling of neo-liberal capitalism or the pursuit of social justice, indicating that standard forms of conflict resolution are focused solely on delivering a minimalist 'negative' peace. Many felt that the lack of social issues on the GFA talk's agenda resulted from Unionists and British attempts to prevent Sinn Féin's participation over the arms decommissioning issue. Linda felt that this was done in order to narrow the space for wider republican demands at the talks:

> "bringing issues of social justice to the talks table would have been perceived as a weakness;
> a stick to beat republicans with so the focus had to be on the constitutional issues or the Brits
> would have walked all over us."

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[67] Dodie McGuinness was a life-long republican who left the Sinn Féin in 2007 after she was made 'redundant' from a party position. She took a case of gender discrimination against the party who paid £15,000.00 without an admission of liability.

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Edel feels that this type of 'jockeying for position' by the various parties resulted in top-down, high-wire peace negotiations in which both women's participation and issues of social justice were simply marginalised. Nicola, a republican activist who currently works solely in the community sector recalls:

"I thought the peace agenda was very narrow to start with but it just became narrower and narrower. It was not interested in hearing women's voices and just look at the reaction to the NIWC, the contempt shown by men within the unionist parties was really disappointing and I just thought 'there is that again'. Unionism has equal contempt for women and republicans, specifically republican women; bucket loads of contempt. So I felt the agenda being narrowed all the time and that initial hope and expectation just evaporated as the talks went on. This is what I termed earlier as the narrowing of the ground for women within the movement."

The 'narrowing of the ground' for women saw peace defined and anchored in a very state-centric outlook, with little or no radical potential. Karen, a former IRA volunteer who is now a Sinn Féin and community activist, echoes the sentiments of Nicola in believing that it was the state-centric nature of process itself which precluded any issues deemed outside standard conflict resolution:

"It was probably not possible to negotiate more than was done at each particular time and while I can see it would be a good thing to gain a lot more in terms of your negotiations like education and the like, it was probably more important if you can get the main things, get sufficient things agreed to move on because it was about moving it on and I think that's what makes it a bit tricky. There's a certain window of opportunity where you have to make progress or else things slide back."

Arguably, republican women are profoundly aware of the limitations within standard approaches towards armed conflict. There is an acceptance that this form of 'conflict

resolution' is capable of delivering only a negative peace, that being the de-escalation of military violence. The narrow talk's agenda and the prevailing threats of Sinn Féin's exclusion effectively precluded any issues of social justice being on the agenda, according to interviewees. The view that it was only possible to address the "main issues" indicates a hierarchical, exclusionary approach which sees state-centred issues deemed as the primary objectives, rendering all others subordinate. The stock-in-trade characteristics of standard institutional approaches to resolving armed conflict are marked by an unreceptive terrain for alternative, broader conceptualisations of peace.

Furthermore, interviewees also articulated a distinct sense of physical alienation from the process itself. Many stressed that armed conflict literally came in through their front doors, blurring traditional gender lines and creating spaces for women's active involvement. The close proximity of the conflict, particularly in the urban centres and highly militarised regions along the border, ensured that republicans and nationalists lived and breathed the conflict on a daily basis. The political dynamic and physical location shifted away from those working-class epicentres and relocated in the corridors of Stormont or Hillsborough Castle. There is a palpable sense of detachment among interviewees. Very few were involved within the talks at Stormont. It was felt that the conflict was fought on peoples' front doors, but the peace was very much devised behind closed doors.

> Sandra: "The peace process came and it all sort of moved to Stormont. The political environment moved them away from the street up into Stormont. So you felt a detachment and certainly as a woman I feel detached from that sort of politics. And I think that's one of the things that has happened since the peace process…….a feeling of detachment."

The secretive and top-down approach was the antithesis of the grassroots, mass mobilisation of the Troubles experienced by many of the interviewees. The absence of street politics, or perhaps more accurately, the lack of attention given by the leadership in the 1990's to street

politics, indicates the focus of republican attention had shifted towards the higher levels of state power.

> Janette: "The benefits of grassroots democracy, and I think the problem is it shouldn't be high wire negotiations *unless* they are held accountable by the community. And I think that is why I would never want to be involved only in formal politics because of that lack of [grassroots] accountability."

Siobhan is a former IRA volunteer in Derry who now works as a Sinn Féin and community activist recalls:

> "I think that whole period leading up to and after the GFA alienated and isolated a lot of people and it didn't have to happen that way. One part of the movement should have been negotiating while the other part should have been doing something with their grassroots people."

According to Kevin Bean, the republican movement 'moved from the politics of the streets into the anterooms of power; the days of revolutionary mobilisation in anything other than a commemorative or rhetorical sense were long over' (2007: 151). There is a sense that the political process, which had previously been a mixture of ad hoc demonstrations in reaction to local events, mass demonstrations and rallies and grassroots activism, was now formalised and highly technocratic.

> Linda: "So when you look at how republican politics was through the early 1980's up until the early 1990's, it was all mass mobilisation, a sense of community solidarity. People who were not even what you would call republican were out marching with us against lots of different issues. After the war ended, and indeed in the years leading up to that, things really died down and got much slower, politically. So by the time of the ceasefire, there was virtually nothing in terms of street activism and community politics."

Orla, joined the IRA in Belfast in the late 1970's and is a former prisoner. She now works solely as a community activist and broadly supports the republican movement today but believes that the peace process was marked by a sense of disconnection between the leadership and grassroots activists:

> "At a grassroots level, people on the ground are just not being kept in the loop. People are not being informed enough of what's happening. So there were meetings being held [at the time of the GFA] but it was more a case of 'this is what's happening at the talks' as opposed to 'what do yous think' and gauging peoples' opinions. So it was sort of 'this is happening and this happening, so you're either with us or you're not', that type of thing. Sort of then, I was starting to question myself; 'is this really what you want?'"

Even those who remain within the party and close to the leadership acknowledge that Sinn Féin operated along strictly vertical lines of control during the peace process, where a 'very powerful and dominant leadership' led the way on issues of 'fundamental' importance' (cited in Frampton 2009: 117). This view was also shared by others within the party such as Eoin O'Broin who concurs that the party was probably 'a little more centralised' than it needed to be during the period of the peace process (cited in Frampton 2009: 117). It is this emerging 'leadership-led' culture which saw Eileen, and others, severing her ties with the Provisional republican movement:

> "Then (after the GFA) you had all this so-called consultation; it wasn't a consultation, it was a *fait acompli*. It was signed, sealed and dusted and I knew they were going to accept it but all they wanted was time to convince people. I saw a terrible change in the leadership's attitude; if you questioned what they were doing, you were pushed out."

Even among those reticent to be critical, many interviewees recall that communication with the grassroots was "not as good as it should have been" during this period, with many indicating that such secrecy breeds suspicion among activists. The dearth of meaningful

participation within the peace talks is therefore compounded by the complete absence of grassroots input or the mass mobilisation which characterised republican politics in the 1980's. A key attraction of mass mobilisation resides in the non-hierarchical and autonomous nature of grassroots organising, where 'rather than follow the dictates of union bosses, party leaders or church officials, women seek more autonomous forms of organisation where their own voice could be heard' (Flowerier 1995: 55).

The mass mobilisation as envisaged by republicans failed to materialise and so 'the picture of political demobilisation that emerged in the 1990's and 2000's was in marked contrast to this [1980's] vibrant activism' (Bean 2007: 151). This is certainly evident among many of the research participants. The use of mass mobilisation and grassroots input are vital components in politicising and attracting women to nationalist movements due to its bottom-up, grassroots dynamic which stands in contrast to mainstream political action; grassroots organising is an essential component in politically mobilising nationalist women (Aretxaga 1997; Molyneux 1985). In other words, the absence of the mass mobilisation dynamic narrowed the spaces for republican women who were part of a movement which was increasingly relying on electoral strength and the adversarial 'hard bargaining' behind closed doors at Stormont in order to pursue its objectives. Despite their 'front-line' roles during armed struggle (Chapter Five), the immediate post-ceasefire period, particularly the GFA negotiations, sees women distinctly side-lined from any direct role in peace talks. Some of those within this research cite this juncture as the decisive moment in which they chose to leave the Provisional republican movement. While also critically aware of the perils regarding a change in direction and culture, others however, chose to agitate from within, through the establishment of semi-autonomous women's groups. One of those was a group called Clár na mBan.

"Put a Feminist Stamp on it": Clár na mBan

By the early 1990's, it was clear that certain groups of republican women were profoundly aware of the vast pitfalls if the North's burgeoning peace process followed the standard, top-down format. It is interesting to see that once again, republican women were organising autonomously in order to agitate around their particular needs and interests. Clár na mBan grew out of this ambivalent period of hope and fear among republican women. Most women within the movement were aware of the historical trends regarding the marginalisation of women and gender equality in the aftermath of revolutionary armed conflict[68]. As the question of state power gained prominence within the republican agenda in the mid-1990's, Clár na mBan articulated the belief that both the struggle for national self-determination and gender equality could not be mutually exclusive (Hackett 1995). As such, Clár na mBan were effectively holding the republican movement to account by ensuring that the feminist agenda did not disappear, reminding the leadership of their promises regarding feminism.

Clár na mBan began with a series of informal meetings of women in 1993 prompted by concern at the marginalisation of women's voices in the debate (Hackett 1995: 112). They criticised the absence of an independent women's voice within the Sinn Féin party (O'Keefe 2013; Sales 1997). Following the revelations of contacts between Hume and Adams, and particularly in the aftermath of the Downing Street Declaration in December 1993, Clár na mBan came together to discuss ways in which women's participation, demands and needs would be represented within any future peace talks. This culminated in a conference in March 1994 entitled 'Women's Agenda for Peace'. It brought together republican women from

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[68] Women have historically played a comparatively prominent role in various Irish nationalist struggles over the centuries and in particular during the 'revolutionary period' of 1916-1923. Despite playing a relatively central role in the national struggle and the rhetorical promises of a more gender-equal post-Independence society, women's position after 1923 remained largely unchanged. Given the power of the Catholic Church in Ireland, some would argue that their position in fact deteriorated in the aftermath of British withdrawal from the South. See Carol Coulter (1993) *The Hidden Tradition: Feminism, Women and Nationalism in Ireland.* Cork: Cork University Press.

across Ireland with the explicit aim of ensuring the meaningful inclusion of women's voices within any negotiated settlement. The main criticism from the conference focused on the secretive nature of the contacts and the very narrow political agenda which was limited to discussing violence in a particular way (Connolly 1995; Sales 1997: 197).

Nicola was an activist in Clár na mBan:

"I remember after the ceasefire, myself and other people who were in the republican movement were all getting involved in the like of "Disband the RUC" campaigns, and then you were just thinking what would replace that? You were realising what would be there for women in the peace? Like all these issues and questions are flying around and so this group emerged from that, Clár na mBan which came out of a conference. What could we do with this situation to put a feminist stamp on it; put a social justice stamp on it……..shaking the whole thing up; putting *everything* on the agenda for change."

Clár na mBan attracted criticism from those who saw any diversion from the national question as unhelpful. More ominously, there was a perception that challenges from women within the movement were 'often seen as disloyal, to be breaking ranks which need to be solid in order to be strong' (Hackett 1995). At the conference held in March 1994, a statement was read from the female IRA prisoners at Maghaberry articulating their views for the future, stating that "if the rights of women are to be supported, they must be supported fully and not be addressed in wishy-washy legislation" (cited in Connolly 1995: 124). Contributions to the conference were full of hope and cautious optimism while consistently balanced by a strong awareness of historical trends regarding the side-lining of women.

In discussions with interviewees, it was mentioned that another women's group, Sheela na Gig, had also formed at the same time. The group established itself in the mid and upper Falls road area in 1995. They were primarily motivated by a lack of communication

from the leadership and by their need to have more women inputting into the peace process. Ruth, a former IRA member, Sinn Féin political representative and community activist was a founding member of the group:

> "Well there was a sense of not knowing exactly what's going on here because you have to remember here, that after the ceasefire we were told little or nothing about what was going on. So we had no real idea about where this thing was going. So there was a group called Sheela na Gig set up and they were a group of women who weren't sure whether Sinn Féin was going the right way or whatever and that group was formed by republican women and what they did was murals, local pamphlets that were fired out again and again."

The inference from the data is that incredibly small circles of republicans at a leadership level were largely deciding that trajectory of the republican movement. While Ruth maintained that the group was short-lived and comprised of a relatively small number of members, she maintains that it was the 'quality' of the membership which indicated its political weight. Ruth named many prominent republicans, most of them militarists and illustrates that prominent women were prepared to organise themselves in order to pursue their demands within the movement. Clár na mBan and Sheela na Gig are in themselves evidence that republican women organised autonomously in order to pursue their interests and ensure their contributions were heard.

When asked about the disbandment of Sheela na Gig, Ruth elaborates that the leadership opened up a bit more in response to their formation and actions and in doing so explained in more detail where they saw the peace process going. After this, Sheela na Gig participants were "persuaded" that the leadership was taking the right path, and so quickly disbanded with most members remaining within the fold of the Provisional republican movement. Republican women were galvanised into action by a compounding fear that women's interests would not be represented at the talks table and a firm belief that formal

peace negotiations and new peace accords 'in and of itself does not create the conditions for gender equality' (Holt 2003; Richter-Devroe 2013; Sharoni 1998: 1089).

With the dismantling of the Northern Ireland state now firmly displaced by a largely reformist agenda, the new political realism within Sinn Féin demanded a more pragmatic approach which saw the party display all the staples of a formal, mainstream party. The reassertion of patriarchal cultures and expectations, perhaps best illustrated by attempts to allocate women tokenistic or 'backbone' roles during the GFA negotiations, occurs at a time when the party was moving towards a more mainstream standpoint. Women and their objectives were effectively side-lined, despite their resistance, when state power was at stake. If the specific conditions of armed conflict mobilised republican women, then it is unsurprising that such seismic changes during conflict transition severely impacted upon the mobility of their political struggles. Perhaps the most potent illustration of this shift within Provisional republicanism, and the declining fortunes of republican women, is the ambiguous demise of the Sinn Féin Women's Department.

The Sinn Féin Women's Department: The Opportunities & Limitations of Feminist Organising within Formal Political Parties

From the late 1970's republican women began organising within the republican movement in order to assert their own political agenda and interests. A prominent outlet was the establishment of the Sinn Féin Women's Department in 1979. This section critically explores the establishment, activism and eventual demise of this bastion of republican feminism, arguing that its ambiguous decline substantiates the argument that the republican movement switched towards a more institutional position, producing a less radical stance on feminist and women's issues.

The foundation of the Women's Department represented a collective effort by republican women to ensure that they had a voice and political spaces within the republican movement. Former head of the Women's Department Mairead Keane explains that 'women came together through their involvement in the nationalist struggle……to discuss the issues that were affecting them not only as women but as women political activists, and there was a need to have an organised political voice within the party. This culminated in the discussion about departments and the need to have a separate department in which women could come together and meet as women, as women only, to discuss, to debate, and to push forward the issues important to us. There was a need for a group that would serve as a support for women within the party' (Lyons 1992: 265). Anne was involved in the establishment of the Women's Department and recalls:

> "There were very strong women like Maire Moore and like that and Rita O'Hare of course,
> so I was involved in the whole development of women's first policy document that was put
> in front of the Ard Comhairle which was fully endorsed. Then we broadened it out to male
> comrades because this had to be sold to the male membership before it went to an Ard Fheis
> so those were very intense and eye opening experiences as well and of course you had some
> of the traditional, macho men within the party resisting but then when you talked them round
> after more discussion then they mellowed a little and saw the merits because our objective
> was to get this passed in the Ard Fheis so I'm proud to say I was part of that."

Echoing Anne, Janette who was also heavily involved is the establishment of the Department, says:

> "The Sinn Féin Ard Fheis and Ard Comhairle recognised the need for a women's voice and
> that this was the time to set up a Women's Department so women could develop and come to
> the fore. Now, the reason this is happening is because some women were linking up with

Women Against Imperialism. They were involved in setting up the Rape Crisis Centre in Belfast and so you had all these really strong republican women."

This suggests that the roots of the Women's Department resided solely with the agency of republican women themselves with little input from the male-led leadership. It is indicative of a vibrant and powerful feminist voice within the republican movement, particularly their links to wider women's groups and organisation within working-class republican communities. Some have posited a rather cynical appraisal of the republican movements' newfound gender ideological awakening during this time, arguing that women and feminism were used as 'window dressing' (Power 2010). Such a perspective however neglects the fact that the energy and direction of the Women's Department as a potent and radical political force within republicanism stemmed from republican women themselves, not the leadership. Moreover, the activism and energies of the Women's Department achieved some remarkable feats within what was (and remains) a male-dominated movement containing many conservative forces among its eclectic membership.

Within the largely conservative and male-dominated sphere of formal Irish politics in the early 1980's, the creation of the Women's Department was an incredibly important development, particularly given the issues they pursued. The development of a 'women's section' was not unique to Sinn Féin as other parties such as the Ulster Unionist Party did have a women's section as such, although their main role was that of an auxiliary or 'vote getter'. The Sinn Féin Women's Department, however, advocated around issues which at the time were deemed highly controversial topics such as divorce, access to contraception, domestic violence and equality for LGBT, among others (Maillot 2005; O'Keefe 2003; Power 2010). Fiona states that the department were "highlighting issues that were particularly important to women……and it gave women that wee bit of space to organise on their own and organise around their own issues." Others concur with those sentiments:

Edel: "What was interesting in Sinn Féin at that time was the Women's Department and that gave us an outlet for that [feminism]. Women like Mairead Keane, Jenifer McCann and Una Gillespie and that definitely gave a sense that while the party was completely imperfect when it came to those issues especially issues around choice, there was however a core radical feminist analysis that was valued and we could agitate even within the party and that and try to find a voice for a republican feminist analysis in broader society and because there was a feminist analysis of what was occurring to women in jail."

Linda: "Well there were a lot of women in the [Women's] Department from Dublin and that and a lot in there with feminist views and that is what attracted me to the Women's Department and even now I'm still into the thing of standing up for women and I love to work with women in the job of helping women."

This suggests that an overt feminist outlook informed much of the activism in and around the Women's Department, with many stressing the presence of strong feminist voices coupled with the political space to organise as women as the key strengths of the Department. From a feminist perspective, it is also an incredibly important development because the department identified two main sites of political struggle; formal politics and grassroots activism (O'Keefe 2003). Republican women were not merely concerned with increasing their visibility or quantity within the ranks of the party or as political representatives. They were also challenging patriarchal structures and cultures of domination by advocating on 'practical, day-to-day issues of fundamental importance to many women, issues that mirror those of the broader women's movement' (O'Keefe 2013: 135). In addition to agitating for change within Sinn Féin and formal party politics, the Department also sought opportunities to address directly the issues impacting upon the lives of working-class women in nationalist and republican communities. The establishment of women's community centres and services in working-class communities in the cities of Derry and Belfast is littered throughout the

interview data as a prominent achievement. In particular, the links between the Women's Department and the establishment of women's centres, particularly in Derry and the Falls Women's Centre in Belfast are most prevalent.

> Janette: "I didn't see myself as a feminist until 1979 because we established the Women's Department in 1980 but I had never read anything about feminism. By 1979, that had changed and I was reading about feminism and things like that. I had some socialist feminist friends and I suppose I was just naïve about [women] being discriminated against. But once I began thinking about the social and economic impact on women. And so we [republican women] set up the first Women's Centre here in Derry, particularly around issues of domestic violence."

> Anne: "I was heavily involved with the Department and the connections we had working with women in the community as well. We got the Falls Women's centre up and running in an old derelict building which was the old Sinn Féin centre at the bottom of Clonard Street. An old building, three storey building, a dump but we all got together and we fixed it up. Some money came from the movement but we set it up and it was for women who were suffering domestic violence, women who needed advice, women's issues, you know, around at that time and also the focal point for advocacy with protests on the streets and reclaiming our streets, like women who were afraid to go out, perhaps women who were raped. After that we started a campaign to get statutory funding for a proper women's centre which now sits on the Falls at Beechmount[69]. But it was only a handful of us really. But that was just real determination you know? We [republican women] saw the need in the area and said 'what will we do about it' and we just did it."

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[69] The Falls Women's Centre remains a prominent space and service provider for women in West Belfast. It is now located opposite the corner of Beechmount Avenue and the Falls Road, in the mid-Falls area. According to it mission statement "the Falls Women's Centre was the first of its kind in the area and has continually worked to raise awareness within the community and with statutory agencies on issues that affect women's lives. Falls Women's Centre is a women-only centre. It is staffed and managed entirely by women and is seen as an important support for women and their families. It was established to improve the quality of life for women and their families living in areas of extreme deprivation and most affected by the conflict." For more, see http://www.fallswomenscentre.org/

Kelly, who previously worked as a manager of the Falls Women's Centre states that it was the direct input of republicans, particularly the Women's Department which established the centre. Equally, Karen states that "a lot of the women's community organisations grew out of the republican struggle too, like the Fall's Women's Centre." There is a relatively long-standing history of community activism in nationalist/republican communities (Bean 2011; Cassidy 2005). From the late 1970's onwards, there was a marked rise in the number of women's centres established, which provided space and services to tackle a myriad of issues directly outside of those related to armed conflict. While state violence was unsurprisingly a pressing concern within these centres, many also dealt with issues of poverty, gender-based violence and education, among many others. In other words, republican women were agitating around issues such as sexual and domestic violence, poverty, education, issues normally considered outside of male-led, mainstream party politics. There is an overwhelming sense of satisfaction echoed across the majority of interviews when discussing the endeavours and achievements of the Women's Department. Their political agenda and activism is indicative of a vibrant level of feminist consciousness among many republican women, despite the confines and limitations of a male-dominated political party.

In addition to the links and activism for women within working-class republican communities, the Women's Department were also having an impact on the formal politics of Sinn Féin. Within the party's 'equality agenda', gender equality was defined as a fundamental principle within Sinn Féin's republicanism (Maillot 2005: 107). Sinn Féin is keen to be viewed as taking the necessary steps in order to become a more gender-balanced party and consistently returns the largest number of women to the Northern Ireland Assembly (Maillot 2005; Side 2009: 75). A key contribution of the Women's Department was the women's policy document, the first of its kind of any of the political parties on the island, in which was included appeals for public child-care and child-care to be shared by both parents

(O'Keefe 2013: 135). Sinn Féin became the first political party in Ireland to provide child-care at its annual Ard Fheis (party conference); a subsequent motion at the 1986 Ard Fheis ensured that the party would pay child-care costs when such facilities are unavailable at party meetings or functions. Today, Sinn Féin is widely hailed for its relatively progressive stance on women (Buckley 2013; Galligan 2013).

Sinn Féin has displayed a sustained commitment to gender equality (Galligan 2013: 429). 'Positive action' (Lovenduski 2005) has been a key strength in Sinn Féin's post-war strategy and most research participants welcomed party actions around changes to start and end times for meetings, protests and commemorations as well as the provision of crèche and child care facilities at all major party meetings and functions. They also advocate strongly around LGBT rights, domestic violence and access to contraception in party policy. In addition to this, the broader republican movement established a number of educational and training courses aimed specifically at republican women, particularly those who are ex-prisoners. Gemma's main role today within the party is focused on the training and educational services for women within the party which she believes makes a huge difference for women not only in educational terms but also for their own sense of confidence within what is still a male-dominated party.

According to party policy Sinn Féin advocates 'the use of all possible mechanisms for advancing gender equality including: equality and other legislation; funding for women's groups; affirmative action; gender-proofing; gender mainstreaming' (Sinn Féin 2004: 1). The party's policies in these areas are motivated by the 'vital need for equal participation for women in politics'. Sinn Féin has made good its promise around affirmative action and in 2003 the party adopted a 50:50 gender representation for its Ard Comhairle. Gender proofing and mainstreaming were also integrated as standard practice within party policy. In the South of Ireland general election manifestoes of 2007 and 2011 the party advocated a 40 per cent

share of cabinet positions to women, a review of the working hours of Leinster House and the creation of a more family-friendly environment.

When it comes to the issue of electoral candidate selection, the zealous pace of Sinn Féin's participatory rights for women decelerates considerably. The Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act, 2002, under the GFA allows political parties the option of undertaking positive discrimination in the selection of female candidates for electoral contests but so far, not a single party in the North of Ireland has utilised this measure. Despite pledges of affirmative action, Sinn Féin uses informal targets around female candidate selection in attempting to increase female candidates (Buckley 2013; McGing 2013), although the party is also credited, even in a somewhat patronising way, 'with offering women winnable seats' (Galligan 2013: 421). While other endeavours around divisive matters such as abortion (Chapter Eight) proved far more arduous and troubling, the Women's Department agitated around topics often taboo in a largely conservative, Catholic Ireland. In particular, the demands of the Women's Department were all the more significant given that divorce, reproductive rights and contraception were illegal at the time (O'Keefe 2013: 136)[70].

Of course these successes need to be qualified in the context of a feminist struggle within a formal political party. The actions and spaces utilised by the Women's Department are not archetypal feminist ways of organising. Many feminists organise either through non-

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[70] Owing to the powerful influence of the churches, both states on the island of Ireland approached the issues of divorce, contraception and abortion in highly conservative ways. In the South of Ireland divorce was prohibited until it was overturned by referendum in 1995 and wrote into law in 1996. Contraception was illegal in the South of Ireland from 1935 until 1980, when it was legalised with strong restrictions. In 1992 however, these laws were further altered to allow any person over the age of eighteen to purchase contraceptives such as condoms without medical prescription. In the North, divorce was legalised from 1978 onwards with the Matrimonial Causes (Northern Ireland) Order 1978. While Great Britain introduced legal abortions in 1967, it was not extended to the North of Ireland owing to the united opposition of church leaders. Although abortion is legal in a number of highly restricted scenarios (if a woman's life is at risk), both states on the island of Ireland remain consistent in their outright prohibition of women's right to access abortion.

hierarchical autonomous groups and collective actions, or through participation within social movements (Naples 2014; Safa 1990). Progressive social movements seek to build the collective power of the excluded, marginalised or oppressed constituents so that they can access human rights and challenge dominant ideologies and power relations (Batliwala and Brown 2006). The notion of women organising within a formal political party therefore appears to be the antithesis of any type of feminist organising other than liberal. Formal political parties are imbued with relations of power, hierarchical control and organise for the attainment of state control, and so are hardly the likely sites which will foster a progressive feminist agenda (Bryson 1992; Young 2000).

Given the largely conservative nature of most mainstream political parties in Ireland (Galligan, Miller & Wilford 1999; Sales 1997), feminist organising within a male-dominated movement whose primary concern was the national question is an atypical condition in which to pursue a feminist struggle. Undoubtedly, strict limitations were placed on the scope of republican feminist activism, where they faced formidable internal battles with those of a more conservative standpoint, particularly around the issue of abortion (Frampton 2009). Given it male-domination, and the prevalence of a strong sense of Catholicism, the battle by some republican women for a pro-choice position calls into question the validity of a party which claims to be both socialist and progressive on the issue of women's equality. Most interviewees are profoundly aware of these limitations. Despite the claims to equality within the republican ranks both by interviewees and rhetorically from the leadership, the fact remains that the national cause takes precedence at all times, ensuring the gender or feminism was never the primary objective. Gemma, a self-described republican feminist sums up this position:

"In so many ways things have improved but in others it hasn't in the ways that I'd like it to. But in terms of Sinn Féin, they are still the most progressive and radical in terms of gender

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and now it's not perfect and wonderful but if you look at the other parties, Sinn Féin are a

hell of a lot more forward."

There was overwhelming support among interviewees for Sinn Féin's current position on gender equality and women's rights. Despite this however, acknowledgements regarding the imperfections and tensions between party policy and what women themselves want are scattered throughout the interview data, indicating that many are cogent of the enforced boundaries imposed on women's struggles within a male-led political party. In sum, while the many endeavours of the Women's Department undoubtedly produced meaningful and discernible results, measuring feminist activism within male-dominated formal party politics is hardly the most radical gauge. Despite its successes and its prominence in the lives of republican women in this research, the subsequent demise of the department is enveloped in confusion and ambiguity.

"Just Faded Away?": An Ambiguous Ending

The demise of the Women's Department in the mid-1990's, and the emergence of the Equality Department in its place, is perhaps the most compelling illustration of the regression experienced by republican women during the conflict transition years. Having endured and politically thrived during some of the worst years of armed conflict, I suggest here that the ambiguous collapse of the Women's Department is directly related to the ideological shift to institutional politics within the post-ceasefire period. The feminist politics of the Women's Department and the overall movement's shift towards institutional politics constructed two incompatible strategies; the former, an echo of their revolutionary past, the latter, the future constitutional direction of the movement. When asked about the ending of the Women's Department, not a single participant could pin point exactly the date or the reasons for its demise. There was no great fanfare, no statement from the party hierarchy announcing the

ending of the department, no vast restructuring of the party apparatus; according to most interviewees, the Women's Department just 'fell away'.

According to Anne, the Department had succeeded in bringing republican women to the fore:

> "Women are now discussing politics in every sphere of the organisation so their views will be fed into the Ard Comhairle and their views will be fed into the Ard Fheiseanna. The Women's Department was needed at that particular time but policy overall now is determined by cumann, from the grassroots so that's where you start to impact on women's lives with difference policies and different projects. If there's a [women's] need then the party centrally takes those needs and women are at the centre of all of that and centre of the party."

Bernie echoes the sentiments of Anne arguing that the Department was a product of its time and is no longer needed in the current environment:

> "Well by the time armed struggle ended we had already secured equality within the movement; women were equal. And I believe Sinn Féin are actively promoting women, because I mean the many women candidates that stood there in the last elections, thankfully, the majority were all successful. There are more women now than there ever was."

Both Bernie and Anne's thoughts typify the voice of those who believe that the achievement of equality in the party structures rendered the work of the Women's Department completed (Sales 1997: 175). There are a number of problems with such a sentiment. First, ostensibly the objectives of the Women's Department were far broader than simply including women as formal equals in party politics. Second, we know that women were and still are struggling for equality within the republican movement, despite their rhetorical assurances to the contrary (Chapter Five). And third, it contradicts the vision of women's equality as the eradication of patriarchy, as explored in Chapter Six. The notion that 'equality' has been achieved within

the party suggests that some republican women interpreted the Women's Department as a vehicle for change solely within the republican movement, and not outside of it.

The vast majority of others however, cited the shift towards institutional politics and the primacy afforded to the demands of the 'peace process' as the downfall of the Department.

Kelly: "I don't know, it just appeared to fade into the background [during the peace process] and it just needs looking at again and I know it has. I think we [republican women] did regress for a while, I think women were put back in the background again. The peace process was on now so let them ones [male republicans] make the decisions. But when we opened the women's garden [2007 in Roddy McCorley Club, Belfast) that was the first time we said "where's the women in all of this" and "let's get this back again". When Siobhan[71] died [2006] and it was just about asking 'where are the women' who just disappeared and then they [the leadership] did the garden and nothing much since and I think the politics too is changed as well. So some people fell away by the way side and didn't stay with the republican movement and went to other organisations."

Kelly, like many other interviewees, invariably conflates the 'peace process' and a 'new type of politics', suggesting that the vast ideological transformation within the republican movement was the catalyst for the demise of the Women's Department. Many other interviewees echo her thoughts on the primacy of peace:

Elaine: "I was actually talking to someone recently about this and we were discussing the women in the party in the 1980's and looking at the things that were written back then and we were asking 'where are those women today?' And I think something happened after the GFA, or maybe even just after the ceasefires but it looks like the women involved at that

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[71] Siobhan O'Hanlon was a prominent republican who died of cancer in 2006. At her graveside oration, Gerry Adams described Siobhan as "brave and courageous" in her life as an IRA activist, political prisoner and Sinn Féin activist.

time [1980's] were far more radical and militant in their views. So what happened was that they left or were just exited from activism and then took with them all of these progressive views on feminist issues."

Gemma: "I don't know……there was this party development where a lot of structures were put in together and I think we had a new head of gender equality and this was a salaried position so it fell away. So there was a Women's Department until the mid-1990's but then you had the ceasefires, the GFA, and everyone was so involved in those events [peace process] so that is why the focus was lost a wee bit and then after that each *cúigí*[72] had to have their own gender equality representative."

There is a distinct lack of clarity when recounting this period, where the materialisation of the peace process and electoral politics appears to displace other political outlets within the republican movement. Outside of the formal interviews, I made numerous formal and informal inquiries to the Sinn Féin party (which I detail in full a little later on in this section), which failed to yield a clear and unequivocal answer to the question of what happened to the Women's Department. Nevertheless, consistent throughout many of the replies to my inquiries, is that the period of the mid-1990's was consumed with the capricious peace process and formal negotiations. With control of state power at stake, many of the other political struggles were cast aside until the 'bigger question' of institutional power was resolved. In order to pursue the formal peace process, all republican energies, including those of the Women's Department, were channelled into formal peace negotiations and electoral gains, mirroring similar trends in other revolutionary struggles.

In Nicaragua, the FSLN women's organisation Association of Women Confronting the National Problem (AMPRONAC) advocated radical stances on many issues, rooted in women's experiences and the assumption that women have gender-specific experiences and

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[72] Sinn Féin is organised hierarchically into *Cumainn* (branches), *Comhairle Ceantair* (district executives), *and Cúigí* (regional executives).

issues (Chinchilla 1990: 374). In the aftermath of the 1979 victory AMPRONAC was restructured and retitled the Luisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan Women (AMNLAE). Its primary objective as specified by the FSLN would be to mobilise its energy behind campaigns of national reconstruction (Chinchilla 1990: 376). Counter-revolution, military threat and economic scarcity however, was taking its toll on the Sandinista experiment. AMNLAE reduced its public identification with feminism and its priority now was 'the defence of the revolution' (Molyneux 1985: 238). Just as in Nicaragua, the transition away from armed conflict in the North of Ireland witnessed a re-ordering of priorities which saw women's struggles subordinated for more pressing matters of concern, perfectly encapsulating what Cynthia Enloe describes as 'not now, later' (2014: 62) moment.

When asked about what happened to the Women's Department, Fiona, a prominent member of the Department replies:

> "I don't know, I really don't know. I think what happened was at the time you had like Maire Moore, Mairead Keane and myself and people there that were pivotal, people who organised it and then some of them women went into different roles within the party and then there was a view that it would be more mainstreamed. The peace process was probably a big part of that [disbandment] and we were going into that type of politics there and the drive was for the peace process and a lot of the leadership people were driving that type of agenda."

Similar to Kelly's thoughts outlined earlier, Fiona's extract touches on two hugely important issues; first, that the focus of the entire movement centred upon the ever fragile and often failing peace process and second, that the movement itself was experiencing a transition towards a different 'type' of politics. The transition period witnesses a vast ideological departure within Sinn Féin that is marked by leadership-driven policy changes and a radical shift from purported revolutionary standpoints (Tonge 2006). And 'as the party becomes increasingly preoccupied with electoral success, the interests of women fade from

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prominence' (O'Keefe 2013: 138). Fiona's extract, like most of the interviews reveals an awareness that the movement was shifting towards a more institutional path and so, the radical, grassroots activism was something that required tempering and refinement to fit in with the new institutional departure. Elaine, a senior Sinn Féin member and community activist, outlines her explanation for the winding down of the Women's Department:

> "In a conflict situation, you're not involved in any institutions and you can get up and say what the hell you like because there is nothing to lose. You can talk about war or abortion and be involved in it because you're in a war situation, but once you're in [political] institutions then it is very different and then you're fighting elections and very conscious around who says what, and I am sure that had a big part to play."

As electoral contests gained primacy, public perceptions and popularity limited previously radical positions. Elaine's extract divulges that electoral politics required an ideological reformation within the republican movement. Undoubtedly the transition years witnessed a leadership-driven discipline within the movement (Bean 2007; Tonge 2006) where the party moved from 'purported revolutionary republican vanguardism towards becoming a competitive actor in the political marketplace. 'New' Sinn Féin seeks respect for its electoral mandate, co-operates with other parties and constructs its agenda primarily based upon equality and rights rather than issues of sovereignty and territory' (Tonge 2006: 136). While acknowledging that both the IRA and Sinn Féin always existed as hierarchical structure (and mainly male-led leadership), many research participants recall witnessing a hardening of party lines during this period which contrasted with the spaces previously available to discourse and debate within the movement during armed struggle.

While Maria Power (2010) suggests that the Women's Department was defunct by the late 1980's, there is much archival material documenting publications by the department

throughout the 1990's and even as recently as 2002[73]. Through extensive searches on-line but more importantly at the vast political literature collection at Belfast's Linen Hall Library, the final publication from the Women's Department that I could find dates to the year 2000 with *Women In an Ireland of Equals*. After this, there is an abundance of party literature and policy documents on women's rights yet they appear not as Women's Department publications but under different headings, again highlighting the ambiguity over the demise of the department. For example in 2002, a document also entitled *Women In an Ireland of Equals* is published by the Sinn Féin Women's Committee, while in 2007 the Sinn Féin Women's Manifesto is a Sinn Féin only publication. The lack of an actual date or event marking the end (or at best, the reformulation) of the department muddies the waters on its exact demise, but by the mid-1990's the Women's Department fades and the new Equality Department emerges[74].

During the course of this research I made both formal and informal inquiries (through phone conversations, email and face-to-face informal conversation) to people in various positions in Sinn Féin. The replies I received were highly mixed and at times opaque. Informally (through phone conversation), I was told that the Women's Department formally ended in the late 90s, when Lucilita Bhreatnach, who was prominent within the Department changed role within the party. Another source informed me that it "never officially ended" because of the existence of a "women's group" within the party but then went on to reiterate that it is actually no longer an official "department". Another source told me that the Women's Department was still technically in existence after the formation of the Equality Department in 2002 and was then re-named 'Gender Equality'. Another prominent Sinn Féin member told me through email that "there is a lot of confusion regarding the dates. It's quite

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[73] Many interviewees were of the view that the Department effectively ended in the mid-1990's.

[74] It appears that by 2006, the Women's Department is undoubtedly subsumed into the Equality Department, with the party listing Eibhlín Glenholmes as 'National Co-Ordinator for Gender Equality', a position dealing with gender as opposed to an overall department.

possible the Women's Department formally ceased in the late 1990s, or just ceased

functioning as a department at that time, and there were maybe one or two people who issued

documents under the name."

In 2006, a conference in Belfast called 'Entitled Voices - Women in International

Struggle' was organised by the Sinn Féin Equality Department[75]. A key speaker at this event

was Eibhlín Glenholmes, a senior republican who was listed as Sinn Féin's National

coordinator for Gender Equality at the time. In an interview published in the party newspaper

An Phoblacht/Republican News in March 2006, she states that "Sinn Féin's Party

Development Department has been charged with creating and developing programs and

mechanisms by which we will truly become representative of society. Within that department

I have responsibility to ensure gender equality. I will use whatever tools are necessary to

ensure that women are not just seen but are also heard." (An Phoblacht 2006)

I contacted Eibhlín[76] by email and in her reply she states that "The department was

known as "The Women's Department" under Lucilita but when I came into post as

coordinator in late August 2005 (after the 28th of July Oglaigh na HEireann statement[77]) the

Department became known as the Gender Equality Department. Along with the Recruitment

Department and the Education Department the three departments formed the Party

Development Department. In February 2006 I was elected to the Ard Chomhairle. The really

interesting stuff [within this department] was the training of young women into leadership

roles. They committed to three days intensive training every two to three months for a year.

The program had a 100 per cent retention rate – I actually had *more* women at the end than I

started off with. I remained in that post until June 2011."

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[75] Full conference report available at http://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/14924
[76] This email extract is published with kind permission from Eibhlín
[77] IRA statement announcing its disbandment

Of course an alternative reading of the data could postulate that the real story here is that now the crisis of armed action has passed, the reserve army of women were supplementary to requirements. Carol Coulter (1993) and Margaret Ward (1983) have both documented the historical pattern of women's marginalisation by Irish republicanism and nationalism in the aftermath of independence struggles of the past. In particular, both concur that women have never been accepted as equals by men within such movements. There is undoubtedly more than a grain of truth to such assertions yet they are entirely premised on the ways men situate women as opposed to examining where women situate themselves in the aftermath of armed conflict. Unquestionably, women were marginalised during the period in question, yet that is but a partial telling of the story. In particular, there is no suggestion that Sinn Féin is excluding women. On the contrary, there is a chorus of feminist praise for the party's consistent progressive record on women (Buckley 2013; Galligan 2013; Sales 1997). In other words, the 'reserve army' thesis does not stand in the face of Sinn Féin's relatively progressive record on promoting women. What I argue here is that it is feminism, not women, which is the reserve army, now supplementary to post-war requirements.

Therefore, it is important to link the shift towards institutional methods with the diminishing feminist politics associated with the Women's Department. According to Eibhlín Glenholmes, Co-Ordinator for Gender Equality, the body which replaced the Women's Department actively trained women in areas of 'leadership' in order that they progress through the ranks of the party, yielding many benefits for the party's increase in female candidates. The demise of the Women's Department therefore should not be read as an outright exclusion of women within the movement as such, but is more indicative of the new ways in which the party re-conceptualised women's equality as women's participatory rights within formal politics.

The end of the Women's Department however does largely represent the end of republican feminism within Provisional republicanism. The ideological departure from revolutionary agitating towards a more mainstream position invariably shaped the spaces available to republican feminists. In the course of the peace process, republicans adopted the language and ideas more closely bound to mainstream politics (Ryan 1997); 'the softer language of transition and gradualism has replaced the maximalist imperatives of a revolutionary party' (Bean 2007: 141). In keeping with this new form of politics, the emergence of the 'Equality Agenda' during the peace process significantly blunted the cutting edge of republican feminism without actually cutting off republican women[78]. By adopting relatively mainstream mechanisms such as quotas and utilising a discourse of citizenship and rights in order to pursue gender equality, the republican movement effectively included republican feminists while excluding feminism[79]. In other words, it illustrates the perilous downfalls for women's radical political organising within institutional-orientated political movements which invariably produces a strategy synonymous with liberal feminism.

Across the vast majority of interviews there is an acceptance that the previously strong feminist standpoints and agitation by republican women was the product of the specific context of armed struggle. The party's pursuit of electoral gains in the transition demanded that women's feminist positions, like the armed struggle itself, would be firmly associated with past tactics. While individual women may gain through mainstream mechanisms of quotas and increased visibility, evidence here indicates that state-centric politics remains inhospitable for anything other than liberal approaches to feminist politics.

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[78] Notwithstanding the fact that some of those women prominent in the establishment of the Women's Department appear to have relocated their activism to other spheres outside of the Sinn Féin party.
[79] I tip my academic hat to Anthony McIntyre for this sequence of words. In describing the death of republicanism after the GFA, McIntyre argued that the GFA effectively 'included republicans while excluding republicanism'.

The dilution of overt republican feminism within the emerging conflict transition landscape was profoundly felt by those within the Women's Department. Aoife states that;

> "I got involved in Clár na mBan because for me the Women's Department were not doing enough for me anymore and I wanted something far more radical, more room for debate."

The merging of the Women's Department with other political issues within what would be called the catch-all 'Equality Department' meant that what was once a radical tool for republican feminism was replaced with the gender-neutral terminology of 'citizenship', 'equality' and 'rights', therefore removing the gender specifics of women's struggle. Janette, a life-long republican who is now a Sinn Féin member and community activist expresses that sense of loss:

> "It [women's struggle] did get lost and I think it did become the Equality Department and I think there is definitely a loss there, that is a loss, just like I think if you have a women's specific party or whatever bringing up women's issues on their own then I think it far more pertinent and more focused than bringing up general equality issues."

> Gemma: "When it became the Equality Department it became less militant because it's [women's struggles] not to the forefront then, it is always way down low on the list and we were constantly reminding people of things such as last week we had a conference and there was no childcare so a few of us got together to try and put gender back to the top of the agenda again because we seem to be forgetting about it again."

Gemma's testimony is typical in her acknowledgement that republican politics has shifted away from radical or what Gemma terms 'militant' politics towards a more mainstream position, obviously causing difficulties for those who preferred grassroots advocacy in pursuit of women's struggle. Findings suggest that feminist spaces opened up by, and for, women's political activism during the conflict years were slowly squeezed by a sense of retrenchment

during the peace process, which I contend, correlates to Sinn Féin's shift towards a more institutional position. The entire energy and focus of the republican movement in the years of 1994 to 1998 was the peace process and electoral politics. All other spheres of political activism around gender, class and minority equality were put on hold as the pursuit of state power became central.

Within the formal peace process, republican politics would now manifest solely in party policy, legislation and, of course, political rhetoric. In this new era, 'equality and rights' replaced the strategies of revolutionary agitation and so, women's struggle for emancipation would be sequestered and emerge in the post-ceasefire period as something far more tempered and modest. Previous advocacy around reproductive rights or strip searching were watered down and substituted by mainstream actions such as legislative affirmation around gender equality of opportunity and the selective use of positive discrimination by use of gender quotas. What emerged in its place, the Equality Department, bore little or no resemblance to the radical politics and feminist struggles that went before in the Women's Department.

While women's struggle was deemed an essential part of the revolutionary strategy during the conflict by women themselves, armed conflict itself appears to have been a specific pre-condition for the housing of such a strong feminist voice within the movement's ideological canon. Implicit within the post-war re-ordering is a view that feminism is somehow associated with revolutionary, subversive politics. In order to reflect the new state-centric political positioning, feminism was deemed unsuitable and replaced with a more fitting 'Equality Agenda'. The emerging political landscape within the new 'peaceful' dispensation had little time or space for a radical struggle. Women's struggle within the republican movement was diluted, de-radicalised and sanitised within the new post-ceasefire landscape; it was repackaged, rebranded and subsumed within the ambiguously titled

'Equality Department'. The shape and methods employed in pursuing women's interests within the republican movement required some enforced bespoke tailoring in order to fit the new straitjacket of formal peace process politics.

At the time of field research and writing (2012-2013), fourteen interviewees stated that there were significant efforts already underway to resurrect the Women's Department. It remains to be seen if such efforts come to fruition. Many of those interviewees are currently involved in such endeavours, something strongly supported by the vast majority of research participants. Edel felt that a new Women's Department is essential if the party is to move on the abortion issue:

> Edel: "Without a Women's Department that articulates and advocates for that, how will it [pro-choice position] ever happen? Sinn Féin as a party and republicanism in general can only benefit from people who have strong feminist views, especially on issues of women's choice and not worrying about looking out of step. It's healthy to have diverse voices within a movement, voices that others within the party don't necessarily agree with. But republicans can say 'look we're a diverse party with different voices within it'."

> Gemma: "Things are far from perfect for women. Gender equality is my main interest in the party and I currently sit on a group with other women with a view to forming a new Women's Department."

Just as was the case with the original Women's Department in the late 1970's, the contemporary efforts stem from a shared frustration at the lack of women's voice within republican politics, a voice which articulates and agitates on a broader spectrum beyond women's institutional participation.

Notwithstanding the sense of loss among interviewees towards the ending of the Women's Department, it is important to also state that most supported Sinn Féin's current

approach to promoting women and gender equality within the party. There is a discernible frustration however, that such measures do not wholly encompass the type of women's equality as envisioned by many republican women (Chapter Six). It reaffirms that while the institutional staples such as rhetorical affirmations, positive discrimination, gender quotas, legislative and constitutional guarantees regarding women's equality are positives, they are clearly insufficient to meet their specific demands and needs of working-class republican women. As the peace process 'beds down' some twenty years on from the 1994 ceasefires, it is clear that some republican women are now asking the question 'where are the women?' The ambiguous ending of the Women's Department, I concur, is indicative of the limitations of pursuing a feminist struggle solely within formal party politics.

Conclusion

The common theme throughout this chapter has been the transition of a male-led movement from revolutionary agitation to a mainstream, political party vying for state power. The conflict transition period witnessed not only a relinquishing of armed struggle but also a distinct departure from strong feminist standpoints on a number of issues. Through the years of armed conflict, republican women pursued a broad-based struggle against multiple sources of oppression, most notably through the activities of the Women's Department. Republican feminists were remarkably successful at steering the overall republican movement towards recognising women's multiple sources of oppression. Moreover, the spaces created within the movement, such as the Women's Department, achieved some major successes when one examines the relatively progressive positions Sinn Féin has on women's equality. Perhaps their most enduring and important success was their vital role in the establishment of women's centres, such as the Falls Women's centre, in working-class communities right across the North of Ireland.

Much of the prevailing literature on women and equality in the North of Ireland frequently cite state structures and formal political parties as sites of potential transformation for women and feminist post-war struggles (Anderlini 2007; Cowell-Meyers 2003; Deiana 2013; Fearon 1999; Fearon & McWilliams 2000; Galligan 2013; Hammond-Callaghan 2011; Hinds 2011; Hoewer 2013; Murtagh 2008; Porter 1998, 2000; Side 2009). Those behind such strategies either overlook or simply fail to acknowledge that the mainstreaming of women's struggles presents a rather limited way of women's organising. Surely, the conflict transition experiences of republican women stand as a formidable caution to those who contend that increasing women's presence across formal political parties provides the optimum strategy for delivering feminist politics in post-war scenarios. The evidence in this chapter certainly presents some challenging questions to those who prescribe such a course of action. Given the limitations of women's organising within Sinn Féin, it is important to state that there is far more to the story of republican women and conflict transition however than simply their roles within Sinn Féin. As the North of Ireland continues its transition away from armed conflict, the remaining findings chapter examines the multiple ways and spaces in which they organise for peace and equality today.

Chapter Eight - Understanding the Ways Republican Women Organise for Peace and Equality in Conflict Transition

Introduction

Unquestionably the immediate post-ceasefire years, particularly the period dealing with the GFA negotiations, witnessed a backwards step for women within the Provisional republican movement. Given this, it is important to examine where republican women position their activism today and to explore their motivations in doing so. This chapter uncovers important insights into the ways republican women organised for peace and equality during conflict transition. First, the chapter explores the motivations behind their current activism, revealing the ways in which war-time politicisation and mobility fundamentally informs their activism today. The data indicates that experiences of state violence and injustice during the Troubles bequeath a unique and discerning contemporary political vision which shapes the way they organise for peace and equality. In other words, their struggles for peace and equality today can be seen as indirect continuity with their war-time struggles.

The latter part of the chapter examines where they situate their political struggles today. We can identify a hybrid, or dual struggle encompassing both formal and informal activism. There is a shared ambivalence towards institutional politics and its restricted transformative potential among these republican women. Although they do deem it an important sphere for women, it is also appraised as having insufficient potential to deliver the type of change envisioned by interviewees. Rather, it is community engagement that is seen to provide the transformative space to address the specific issues which impact their lives and the lives of those within working-class, republican communities.

This chapter exposes the shortfalls of examining and/or measuring women's post-war activism in formal institutional politics only. By consistently looking at the ways in which existing structures can best include women, prevailing feminist approaches are missing out on the ways in which women organise using power from below. It suggests that while women's institutional activism is important, it alone is incapable of delivering on the political demands and concerns of republican women. This chapter excavates republican women's post-war activism in a holistic way. Examining the ways in which *all* women organise for peace and equality yields a far stronger feminist analysis of both patriarchy and women's eclectic forms of resistance in post-war scenarios.

"Where's the Next Tier of Struggle?": War-Time Gains & the Continuity of Political Activism in Conflict Transition

SCR 1325's official reference to female combatants within DDR programs remains a landmark achievement, since it is one of the first official acknowledgements of women's roles as combatants. Other than calling for women to be 'equally demobilised' as their male combatants in DDR, the resolution, however, has very little else to say about the pre and post-war political struggles of combatant women. Moreover, by neglecting the ways in which some women use war as a means to struggle for a just peace, the resolution overlooks the ways in which combatant women carry forward their war-time activism into the post-war period. By focusing primarily on the ways combatant women are demobilised, it omits an important part of the story of women in conflict transition.

Republican women's experience of state violence and injustice during the Troubles, coupled with their own political mobilisation, informs the way they organise for peace and equality. In particular, their community organising today is central to their struggle against inequality. This section reveals the motivations behind their contemporary activism, arguing

that their struggles for peace and equality today are carried out just as their war-time struggles were. It demonstrates that war-time gains, such as political mobility or consciousness-raising, can be successfully carried over and continued into post-war scenarios. In sum, there is no return to 'pre-conflict roles', because for all interviewees, conflict and injustice still exists.

Research on women's grassroots activism in other regions reveals how their own personal experience of class discrimination, racism or state marginalisation provides the initial political consciousness which motivates their subsequent political organising (Naples 1998; Safa 1990; Stephen 1997). All interviewees stated that their war-time mobilisation was motivated by an obligation to protect themselves, family and community from state violence and oppression, findings which echo those in Alison's (2009) and O' Keefe's (2013) research. Many expressed the view that armed struggle was their last and only option.

> Anne: "The British Army had been brought in and it was like a scene out of Vietnam or something; barbed wire everywhere, soldiers, tanks on the streets, big tanks all rumbling down the streets, wee narrow streets. Soldiers entering peoples' home, beating people all looking for invisible guns in our houses. So very quickly I had an education about that and we were curfewed [sic] for several days in the Falls and they were brutal and so that brutality motivated me because I was not going to stand by and watch this brutality against my people."

Bernie outlines her experiences and motivations:

> "Well getting stopped in the street and getting searched all the time simply because you were Catholic. So it was a slow process. And then Internment and Bloody Sunday was the thing for me, the last straw and that's when I joined the movement."

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Reflective of the immediacy and close proximity of armed conflict, terms such as 'home', 'street', 'houses', 'families', 'communities' are repeated. There was a striking absence of nationalism or republican ideology in their rhetoric. Indicative of this is a remark from Theresa stating that "I didn't go looking for war, war came looking for me". Vivid descriptions of army bases, barbed wire, foot patrols, house searches within tightly knit, working-class residential communities transformed everyday life into every day experiences of state harassment and street violence.

> Fiona: "So when you got that wee bit older in teenage years and then you started to get stopped by the British Army and RUC…….. most people who grew up in West Belfast, they were always getting harassed by the Brits and RUC, and of course then you saw them killing people and all that."

> Helen: "I fully believed that the state was not for turning. I believed that we were living in a society that was about one community [unionist/protestant]. One community which was policing the other [catholic population] with the aid, authority and approval of a foreign [British] government that was complicit and compliant in allowing all of that to happen. And, in my belief that the state was not for turning, I knew that I had to do something because I couldn't turn a blind eye to it because it's not in my nature. So I did join the republican movement. But it was my last choice to become militarily active but always my first choice to become politically active."

Very few interviewees spoke of becoming involved in armed republicanism as a derivative of nationalist or republican ideology. As nationalist communities faced attack from without by both state forces (RUC and B Specials) and loyalist crowds, women were thrust to the front-lines of defence in a myriad of roles. The eruption of street violence in 1969 in the close quarters of tightly-knit streets and within the 'private' realm of the domestic home, ensured that the normative boundaries of war were significantly distorted for women. Most spoke of

engaging in political violence as a last resort, of feeling a duty to do something on behalf of their community. In their formative experiences, that community extended no further than the immediacy of a few streets. The 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) of a united Ireland would come much later.

Anger and resentment at state incursions into the intimate surroundings of family, home and community were still palpable today. House raids by state forces, particularly by the British army, was a particular source of trauma:

Siobhan: "And that memory that after the Brits left, your mother standing crying because the house was totally wrecked. Humiliating. But I grew up with the conflict, shootings and that which was a daily occurrence, there were shootings going on here every day. And as things progressed on, then I just became political and when you're young you sort of thought, "Brits Out" and to be honest I couldn't spell politics never mind knowing anything about it. That wasn't the way it was. There was just an armed struggle going on and that's where it was. It's only obviously when you get older and when you go to jail that you actually become more politicised."

Niamh: "The house raiding……that constant raiding, your home being destroyed, things like that was horrendous. And then what it did for me, growing up in the city, this city was rampant with poverty, there were no jobs, some families were very well to do but there was a massive split, basically there were two sides; very well to do or else you lived in poverty."

It appears that political thought or ideological objectives featured very little in the immediate mobilisations of interviewees. From Siobhan's and Niamh's extract it is clear that most were active in reacting to the immediacy of the conflict in the close quarters of their streets and homes. The destruction of the family home and personal items within it reverberates. Theresa also vividly recalls a "gorgeous new white carpet" that she got in time for Christmas in 1971. Her home was subsequently raided soon afterwards and she recalls how soldiers deliberately

went outside to the garden and brought in plant pots and poured the soil and mud all over the new carpet. In Derry, Sinead stated that her family home was raided seventy-one times in a single week and produces a tin box with the British army raiding papers to prove it. Even after almost forty years, experiences and memories of state violence within the family home remained a source of anger, resentment, distress, and of course, also motivated them to engage in armed struggle.

In addition to state violence there was also a profound awareness around issues of discrimination such as housing, jobs, and voting; state injustice encompassed much more than tanks and guns. Niamh's extract also reveals a palpable sense of state discrimination in jobs and housing. Bernie adds that "it wasn't just the Brits on the streets; it was also the state of our housing and no jobs".

> Karen: "Well it was the discrimination. You were questioning why you couldn't get a job or house if you were catholic and I was aware of that. So whenever the Civil Rights thing was starting I was quite conscious of it even though I was young. In 1968 when things started coming to a head, I was very aware, very aware of discrimination. And then just from then on I just wanted to be involved. It was just about doing something, resisting, playing a role and playing a part and there was only one vehicle at that time and that was the provisional [republican] movement."

> Eileen: "So my first involvement came through the Cailíní which was the girls youth movement but I always just had this feeling that this whole state was wrong and what was happening to our people was wrong. What was happening in the North was wrong, everything…..voting, housing, jobs, the whole lot."

A profound sense of alienation from every part of the state's structures and processes was named. The role of the state and its many injustices was consistently cited as the primary source of motivation for women in joining the armed struggle, even among those who had a

family history of Irish republicanism (Alison 2009; Hackett 2005; O'Keefe 2013). SCR 1325 talks of the need to 'protect' women in times of war, neglecting the agency of women to actively "protect" themselves through the use of armed struggle. Research findings here suggest that many interviewees saw armed struggle as their only means of 'protecting' themselves from state violence. Unquestionably, all wars inflict pain and horrific trauma; republican women undoubtedly endured much hardship. By portraying armed conflict in solely adverse terms however, SCR 1325 misses the ways in which some women gain empowerment and agency through their participation in armed struggle. Portraying all women as victims or opponents of violence overlooks the multiple ways in which differentially positioned women, such as combatants, organise in times of armed conflict. Moreover, it then misses the ways in which combatant women carry forward that political mobility into conflict transition.

Furthermore, Nagel (1998) and McClintock (1993), among others, have stressed the temporary nature of women's agency gained through participation within nationalist movements; there is a recurring global pattern of women's post-war marginalisation and return to pre-conflict, traditional roles (Alison 2004). In a rigorous interrogation of women's relationship with nationalism, McClintock cautions against viewing nationalist movements as a panacea to women's emancipation as feminist nationalists are frequently told by their male comrades to 'hold their tongues until the revolution is over' (1993: 77). Promises of a more gender-equal society after the war ring hollow whereby once conflict has ended, pre-conflict gender norms quickly re-establish themselves and 'feminist nationalists find themselves once again under the thumb of institutionalised patriarchy' (Nagel 1998: 253). The side-lining of women's rights by male-led nationalist movements is perhaps best summed up by Cynthia Enloe who states that 'not now, later' is the masculine advice which rings in the ears of many nationalist women (Enloe 2014: 120).

Republican women's post-war struggle for the betterment of their communities represented a continuity of political consciousness stemming from their war-time experiences of injustice. When asked about the motivations behind their contemporary political activism, participants stressed that same sense of war-time obligation, of seeking justice, of righting wrongs, of 'needing to do something for their communities' and they viewed their current activities as a direct continuation of their war-time activism.

> Fiona: "Well I think the conflict has been so much a part of my life for so long and it has shaped my whole life. You can't grow up as a child in a situation and then join the republican movement, be involved in a conflict as a participant, go to prison, come back out, get involved in all the things and not to have an impact on you personally. It shapes the person that you are today but I have to say that for me, even when I look back on things now, I think that for me, the driving force is for now to bring about a social justice that never was here before."

> Patricia: "Well I think there is still a struggle; there are major issues that still need to be addressed. I'm all for the people, with the people and to the people; it's always been my politics. Because of the injustices that I witnessed [during the Troubles], and we're still experiencing injustices today, and I hope that my contribution will still go a long way in addressing some of those issues. A phone call from the housing executive telling me of an available house for a young mother [constituent], then that makes my job very worthwhile and that is the same things that motivated me throughout the 1970's; by the people, with the people and for the people. So when the war ended I simply said 'where's the next tier of struggle?'."

Many cited their decision to join the republican movement as a moment in which they were 'liberated' from normative, gender assigned roles. There was a shared belief that many would not be involved in political activism today had it not been for their role in armed republicanism. Orla is a full-time community activist in Belfast and believes that had she not

been an active republican, she would have spent most of her life within an unpaid domestic role.

> "Well I probably would not be doing what I'm doing today. The woman that runs this centre got in contact with me to see if I could help out because I couldn't be doing with sitting around doing nothing when I got out of jail. So I did a business studies course [in jail] and got involved that way. Before going inside [jail] I was a factory worker but inside [jail] was where you got an education and decide what you were going to do when you got out. The girls I knew in jail are great and doing a great job as politicians or community workers. I would imagine the women in it [political activism] today are there because of the roles and experiences of the conflict. Their past has certainly helped them to where they are today."

It appears that despite the obvious hardships involved, jail also yielded improvements in personal circumstances such as level of education (Alison 2009; Corcoran 2006; O'Keefe 2013). Her decision to join the republican movement 'liberated' Orla from a life time of monotonous factory work or unpaid domestic labour to a position today where she is employed in a role that has meaning for her and the people she serves in the community. Despite the obvious pain, trauma and loss of the Troubles, most interviewees stated that their current role exists solely because of their involvement in armed struggle. 'Deirdre', who joined the IRA in the 1970s, now works as a community activist in the area of drug abuse prevention. She states that her current activism is directly linked to her conflict role:

> "Yes, women were politicised [during the conflict] and even myself, had I not been involved in armed struggle, there is no way I would be doing what I'm doing today because I wouldn't have the political or social conscience. And my role today is all about challenging injustices and wrongs, to challenge inequality, irrespective of what type because we are more in-tune with noticing and confronting inequalities."

Deirdre's words exemplify the connection felt by these republican women between injustice today and the injustice which motivated their involvement in armed conflict. In addition, their empowerment through armed conflict ignited a political appetite and consciousness which they were determined to continue after armed actions had ended.

> Eileen: "Republican women who were fighting on the streets with the men and who did the same activities as the men, they fired a gun as the same as a man and planted a bomb the same as a man, so women then saw 'well if I can do that the same as a man, then I can go into politics the same as a man, or maybe better'…..so it gave them that sense they valued themselves more, maybe they weren't valued by other people more, but it gave us a sense of 'I can do this and I'm not afraid to do anything.'"

The sense of "I can do this" indicates a sense of personal empowerment which carries over into other spheres of political struggle.

> Anne: "So going into [Belfast] City Hall, people standing up and speaking but to me it's just another arena of struggle. So as a republican woman, I am involved in a continuation of that same struggle, that struggle for justice and equality."

> Siobhan: "To me, it was still a struggle but we had just moved from being an armed struggle into a political struggle and it was just making that cross over. You were still on the side of the struggle, but rather than putting your energy into military operations you were putting energy into political activities and working towards a more peaceful and political resolution. But I just saw the armed struggle ending and politics as another site of struggle as opposed to the armed struggle and that's it."

In addition, it is interesting to note how their declared motivations are consistent with those described in other research on community activism which states that women who themselves experience multiple forms of marginalisation, develop both a political consciousness and sensitivity to all kinds of injustice and discrimination (Naples 1998: 117), their activism

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usually infused with ideals of solidarity and reciprocity. Eileen, who joined the IRA in Belfast in the early 1970's and who now works solely in the community sector stated that her actions within armed republicanism were informed by the pursuit of equality and justice, which continues to inform her contemporary activism:

> "So my politics today is about equality for all no matter what you have materially. So equality in terms of employment and education and as a socialist and as a republican my politics is like a duty for me to give something back to the people, irrespective of who they are or of their views on the conflict."

> Helen: "Involving myself in the war was a last choice. So it [joining the IRA] was never a personal journey of growth. It was always about what I could do and contribute towards improving our community. Some cynics out there say that people [today] on welfare are scroungers, that old people stash their pensions under their pillows or that there is no hunger out there well let me tell you, we do community audits and when I knock on the door, poverty answers and that is what gets me out of bed in the mornings."

There was a profound sense of obligation, or as Eileen describes it, a 'duty,' motivating their contemporary roles, one which they consistently linked back to the same sense of obligation in taking up arms or supporting the use of armed struggle on behalf of their communities during the Troubles. While the struggle is primarily framed by the republican movement as a fight for national independence and self-determination, across the majority of interviews, peace and equality also means education, resisting austerity, and challenging the subordinate position of women.

Many feminist studies on gender and nationalism depict a deeply problematic relationship and often for women, a regressive one in the aftermath of war. While nationalism is undoubtedly a gendered construct, the data here indicates that women's war-time empowerment is not merely an abeyance. The notion that nationalist combatant women

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primarily return to pre-conflict roles in the post-war period does not stand up in the face of the overwhelming evidence here. The interview narratives demonstrate that war-time gains, such as political consciousness and mobilisation, can be successfully carried forward into other political realms outside of the national struggle, thus motivating women's continuing activism in pursuit of a genuine peace and equality.

'It's Important, But It's Not Enough': Institutional Politics and Conflict Transition

Efforts to increase women's presence in pre-existing formal structures have accelerated considerably since the passing of SCR 1325 in 2000. In recent years, demands for women's formal inclusion has been seen by many women's organisations as the most promising avenue of post-war feminist struggle. Proponents of such a recourse see women's formal participation in decision-making on peace and security as both an outcome of, and a vehicle for, women's empowerment (Anderlini 2007; Arostegui 2013; Erzurum & Eren 2014; Hoewer 2013; Porter 2013: 9). The fundamentals of this approach are gender mainstreaming, SCR 1325, gender quotas, among others. Such propositions assume that women's true empowerment can be accessed only through institutional inclusion and therefore neglects that a sustainable peace is one which is built from the grassroots up (Cordero 2001; Karam 2001). There is a real danger that collective and multi-sited feminist struggles will be displaced by a feminism which increasingly looks towards top-down, institutional inclusion as a mechanism for securing women's equality and a genuine peace. In so doing, women who agitate across a myriad of political spaces using power from below may be neglected.

This section explores the current activism of republican women today. The narratives of the republican women can be interpreted as a cautioning against the limited strategy of mainstreaming of gender and foregrounding women within formal institutions (Hudson

2009). Rather, they serve to further remind us that feminists must be aware of 'different feminisms' and remain attuned to the differing contexts in which women situate their peace-building struggles (El-Bushra 2007; Hudson 2009; Meintjes et al. 2001). In other words, increasing the number of some women in key institutions is generally not believed to be enough to bring about changes in institutional culture in societies which still highly value norms of masculinity (Pankhurst 2003: 168). What is required is a multi-sited and multi-layered feminist struggle. This section finds that while deemed hugely important, institutional politics alone are seen to be insufficient to deliver the type of radical change envisioned by republican women.

Despite the claims by some that Sinn Féin is merely another mainstream constitutional party in the political market place (Evans & Tonge 2013), it is however, a party that emerged primarily from street agitation and the mass mobilisation of the nationalist community in the early 1980's (Bean 2007). As it accelerated its embrace of constitutional electoral politics in the post-ceasefire period, the party 'was keen to retain its radical edge, to continue to be seen as a militant, activist-led party' (Maillot 2005: 54). During the 1980's, it fused street agitation, community activism, and electoral contestation in a cauldron of activism which provided the republican movement with many political outlets and fronts. Given this, it is unsurprising to find that the overwhelming majority of interviewees today are full-time activists in both formal and informal politics.

Thirty-one research participants are currently both Sinn Féin members and active in one or more community or grassroots organisations. Of these, fifteen are elected representatives at various levels, from local councillor up to senior levels of government. Ruth joined the IRA in Belfast in the early 1970's and is now a Sinn Féin member, a former elected councillor and a community activist. Her extract typifies the type of eclectic activism interviewees are engaged in today:

"I'm a Sinn Féin activist and a community activist in the mid-Falls area and I'm also the

Sinn Féin representative for the mid-Falls, for constituency matters. I work full time and I'm

a mother of three children. I'm also the chairperson of a local area forum which is made up

of residents groups, youth groups, women's groups and through the forum we would deal a

lot on street issues and the door to door issues and I see that as a very important part of being

a Sinn Féin representative. That you are there doing the work and you're there for and with

the people. I'm a great believer that if you talk the talk, then you walk the walk. So if you're

spouting republican or socialist ideologies then you have to put them into practice on the

ground."

When asked about their current roles, interviewees described a multi-sited terrain of political

and social struggle across a myriad of issues and concerns. Within Sinn Féin, some are

constituency office workers, grassroots activists, paid employees, political advisors, elected

town and city councillors, right up to senior levels of the party's elected representatives.

Within the informal sector, their roles primarily involve community centres, women's

centres, tenants and residents associations, republican ex-prisoner centres, NGO's, among

others. Community centres forms the bulk of their informal activism and play a hugely

important role in the lives of citizens in working-class republican and nationalist

communities. Many of these community centres are located in the Bogside/Brandywell in

Derry and areas such as Turf Lodge, Short Strand and Ardoyne in Belfast. Given their high

level of services and supports, the importance of these centres within working-class

republican communities cannot be overstated. Orla is a full-time employee at one such centre,

and she described the typical services and supports provided:

"I'm a community worker here in [named area] and have been working here since I got out

of jail in [1990's] and my role is supposed to be in finance but you end up doing anything

and everything in the centre. So we look after elderly people and look after children and I

love it; I love the work. We have everything here; a crèche, an after school club, a senior

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citizens group, residents groups, women's groups, men's groups….you know, everything. Like a one stop-shop for this whole community. There's counselling services available, and some of those would be for ones affected by the conflict, some for other issues such as alcohol and substance abuse. We help people in financial trouble or people with problems in their benefits. Everything really. We're also doing up the park at the minute, so this centre is very much at the heart of this community."

Despite the fact that Sinn Féin are widely credited with providing women with relatively higher levels of access to formal politics (Buckley 2013; Galligan 2013; Sales 1997), it was important that the research explored the reasons for the high levels of 'dual roles' involving both formal and informal activism. Why not locate their entire activism in formal politics? What are the reasons behind their continued community organising? Which spaces are deemed politically effective and potentially transformative for women's post-war struggle? In order to do so, I began by asking former and current elected representatives of their experiences of formal politics.

Patricia joined the IRA in the early 1970's is now an elected city councillor recalls:

"Well when I sat as a councillor for the first time I was quite surprised at the hostility and the heckling from the males when I first spoke and bad manners and an effort to put women in their place; to make it so uncomfortable for me to speak, that I wouldn't do it again. Now I don't shy away from anything but I was quite uptight about it, I was blushing."

Patricia's description is echoed by those who are current or former elected representatives and indicates high levels of hostility towards republican women *as* women. There is a striking awareness that such tactics of male heckling and verbal abuse are mechanisms in which men attempt to exert control over women within the formal realm. Many spoke of the masculine and adversarial nature of formal politics as stifling and unproductive. Bronagh, a

former member of the IRA was previously an elected councillor articulates a similar sentiment:

> "I really respect our politicians, especially our women because I think it takes a certain type of person to do that, to go into these places and all the shouting and bureaucracy…….I hated every moment of it."

Most felt that levels of resentment and verbal abuse was directed towards them because they were republican *women*. Many interpreted the vitriolic attacks and behaviour as deliberate tactics to ensure that the realm of formal politics remained inhospitable for republican women. While liberal and socialist feminists view the state as a key site for the betterment of women, the narrow definition of politics as formal and institutional ensures that formal politics becomes a largely male activity (Waylen 1994: 333) and therefore the culture and norms of politics become masculinised. The positing of the state as embodying a masculine form is explored in the work of Connell who argues that 'public politics on almost any definition is men's politics' (1995: 204). Connell outlines that the few women who do manage to break into this male-led realm do so on men's terms, cultures and norms. Given the widespread adversarial nature of the North's deeply polarised formal political structures, many interviewees found institutional realms as "unproductive". Ruth, who joined the IRA in Belfast in the mid-1970's and is now an elected representative described her frustration:

> "And I think the reason that sort of thing [male disruptive behaviour] goes on is because politics is dominated by men and men are very childish both in private and public. Like you'll see this DUP man standing up in the chamber and making a valid point and then when he finishes four or five other men from his party will all get up and concur with him. Now that to me is just childish; time wasting where most women would not be at that sort of behaviour, probably because they've to get home to the kids or whatever."

It is well documented that the gendered division of labour, inhibits women's ability to participate in formal political activism while allowing men to pursue and engage in full time activities outside the domestic home (Okin 1989). While many interviewees viewed the culture and business of formal politics as 'masculine' or 'very manly', the issue of childcare is prevalent across many interviews. 'Brenda', an elected Sinn Féin representative, believed that:

> "Women could contribute a lot more but they had to put the kids first where men don't need to think about that, they have a woman there to do that for them. So they're let off the hook, free to go on and get involved. I have three kids and it's a real balancing act where my male colleagues don't have to consider any of that, no doctors, no schools. So women have their full time political work *and* they have their full time work as mothers."

Twenty-six of the forty interviewees are also mothers and stated that the birth of a child resulted in a retreat back from full-time activism, either as a militant during the Troubles or from full-time political activism in the post-war period, only to slowly return once children grew older and more independent. Most interviewees felt that formal political structures are designed to accommodate a particular gender order which advantages men.

> Joanne: "I was a local councillor for years but I'm not anymore; up until last year. So I was elected in the late 1990's and I resigned from the council last year just due to time. I have the children and a full-time job and didn't have the time for all the constituency work and council work and I felt it was getting to me. Something had to give and the children had to come first and I couldn't give up my job because it was our only income. I just felt I wasn't being fair to the party or the constituents because they weren't getting the time they deserved. It was much easier when I was single and had no kids."

According to all interviewees, the unsociable working hours does not suit those with children or dependents, with many concluding that formal politics "is not very family-friendly". Most

participants stated that motherhood is not an insurmountable obstacle to political participation, yet it is usually women who have to deal with the conflicting demands of the two roles. Despite Sinn Féin's comparatively high number of female elected representatives, it appears that republican women are very much aware of structural and institutional barriers to women's participation in formal politics (Alison 2009: 203).

Notwithstanding these 'unproductive' experiences, others gave a more benign appraisal of their formal political experiences. Anne is a former city councillor:

"So going into [Belfast] City Hall is just another arena of struggle. It didn't intimidate me at all and I loved it, I loved council. I never really regretted going into council even though my kids were small and I missed out on an awful lot with them. So overall, I did love council. I wasn't keen on some of the committees so I got myself shifted onto ones where I wanted to be in, where I was making a difference because I was the party person on equality. That was my brief and I was there advocating that money and policy needs to be targeted towards those who need it most based on the deprivation indices. So you target the money towards those people and those areas that need it most and improving peoples' lives based on those indices."

Grainne: "Well I'm a councillor here in [named town] for Sinn Féin and have been now for over twenty years and I'm busy in that role and we work in among the community. It's a very busy role and my work as a councillor, the main part of it is, which is what I enjoy most, is working for other people and improving their lives, that is for me the most rewarding part of my role. And I'm very proud to be a Sinn Féin councillor."

Echoing Anne and Grainne, Ruth, also a former elected representative, stated that

"I enjoyed being a councillor and I was sorry to lose my seat but it showed me that all you had to do was lift the phone and you'd get something done. So now I can see the difference of not being a councillor and I try to tell people to use their councillor."

In terms of how effective their electoral roles were, all broadly replied that as a political representative, the title or position adds political clout to their activism. Being a formal political representative as described by Ruth has the effect of cutting through some of the bureaucracy; headed note paper or titles such as councillors or MLA[80] provided elected Sinn Féin members with 'political teeth' and commands the attention of civil servants. In addition, many believed that women's roles within Sinn Féin was meaningful and that the party's role in government is changing the ways in which state-centric politics is currently conducted. Helen is currently a senior Sinn Féin elected representative but also maintains her work within her local community centre:

> "Sinn Féin has made the difference, a small bit of difference as we try and move not just our society forward but also practices and policies in place that will deliver social change. We're hoping that we have the ingredients to create a just society especially for our most vulnerable people. And Sinn Féin is delivering that."

Fiona is an ex-prisoner who previously worked as a community activist in Belfast. Like Helen, she is also a senior Sinn Féin elected representative.

> "Certainly, politics is changing, certainly, and more women into politics and Sinn Féin need to send women into all male-dominated places. We did it very well like in government ministries because most ministries are male, as are most political parties and that is starting to break down and Sinn Féin is at the forefront of that."

Most interviewees believed that Sinn Féin is making a difference, albeit a small one, in the realm of formal politics. The republican challenge to male-domination and cultures within the data indicates a belief that women within Sinn Féin are having an impact on the party's gender politics and the deconstruction of masculine cultures:

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[80] Stands for Member of the Legislative Assembly; an elected representative to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Bronagh: "I'm not even sure if there is a crèche in the Dail or at Stormont. But I know there's a gym and two bars! It has been a male institute for so long and that needs to change. And it is changing and the male culture within politics is changing, slowly and Sinn Féin is certainly at the forefront of that change in terms of republican women."

Ruth: "You only have to look at Belfast City Council today which was previously dominated by men and look at the changes there. When I first was a councillor [1980's], I mean some of them [male politicians], their knuckles were still scraping the ground."

Kelly: "I think women do need be there at that level as politicians…..em…..because it is still seen as a very male-dominated thing and I think we should encourage as many people into it as possible, to make sure women are involved at that level and making decisions. And I know that does work and it makes [sic] sure that women's issues are on the agenda and are considered but I don't know whether it would work for all political roles."

Kelly, Ruth and Bronagh's thoughts are typical of those in the majority of interviews. Many cited republican women's role within Sinn Féin as vital to the dismantling of masculine cultures and male domination right across various arenas of institutional politics, from Belfast City Hall to Stormont. Many also argued for women's inclusion at all levels of formal politics, and the importance of having women at all levels of decision-making. In the final sentence of Kelly's extract however, there is also a distinct note of caution that institutional politics alone would not "work for all political roles". While cited as important, interviewees are also critically aware of the limitations in pursuing politics solely through institutional approaches.

The data and discussion advanced thus far suggests a sanguine optimism that women's role within Sinn Féin and formal political structures is making a difference despite the ubiquitous patriarchal and sexist norms and cultures. Of course many would suggest here that mechanisms and strategies such as gender quotas, gender mainstreaming or SCR 1325

would suitably rectify these matters with an increased presence of women. However, as the following two sections reveal, the additional problem of formal politics for interviewees is that it alone is ineffective and ultimately insufficient in delivering the type of change envisioned by interviewees. In particular, interviewees cited issues such as 'toeing party lines' and the slow-pace of change as major sources of disappointment.

Following Party Lines: The Constraints of Party Politics

When asked where interviewees felt either let down by formal party politics or restricted by party lines, more times than not, the issue of abortion was cited. The majority of those in this study see women's right to choose as a fundamental part of their gender equality vision and women's security (Chapter Six). Given the powerful position of the Catholic Church and various Protestant faiths on both sides of the Irish border, abortion is a deeply divisive topic which many political parties deliberately eschew or at best, approach with prudence. Any pragmatic approach to the topic is deemed by parties to be political self-destruction. While Sinn Féin, in the spirit of their great hero Wolfe Tone[81], sees itself as a secular party, open to people of all faiths and none, some of its 'leading members openly identify with the Roman Catholic Church' (Maillot 2005: 222). The internal battle for a pro-choice position has persisted since the emergence of the Women's Department in 1979 but the issue came to

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[81] Wolfe Tone was a founding member and leader of the United Irishmen and is widely regarded as the 'father' of Irish Republicanism. In particular, given his aristocratic background and his Presbyterian religious identity, he is remembered for his non-sectarian beliefs: "To unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissentions, and to substitute the common name of Irishman, in the place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic, and Dissenter—these were my means". In the bitterly polarised society of the North of Ireland, the Provisionals invariably claim lineage to Tone as a mechanism for countering accusations of sectarianism. Tone was executed for his role in the failed rebellion of 1798. The anniversary of his death remains a strong focal point in republican commemoration today, as it is with many other political parties and dissenter republican groups.

prominence during the party's Ard Fheis in 1985, which surprisingly passed a simple 'right to choose' motion[82].

Although passed at the 1985 Ard Fheis, the pro-choice motion was over-turned the following year. According to Maillot, the motion, and the very issue of abortion itself 'raised a high level of discomfort and discontent…… as it was too divisive, too controversial, and ultimately too damaging' (2005: 113-14). Overturning the 1985 motion, the wording of the 1986 motion which replaced it appeared conservative and slightly ambiguous, stating that 'we are opposed to the attitudes and forces in society that compel women to have abortions. We are opposed to abortion as a means of birth control'. Broadly speaking, Sinn Féin retreated back to the politically prudent and conservative lines of that of many of Ireland's mainstream political parties. The current party position is contained in the *Women in Ireland* document endorsed by the 1999 Ard Fheis, which includes:

"Sinn Féin condemns the failure of the Dublin Government to enact legislation following the abortion referenda in 1992. Despite the result of the referenda, very little has changed for women in the 26 Counties. Sinn Féin believes that full information and non-directive pregnancy counselling, embodying all choices, should be freely available. Sinn Féin is opposed to the attitudes and forces in society which compel women to have abortions and criminalises those who do make this decision. We accept the need for abortion where a woman's life and mental health is at risk or in grave danger and in cases of rape or child sexual abuse."

While republican women created the ideological and practical space to engage in issues around gender equality and feminism in the 1980's, it is also clear that there were

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[82] Some interviewees were involved in the passing of that motion. According to them, the reason the motion was passed owed to the fact that the vote took place late on Sunday evening when the Ard Fheis was coming to a close. At this stage in the evening, many party delegates had left the Ard Fheis, tilting the balance firmly in favour of republican feminists.

defined limitations to how far women's struggle within the movement could go. It was regulated and monitored by those at the leadership level, and at times of peril for the party, women's struggle would be sequestered. For some, the abortion issue, more than any other, remains a prominent source of dissatisfaction:

> Elaine: "I think there will be more movement around the issue of abortion rights. The party is going to have to move because you can't keep articulating that half-baked nonsense around abortion which doesn't please anyone. I'm sure you've read the party's policy; it doesn't please anyone. You know my views on this; our party position is awful. It satisfies no-one but just about keeps everyone about levelled if that makes sense because Sinn Féin doesn't believe in abortion or the extension of the 1967 Abortion Act to the North which is funny because it's the only piece of British legislation that I would welcome with open arms to the North (participant smiles)."

While the vast majority of interviewees stated that they were "happy" with the party's position on abortion, most also qualified that it was far from perfect. The outright opposition to women's right to choose in the republican movement mirrors similar patterns from non-state liberation movements globally. Internationally, women in anti-imperial movements encountered formidable resistance to pro-choice advocacy within groups who maintain strong links to conservative religious groups. In Nicaragua, strong conservative, Catholic voices within the Sandinista movement ensured that no matter the principle or the promises given, the question of legalising abortion was firmly side-stepped and placed on the political backburner. The Catholic Church opposed many gender reforms including educational and family reform, bans on weekend work, but their zealous opposition was most evident in areas such as divorce reform, methods of birth control and women's reproductive rights (Molyneux 1985: 243). Due to the strong influence of the Catholic Church, there was a strong emphasis on the positive identification with motherhood (Chinchilla 1990). While the republican

movement designates itself as a secular broad church comprised of an eclectic mix of traditional republicans, nationalists, conservative Catholics, socialists and feminists, 'Catholicism was a powerful cultural influence on republicans' (Bean 2007: 225). I asked interviewees about the formidable opposition to women's right to choose. Aoife, a senior Sinn Féin member stated:

> "Well it is Catholicism and the perception of the role of the mother and church teaching, basically that is what it is about. But you can believe all of that [Catholicism] and believe it for you and I have no problem with that but let me do what I think is right for me and the state has to provide what is necessary for me to live the way I want to live."

Aoife's extract indicates that there remains a conservative attitude within Provisional republicanism that women's primary role is that of mother, valued for reproductive capacities, despite claims of secularism within the republican movement. The fact that dogmatic Catholicism within the party takes precedence over women's right to choose, indicates that for all of the rhetoric regarding both the secular nature of the party and its advocacy for women's rights, there are clearly defined limits to the pursuit and trajectory of women's rights within the movement. Given this, some felt severely restricted by formal party structure:

> Elaine: "So I'm active within various campaigns and groups around feminist issues and others. I would always try to move things forward within the party, within the republican movement and the difficulty is, in that I'm not just a republican activist, I'm also a *member* of the party so I am constrained. So I have to take in political considerations when I'm in my role within the party because I'm also aware of the way things are perceived publicly……..and there are certain things that you just can't push. So that is a difficulty. So moving things forward can be difficult……….because there is opposition."

Moreover, some interviewees speak of their frustration at being restricted by party lines on the issue. Some felt that there was little space to challenge the issue within formal structures:

> Sandra: "I have my own opinions on issues like abortion and I felt I was being restricted by party lines but I don't really hear anything different from party members. Perhaps women do be debating these issues and we just don't hear about it. Maybe women do challenge party lines on abortion? But I just don't know. For me it is very restrictive, it would be very difficult for me to be in Sinn Féin today because I have my own thoughts and opinions. But any political party, not just Sinn Féin, would be exactly the same."

Siobhan, who now works in a large community centre in West Belfast, recalled an incident when canvassing for a Sinn Féin candidate:

> "I remember going canvassing years ago and we had a big group meeting before setting off and the fella in charge said "oh by the way if anyone asks your opinion on the abortion issue just tell them you follow the party line". And I was like… (brief pause)….shocked, because here's the thing, nobody had a different point of view, everyone was saying the same thing, and nobody challenged it. In political parties you can't ask questions, you can't deviate from the leadership and that's when I became disillusioned with political parties."

Elaine, Sandra and Siobhan's extracts document the opposition and constraints which limit women's pursuit of the choice issue within formal political parties. As members of a formal political party, there are clearly strict limitations on the extent they could pursue women's rights. While some feminist scholars posit the notion of increasing women's presence within formal political parties in order to obtain a critical mass (Cowell-Meyers 2003; Ward 2005), an increase of women is no guarantee that political parties will respond positively and alter their positions on issues such as abortion. In 2007, all the major political parties, including

Sinn Féin, supported a DUP[83] motion opposing an extension of the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland. Emblematic of the internal democratic issues around the handshake with the British Queen[84], again many interviewees cited a lack of debate or consultation around Sinn Féin support for that motion. For Edel, a republican feminist, this incident is indicative of the problems faced by republican feminists working within the constraints of a formal political party which primarily relies on a sizeable Catholic vote for its political support:

"All of the Sinn Féin MP's in the North signed the [DUP] bill that the abortion bill should not be extended into the North. Now I never saw that anywhere on any documentation or policy and that was never consulted on or voted on by us the members. I certainly didn't vote for an MP that was going to do that so there is an undoubted… (pause two seconds)…I was going to say right wing but there is certainly conservatism at the heart of the republican leadership."

For those interviewees now outside of Sinn Féin, the issue of choice is consistently identified as a major difficulty they have with institutional politics, and they include Sinn Féin as an institutional party in that regard. For them, mainstream electoral politics entails a compromising of political principles, specifically around the issue of a woman's right to choose. Despite Sinn Féin's claims to being both a socialist and relatively progressive party on women, the abortion issue suggests that formal party politics alone is insufficient to deliver the type of change envisioned by interviewees. For those still within Sinn Féin, there is a particular discomfort in having to publicly defend a party policy that they in effect personally oppose. While this compromise is viewed as part and parcel of being within a political party, the restrictive nature of following a party line proves too difficult for some.

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[83] The DUP contains a sizable membership of evangelical Christians and is renowned for its social conservatism on this matter and many others.
[84] In June 2012, former IRA commander and current Sinn Féin Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness met with and shook hands with the British queen causing much disconcertion among the grassroots membership, including many of the women in this research, citing a lack of meaningful consultation between the grassroots and the leadership.

The hierarchical and restrictive nature of formal party politics clearly presents challenges to republican feminists. In terms of the abortion issue, many participants recalled instances of private agreement from some members of the leadership that "women do have a right to choose" but that the party could never state this publicly[85]. According to Edel, in the early 1990's a senior male republican cautioned that "adopting a pro-choice position would destroy the movement", while Linda recalls her shock at the unwillingness of party members to join her on pro-choice protests because "people were saying 'oh this may not be perceived right or as politically correct' rather than focusing on the issue and saying 'we should we be doing this for women and supporting that right'". Along with religious conservatism, others postulated public perceptions and electoral fortunes as key to understanding Sinn Féin's opposition to abortion. Janette, a life-long republican activist and now a Sinn Féin member and community activist, stated that the issue of women's reproductive rights:

"was a very unpopular policy among Catholic voters so we [sarcastically] '*couldn't really have that'*. So if you're trying to get a principled position that's in conflict with populism and if you also have to get elected again and again with a bigger and bigger majority, then each time you move from principled positions to more populist positions. We've always fought the good fight and still do but I think we aren't as radical as we could be simply because we have to keep getting elected again and again and so you have to appeal to the least common denominator, appeal to the most inclusive audience. Therefore you tend to bring up populist positions and generic one-size-fits-all policies which are wholly inadequate."

Formal political parties are consistently focused on their electoral position in order to increase power and influence. And 'in order to maximise the electoral appeal, a political party

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[85] Online political bloggers, *Vixens With Convictions* have published what they claim to be internal Sinn Féin leadership meeting minutes from 2000 where the party's stance on abortion is discussed. Tensions between those who wish to retain their traditional stance clashed with those advocating that the party would do well to steer clear from anything deemed to be a right-wing position. In particular to this research, the minutes reveal an acute awareness of public perceptions and voter behaviour whereby "any position they take in abortion may impact on their electoral position." For more, see http://vixenswithconvictions.com/2014/02/27/internal-sinn-fein-minutes-adams-i-wish-it-would-all-go-away/

needs to reach out beyond the hard core and appeal to the sympathisers and the uncommitted' (Neumann 2005: 947), presenting a rather limited political terrain. Popular electoral politics invariably demands a de-radicalisation of party positions in order to reach out to wider potential voters. While many of those within the party today reluctantly accept the need for compromise across a range of political topics, the issue of choice for women appears to stretch the elasticity of that acceptance more than any other issue. While all current party members within this research abide by the party policy in public, they are however equally determined to continue the struggle for changing the party's position to a straight forward pro-choice position.

Moreover, a sizable number of interviewees are active on the choice issue outside of Sinn Féin and formal politics. Many are directly involved with single-issue grassroots groups advocating a pro-choice position, while others are also involved in providing support to those who wish to travel abroad in order to access medical treatment. With its primary focus on expanding its electoral fortunes, most political parties in Ireland are concerned with the overall trajectory of the party and so provide little space for those who advocate for a pro-choice position from within. Evidence here suggests that Sinn Féin are not atypical, pointing to the perpetual limitations of pursuing a feminist vision of peace and security solely through institutional structures. In addition to 'toeing' restrictive party lines, the slow pace of change and delivery sees interviewees widely active in grassroots and community activism in tandem with their formal Sinn Féin roles.

"We Want Results": Grassroots and Community Organising

The feminist maxim that 'the personal is political' sought to redefine the very fundamentals upon which male-led, institutional politics is premised. For many women and feminists, the formal arena of politics was just another part of the patriarchal order, and one which was so

masculine that it was best avoided altogether (Roulston 2000: 26). Due to the masculine and elitist nature of institutional politics, women have turned to grassroots activism and community politics in order to have some influence over the policies that affect their families, communities and themselves (McCoy 2000: 7). There is a strong history of women organising outside of formal political structures in the North of Ireland (Fearon & McWilliams; McCoy 2000; Miller et al 1996; Sales 1997). For the most part, this activism is not concerned with aping or paralleling the formal structures, but rather is seen as an alternative form of politics, which addresses issues that are all too often neglected or excluded by the state.

The data presented here in this section suggests that the institutional participation of women is an important yet inadequate measure through which to address their specific political needs and concerns. In particular, the sluggish pace of formal politics is a key source of dissatisfaction when contrasted with the high-velocity of their community organising. Kelly, who joined Sinn Féin in early 1980's and is still a member, also manages a community centre in Belfast. Her thoughts epitomise many of the attitudes towards the pace of party politics:

"Formal politics is too slow for women and that's why the sector of community activism holds so much in attracting women towards it. I just know from experience [as an elected representative] that it is so slow moving. We drive issues here from this [named] Centre and say "here's a big issue for us" and arrange a meeting with our MLA's and then they take it up to a political level at Stormont. But, once it goes in there [Stormont], it seems to get lost and takes forever to get a decision about it."

Kelly is broadly representative of most interviewees, and interestingly, her views are also profoundly shared, even by those at senior levels of elected representation. Fiona, a former

IRA member, previously worked solely in the community sector and is now a senior elected representative for Sinn Féin:

> "It is very slow up here [Stormont], because I could have been dealing with four or five families in a week who had drug problems when I was in the community [sector] and get access to services for them and moving that on. Up here is just so slow it's like watching paint dry, where when you're used to working on the ground you're seeing your work and things getting done."

Fiona's extract is highly significant in that it depicts formal politics as slow and frustrating, while describing her community activist role as a space where she can address specific issues which affect the lives of citizens within republican communities. According to these women, community organising provides the political potential to make a discernible difference within working-class, republican communities. Emily, who joined the IRA in the early 1970's concurs, arguing that "constitutional politics is very unsatisfactory for anyone like me who come from a background of activism from the 1960's and 1970's and that is very difficult. It is very unexciting for women." Karen is a Sinn Féin activist, a member of a residents group and also works in a Women's Centre in West Belfast. Echoing Fiona's and Emily's thoughts, Karen reflects:

> "Here [community activism] you can make sure people get a house or whatever and get an instant result where politics is very slow. You see if you try and get a decision about anything [in formal politics], it just puts my fucking head away, you know. It is too slow for women and that's why they go into community politics and empower themselves to do it."

In order to illustrate her frustrations, Karen uses the Girdwood[86] housing issue which was ongoing at the time of field research:

> "It [politics] should be just 'let's cut the bullshit, how many houses do we need and how many are we going to build now straight way' and that's it. The Girdwood thing and the nationalist need for houses, and that is all down to the party politics system which is very male-dominated and they don't think about 20,000 houses. I know housing for me is a big thing and I have been yapping [sic] about it in the background in my Cumann going "what are we doing about fucking housing in this estate?" There's hundreds of women living on top of each other and families with their kids all in with their granny's and grandparents and I said "there's houses lying empty in every street, hundreds of them empty because a landlord owns them. Why are we not putting that out and let's get the legislation to buy them all back, compulsory purchase" but then you go up there [Stormont] and listen to all that bullshit and I couldn't be bothered with all that, it really does my head in. Politics is still all that tribal politics and two communities. Nonsense all of it".

The Girdwood issue was in the backdrop during a number of interviews which occurred in 2012. Unsurprisingly, it was cited as firm evidence by many of the ineffective nature of institutional politics in dealing with issues such as housing.

Right throughout the Troubles, republican women's community activism acted in tandem with their formal politics within Sinn Féin. Exploring the post-war experiences of republican women through the prism of formal politics only is therefore a partial gauge. Often the women in this research are active in more than one community organisation. In

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[86] Girdwood is a former British Army barracks in North Belfast. Opened in 1970, it eventually closed in 2005. After years of deadlock over how the land should be redeveloped, in May 2012 the DUP and Sinn Féin agreed to develop the site for recreation and housing, with housing units allocated equally along ethno-national/sectarian lines despite the fact that the overwhelming demand for housing stems from the nationalist population. This episode demonstrated how ethno-sectarian housing effect the political geography of this deeply divided part of the city. Sinn Féin's agreement was viewed by many interviewees a betrayal of principle that housing should be allocated along the lines of need as opposed to the political demands of the DUP. Despite the potential to build 20,000 housing units, the 50:50 catholic/protestant deal between Sinn Féin and the DUP decreased that number down to 5,000 housing units.

addition to the multiplicity of their roles, their activism is also eclectic and wide-ranging dealing with issues such as drugs and alcohol addiction, housing, gender-based violence, education, abortion or women's centres. Others are involved in ex-prisoner centres such as Tar Anall in Belfast or Tar Abhaile in Derry, as well as grassroots organisations directly relating to the Troubles, particularly around the issue of state violence. It is the pace, structures and plurality of their community activism however, which holds much sway for many interviewees. While women's grassroots and community organising is nothing new or unique to this research, we need to bear in mind that women's *type* of community organising is culturally embedded and established in diverse ways according to their differing needs and concerns. The informal and enabling space allows interviewees to address the issues which affect their lives and the lives of the people within clearly defined working-class communities.

Many interviewees revealed a shared value of participatory activism and cite a direct link between grassroots organising and discernible results from such actions. Ruth, a former IRA volunteer who is now a Sinn Féin member and community activist was once also an elected representative. She explains the importance of participatory activism to republican women:

"Well community activism is more dynamic and you can just get on with whatever needs doing. I spoke at the parliament last year and you'd need a medal to put up with the half of it so for me, I much prefer the community politics because you can make a difference and you can see the difference whether it's an anti-graffiti campaign or building a community garden."

Ruth's statement regarding the quicker and visible changes made at a community level typifies the distinct value placed on the discernibility and effectiveness of their activism. Community activism, or what Elizabeth Porter (2000) terms the 'situated politics of everyday

life', allows women to engage in issues that directly affect them and their communities. In particular, many interviewees are directly involved in various women's centres in working-class, republican communities dealing with issues such as domestic and sexual violence, child-care facilities and education, among others. Women's Centres in the North of Ireland 'provide a space for more radical groups and individuals for whom the concerns and practices of the formal political parties holds no attraction' (Sales 1997: 188). According to interviewees, women's centres provide them with the mechanisms to address issues which formal politics is either unwilling or incapable of dealing with. While they are not unique to republican women, women's centres in republican communities are largely focused on issues directly related to working-class, nationalist and republican women.

When we examine the narratives in the data presented here, it is clear that republican women are fully cognisant that issues of domestic violence, poverty, child-care, drug addiction, among others, will not be tackled in the political spheres of Stormont or Leinster House. The apparent inertia of formal politics in the North of Ireland is widely cited as the main reason for the lack of peace dividend among wider society, where the new consociation architecture of formal politics is having limited impacts on the daily lives of citizens (Cochrane 2013; McGrattan & Meehan 2012). As the latest endeavours by political elites to deal with problematic issues such as welfare reform, flags and emblems, dealing with the past, runs aground[87], the ineffectiveness of institutional politics in the North of Ireland would undoubtedly test the patience of even its greatest advocates.

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[87] Highly sensitive or contentious issues relating to the Troubles have been largely placed on the political back-burner since the restoration of power-sharing in 2007. Despite the efforts of US diplomats Meghan O'Sullivan and Richard Haass in 2013, all major political parties failed to reach agreement on these matters. In 2014, vast disagreement between the political parties over welfare reform in the North again brought matters to a head. Despite reaching an agreement (Stormont House Agreement) in December 2014, the text and substance of the agreement remains a highly-guarded secret. More ominously, Sinn Féin pulled out of the Agreement in March 2015, kick-starting yet another round of crisis talks, involving the main political parties and the British and Irish governments.

At the heart of many interviews, is the contention that issues of importance and concern to republican women require direct, participatory political action. The issues addressed by interviewees in their community roles are consistently those which impact upon the everyday lives of people within working-class, republican communities. In other words, this demonstrates that women's ways of peace-building are contextual, profoundly shaped by historical forces and cultural processes. Research data corroborates the argument that women build peace in ways that have meaning in their own cultural setting (Richter-Devroe 2012; McKay & De La Rey 2006). The inability of institutional politics to deliver meaningful change at that level undoubtedly motivates much of their grassroots organising, despite their relatively high levels of formal political activism. Transversal feminist approaches often hold out that women-only spaces offer the potential for women in deeply polarised societies to work across the divide on issues of mutual benefit. While mainstream women's centres are cited for providing linkages between differentially positioned women, interviewees here are involved in women's centres which are embedded in the socialist, feminist and republican politics of their defined communities. Of the forty research participants, only one identified as being previously involved in any sort of transversal or cross-community activism. In other words, the women in this research are overwhelmingly concerned with issues and concerns within clearly defined working-class, republican communities.

The ideals of solidarity and reciprocity resonate with themes of feminist ethics and politics which stress mutuality, interdependence and shared values (Frazer & Lacey 1993: 123). Interviewees claimed that their republican activism, whether armed struggle, electoral politics, community organising, or other, it is informed by the pursuit of a 'positive peace' on behalf of a defined community. Linda, who joined the IRA in Belfast in the early 1970s, expresses that prevalent ethic among research participants of politics as participatory and self-empowering:

"My politics has always been and still is about helping people. You see women do things from a very practical point of view and see what's needed and say 'yes I can get involved there and make a difference', so women want to do things that are practical. Some people say 'where did women go after the conflict?' A lot of women just looked around and said "right what's the next thing for us to do", so women went off into community groups, or helping their families. They don't dwell on the conflict; they move on and are practical and move towards what needs to be done next."

When asked why some republican women did not pursue those objectives solely through formal politics, Linda replied:

"Because they see that that is not the best way to get things done."

Linda is now active in community activism only, severing her ties with Sinn Féin and formal politics. Her views are wholly reflective of all seven research participants who are located in community activism only. While the overall republican movement has shifted from 'party of protest to the party of government' (Frampton 2009), the mistrust of the state remains palpable among interviewees. The historical complexities of the relationship between republicans and the state ensures that despite Sinn Féin's participation, the state is widely viewed with ambivalence, and is seen as largely incapable of delivering on the needs and interests of working class republican communities. Gemma, who describes her conflict role as a 'republican activist' and now works in Sinn Féin and the community sector, demonstrates the links made by many research participants between women's grassroots activism and state politics:

"I like the idea of 'the personal is political'. We had the British government who gave us nothing and certainly gave women nothing. So we had to go out and get it ourselves so we saw the poverty, deprivation and so we got educated and began agitating and setting up community centres, residents associations, co-ops and you were politicised although at the

time you didn't realise it because you were just doing what was needed and those needs

sadly are still there today."

The idea of equality, services and rights are primary concepts within Provisional republican ideology and is rooted in the historical psyche of nationalist exclusion and discrimination at the hands of the unionist state[88]. Much of the community sector's motivation is the perceived inadequacies of the state, inextricably linked to the historical 'discrimination or deprivation at the hands of the state or the unionist community' (Cassidy 2005: 349). Despite the vast overhaul of the state and Sinn Féin's fervent participation within its political institutions, the scars of previous wrongdoings at the hands of the state are still tangible within working-class nationalist communities. Janette, who joined Sinn Féin in the early 1970's, succinctly captured this ethos:

> "The fact that I am here in mental health is like republicans seeing something that is a really
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> bad situation and going and doing something about it. I help disenfranchised people, get
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> guide dogs for blind citizens, help people with disabilities and all those things are where you
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> make a difference where you can. The community sector in this city, which is providing vital
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> services for the people of this community, are all run by republicans and ex-prisoners and
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> that is not an accident. We were just so used to accepting that the state was not there to help
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> and so it was up to us to provide those services."

The ideological characteristic of this approach is the analytical distinction between a reliance on the state or the grassroots approach in a politics defined as participatory and self-empowering. Despite Sinn Féin's zealous participation within state institutions, the state itself is often framed in adversarial terms by many research participants. In addition, some

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[88] Despite many debates, there is somewhat of a consensus that the Catholic population suffered various levels of discrimination in the Northern Ireland state, particularly in the areas of housing, employment and voting rights. While the roots of this discrimination is contested, (some cite the discrimination as instigated by unionist individuals while others view as part of the state structure), undoubtedly, much of the Catholic population felt alienated from the Northern Ireland state. For more, Michael Farrell's (1976) *Northern Ireland: The Orange State*, London: Pluto Press.

interviewees identified formal institutions themselves as deeply problematic. Linda, a former IRA volunteer in the 1970's typifies the feeling of those interviewees now outside of formal politics:

"I always felt that this [formal] political system is corrupting and that once you get into that system then you're working that system. How can you protest against yourself? How can Sinn Féin mobilise their people against austerity measures when they're sitting up there [in Stormont] delivering it?"

Much of the criticism levelled at the party from those who have now severed their links with Provisional republicanism stemmed not from dogmatic republicanism regarding their acceptance of 'partitionist structures', but was in fact rooted in class politics. Like Linda, Eileen joined the IRA in Belfast in the early 1970's and today works solely in the community sector:

"Nothing changes in this political system regardless of elections; all the civil servants are still there, the policies are still there. So once you're in a capitalist political system you deliver capitalist policies and in order to deliver that, you're going to have people who are very poor and people who are very rich and that's what we're stuck with. How can they [Sinn Féin] call themselves republicans and then inflict them [sic] cuts on working class people? It's not in me to do that to people; politics is supposed to be about helping people."

Eilish, is a former IRA volunteer in Belfast and like Eileen and Linda, is now active solely in grassroots organisations outside of Sinn Féin:

"In [formal] politics, the status quo is the status quo and overall, it really doesn't change. Maybe I don't have the patience for it and all the nonsense that goes with it. Here (in community and voluntary sector) I can agitate, I can help people and most importantly I give people the opportunities to change their own lives which I couldn't do if I was sitting up in Stormont."

For Linda, Eileen and Eilish, electoral contests involving the interchange of power between various political parties is a largely superficial exercise. Their main point of contention was that institutional politics presents a political *cul-de-sac* for those advocating a more radical form of politics. Within a capitalist system, there is little transformative potential, regardless of which party takes hold of the reins of power.

According to Elizabeth Porter, 'unless we see the [formal] inclusion of political spaces such as women's community activism, much of women's political activity goes theoretically unrecognised and practically undervalued' (1998: 50). At the heart of many feminist contentions regarding women's formal political inclusion, is that without doing so, women's eclectic activism remains unrecognised and undervalued. It begs the question however, undervalued by whom? When we examine interviewees' grassroots peacebuilding and post-war struggle here, we find a vibrant and active sphere of political struggle which is highly valued *and* recognised by both its participants and the communities which benefit from their services. These community activists are neither marginalised nor victims (Jordan 2003). It therefore questions the chorus of calls demanding women's institutional inclusion as the ideal site for women's post-war struggles.

While most interviewees advocate on the importance of increasing women's participation in male-dominated formal politics, very few actually cite this as the optimum space for pursuing their vision of peace and equality. The republican women interviewed here held clear belief that while institutional structures are important they are also highly limited in their transformative capacity to deliver the type of post-war society they envision. Janette joined Sinn Féin in the early 1970's and today is still a party member and full-time community activist. I asked Janette her thoughts on why so many republican women expressed are active in community organising given their high levels of involvement in formal politics:

"Why are there so many women in the community sector? Because women want to make changes (laughs). Women, like to be on the ground, making changes, make a quick strike, bounce back into their own lives, and then make another quick strike; *we want results* (with emphasis). And I think in formal politics you don't get a lot of it [results]."

Within the prevailing feminist approaches which call for women's institutional inclusion, there is an assumption that transformative power resides mainly in state-centric institutions while neglecting the power from below dynamic. When some feminists talk of the need to include women within formal, top-down peace processes, they are overlooking the vast body of powerful work that women do in the pursuit of peace and equality outside of the formal realm. Assessing women's peace activism through an institutional prism not only fails to reflect women's peacebuilding in its entirety, but it limits feminist approaches to a single tier of political activism only. In contrast, interviewees are not reliant on top-down structures alone in order to pursue their post-war agenda. Often they are agents of change who establish their own spaces, sometimes women-only spaces, where they can address their specific interests and concerns. It is the transformative potential and political mobility within community organising which creates opportunities for interviewees to address the shortfalls and inefficiencies of institutional politics.

Obtaining some seats at parliament or at the formal negotiating table is an important tier of women's post-war organising. Yet if we accept that patriarchy pervades all aspects of women's lives then we need a battlefield beyond mere parliamentary participation. By examining the lives of republican women, we not only bring their lives into view, but we also yield a more accurate picture of women's post-war activism in its entirety. Despite relatively high levels of access to institutional politics through Sinn Féin, the overwhelming majority of women in this research, including senior elected representatives, remain committed and full-time community activists. Given the limitations of women's organising within formal party

politics (in this chapter and Chapter Seven), it is unsurprising to see women organising on issues outside of formal structures in areas such as drugs, housing, education, abortion and gender-based violence. These are the spaces where they can address the specific needs of people, and most importantly, the needs of women, within republican communities. The evidence here presents a challenge to the hegemonic positioning of gender mainstreaming or the formal inclusion of women within existing political structures as the optimum strategy for delivering feminist peace.

Conclusion

Despite the side-lining of women by the republican movement in the post-ceasefire period, this chapter finds all forty interviewees are full-time political activists today. In addition, the majority of them are located in both formal and informal political roles. Feminist critics of nationalism as a patriarchal structure often cite the post-war regression as robust evidence of the pitfalls for women's participation within such movements. The chapter finds, however, that the vibrant post-war activism of republican women indicates that empowerment and political mobility gained through the armed nationalist struggle is directly carried over into the post-war period. They are all full-time activists today *because* of their war-time roles and experiences.

The argument in this chapter serve as a formidable caveat to those who advocate that the site of institutional politics or women's transversal modes of activism presents the most nascent sphere of women's post-war struggles. A more nuanced exploration of differentially positioned women such as this reveals the ways in which women politically organise according to their own specific interests and concerns. Republican women today are not solely located in formal politics or exclusively in community organising. Moreover, only one interviewee spoke of involvement in transversal type of women's activism. None are

mobilised or motivated by only gender or the pursuit of a consensus politics with other women's groups. On the contrary, republican women are active in ways which directly address their diverse and culturally embedded political interests and concerns.

The chapter calls for feminist scholars to be attentive to the ways in which differentially positioned women organise in the post-war period according to their differential needs, as opposed to the myth that women somehow represent a homogenous political bloc. This chapter concludes that we need to step back from primarily examining women's post-war activism solely through the prism of formal institutional politics or transversal bridge-building and instead, pay closer attention to the entirety of ways in which all women organise for peace and equality in post-war scenarios. By doing so, we yield a far stronger feminist analysis of both patriarchy, and women's eclectic forms of resistance to it, in post-war scenarios.

Chapter Nine - Conclusion

Introduction

Women and conflict transition is an important and ever-increasing sphere of feminist research (El-Bushra 2007). As this burgeoning field expands, it is of fundamental importance that the spectrum of feminist vision in conflict transition widens in order to encapsulate the standpoint of combatant women in the post-war period. The shortfall in current feminist approaches is that they predominantly focus on a particular type of women, coupled with a prevailing strategy of women's institutional inclusion. This research sought to shift that emphasis from the widely reified 'women of peace' in favour of a more plural approach, one which takes into account differentially positioned women. This research uncovered an alternative narrative by republican combatant women in conflict transition and in sum, it was argued that the restricted focus of feminist inquiry misses out on the alternative and transformative ways in which combatant women politically organise for peace-building during conflict transition. This final chapter reflects on the significance of the overall study, discusses the implications of specific findings and concludes on the ways in which this research may steer the direction of future feminist research.

Republican Women & Conflict Transition

Despite the welcome acknowledgement of combatant women, both through feminist scholarly research and SCR 1325, the notion of 'women of peace' retains a hegemonic grip on the current direction of feminist research within conflict transition. The existence of dominant, and largely singular narratives, has renewed the dubious linkage between women and peacefulness, serving as a mechanism of exclusion of differentially positioned women such as combatants. The primacy afforded to specific cohorts of women invariably ensures

that we are missing out on the important experiences and perspectives of others. As a result, the current spectrum of much feminist vision is partial and therefore limited. The current considered optimum strategy in the pursuit of a feminist peace and women's equality can be identified through the resounding calls from many for 'adding women' to formal structures. Findings presented in this study challenge such calls and underscores, despite some opportunities, the vast incapacities of institutional approaches to deliver on feminist post-war struggles.

This study adds to the burgeoning and important feminist literature on combatant women and conflict transition. In particular, I was keen to explore a number of key questions on republican female currents views and activities, given their radical past:

- How do they define peace and women's rights? What does a genuine peace look like?

- How has the institutionalisation of the Provisional republican struggle shaped/effected their post-war activism? In what ways has women's struggle within the republican movement changed during the transition? How do republican women react/resist in this changing political landscape?

- Where do republican women locate their post-war activism? Which spaces are deemed to hold the most political potential for transformative change?

- How do republican women define their war-time contributions and sacrifices? How do they ensure an accurate post-war recognition of those unique experiences?

Women's struggle to receive recognition for their war-time contributions in conflict transition is not a new phenomenon for them only relevant in the post-war period. Rather, they have in fact carried out an historical and long-standing battle for recognition and equality since the very inception of the Provisional republican movement. The findings suggest that being attentive to the narratives of combatant women themselves provides a more accurate and

holistic account of their war-time contributions than will be found if relying on the top-down processes such as DDR programs to assess their contribution. In addition to republican women displacing the prevailing androcentric definition of combatant, their various commemorative endeavours also challenged the fighter/supporter dichotomy by encapsulating the importance of *all* combatant roles. The findings therefore suggest a caution against the notion that women's war-time contributions can only be recognised and valued either by top-down structures such as DDR or by 'adding on' women to a pre-existing masculine commemorative discourse. It proves the fundamental importance of examining the ways in which female combatants themselves define *all* their vital war-time contributions.

The vision of peace and women's equality as articulated by republican women were somewhat comparable with many feminist definitions of peace. In particular, the link between peace and social justice was a central component of their vision. In terms of women's rights, there is indeed common ground around the important issues of gender-based violence and women's reproductive rights. That said, there were also many significant contrasts also. While many feminists call for formal political equality between men and women, not a single interviewee cited equal institutional participation as a component of their vision of women's equality. Moreover, a major departure or difference was evident in the definition of peace as something heavily embedded in an anti-imperial and anti-capitalist struggle. Invariably, and unsurprisingly, all cited the removal of a British presence in Ireland as a fundamental pre-condition of genuine peace. Furthermore, in their view the continuing structural violence of neo-liberal capitalism remains a prolific source of inequality and oppression. Their belief in building a peace based on the eradication of imperialism and capitalism, alongside patriarchy, appears to put them at odds with many strands of feminism and many women's groups. This study also uncovers that the formal narratives of a 'society at peace' fail to stand up to interrogation when faced with the formidable testimonies in this

study. Terms such as 'post-conflict' emerge as masculine misnomers as republican women continue to endure a landscape blighted with economic deprivation, various forms of physical and sexual violence, sectarianism, unemployment, and much more.

During the post-ceasefire period, the ideological standing of the republican movement switched dramatically towards an institutional positioning with a zealous focus on electoral politics. The top-down, male-dominated, exclusionary, and often secretive formal GFA negotiations heralded a significant side-lining of republican women, despite the efforts of many. As Provisional republicanism "professionalised" itself in preparation for its post-war institutional struggle, we see a marked contrast in the ways in which women's equality is conceptualised and pursued. In particular, as the radical organising of the Women's Department is furtively wound down, what emerges in its place embraces visions and strategies that are largely indistinguishable from any other mainstream political party. As Sinn Féin moves towards an institutional position, prolific feminist political outlets such as the Women's Department are rebranded in favour of a more mainstream approach, one which is in vogue with the new institutional look. To this end, Chapter Seven underscored the pitfalls of institutionalising feminist political struggles. As the dominant strands of feminist scholarship on women and the North of Ireland continue to rigidly persist with a chorus of calls for women's institutional inclusion within formal political parties, the findings here calls into question the wisdom of such demands.

As to the question of where republican women locate their post-war activism, the findings once again unearth insightful and contrasting perspectives. This thesis finds that their post-war political activism resides not solely in institutional politics, but across a broad-based political struggle of grassroots activism, semi-autonomous organising, electoral politics and community work. Despite the prevailing trend, this thesis argued that women's formal political participation provides an important but ultimately a restrictive terrain of political

struggle with limited transformative potential. While institutional feminist approaches focus their sights on 'women's inclusion', republican women are continuing a political struggle which mirrors their war-time political activism, that being a grassroots, republican, and often socialist and feminist struggle across both formal and informal spheres. Republican women have not abandoned their grassroots activism, despite relatively high levels of access to formal politics through Sinn Féin. The findings therefore significantly challenge those who insist that the institutional inclusion of women, such as SCR 1325, provides the most progressive space in which to pursue a feminist peace and women's equality.

The significance of this research is it departs from generalised accounts which often imply an assumption of women's homogeneity, and it counters those who persistently cite institutional inclusion as the optimum strategy for women's equality and a feminist peace. It once again indicates that feminists need to remain mindful of the diversity of standpoints between women. It is clear that republican women locate their post-war struggles in spaces which directly relate to their daily lives and struggles. Rather than relying on top-down, elitist structures, republican women, in all their post-war endeavours from commemoration to reproductive rights, see politics as self-empowering, participatory and from the grassroots up.

As to the question of gender and nationalism in the post-war period, the research uncovers some significant findings. Feminist critics of nationalism as a patriarchal structure often cite the post-war regression as robust evidence of the consequences for women's participation within such movements. Women pursuing a feminist agenda alongside their nationalist struggle are consistently told by their male counter-parts to park their gender concerns for the more pressing issues of state formation. This research however, suggests a rather different story. The women in this study, as in others (Alison 2009; O'Keefe 2013), were mobilised and heavily politicised by their participation within a non-state nationalist movement. In addition, the formation of the Women's Department mid-way during the

Troubles suggests that women were carving out feminist spaces successfully within the republican movement, despite some formidable barriers. Consistent throughout this research is the contention that it is the institutionalisation of the Provisional republican struggle which presents multiple barriers and high levels of regression for women's political struggle in the post-war period. While the 'revolutionary' phase of the national struggle fostered high levels of women's activism, it is in fact the current institutional phase of the republican struggle which is proving more problematic. Many, if not all of the issues identified within the research, stem from a movement which is shedding radical politics and switching to an electoral and institutionalised position. The common problematic denominator across the findings is not nationalism as such, but the institutionalisation of political struggle.

Furthermore, rather than sitting patiently waiting for that 'later' moment, the vibrant post-war activism of republican women indicates that empowerment and political mobility gained through the armed nationalist struggle is directly carried over into the post-war period. That same sense of confronting injustice and oppression during the Troubles, now profoundly informs and motivates their high-levels of contemporary activism. It is important to state that the Provisional republican movement during the Troubles did not represent some type of feminist utopia. On the contrary, existing research indicates its gendered and often patriarchal approaches to women (O'Keefe 2013). This research makes clear that republican women today are struggling to have their experiences, contributions and needs recognised within the broader republican agenda. That struggle is not unique to the post-war period and is in fact a continuity of a struggle for equality within the movement since its very inception. It therefore underscores the need to be attentive to the ways in which women respond to such marginalisation, as opposed to assuming that the male voice is the final word on the matter. Undoubtedly republican women faced marginalisation and regression both within and outside the republican movement during the post-war period. This research is significant in that it

documents the ways women themselves organised in the face of such challenges in order to resist it.

The conclusion here should not be read as the outright exclusion of women by the republican movement. On the contrary, Sinn Féin is lauded for its exemplary track record in consistently returning the highest percentage of female elected representatives (Buckley 2013; Galligan 2013). Women's institutional participation however, is hardly the most radical gauge to measure the struggle against patriarchy and other forms of oppression. To reiterate, Sinn Féin do include women but they do so in ways which suit the political trajectory of the party. In Chapter Five, we saw that when women do come into view through mainstream commemoration, they do so in the established male-defined discourse. Today, women's equality and inclusion in Sinn Féin is also defined and measured by an established discourse regarding the need for increasing women's political participation and visibility. By shedding the radical politics of yester-year, Sinn Féin includes women today in a way which is virtually indistinguishable from any other mainstream political party. In other words, while women are included, feminist politics appear consigned by the movement to its revolutionary past.

While Sinn Féin's current position on women is not atypical of any other mainstream party, by paying close attention to combatant women in a holistic way, we gain a better measure of the ways in which *they* pursue peace and equality, both within and outside of the republican movement. Sinn Féin's re-branding of women's struggle, like others in pursuit of state power, should not be interpreted as an accurate representation of republican women. Given this, there is far more to the story of republican women and conflict transition than simply their positions in Sinn Féin. On the contrary, they remain committed activists in various organisations in their pursuit of women's equality and a genuine peace. While formal party politics is an important front in that battle, it is nevertheless one of many. Community

activism also provides many other fronts in their post-war struggle. From eradicating domestic violence to ensuring reproductive rights; from anti-drugs campaigning to collective resistance to neo-liberal austerity - these are the struggles of republican women in pursuit of their vision of peace and equality. Focusing solely on institutional politics produces a partial and inaccurate picture of women's post-war struggles. It once again illustrates the benefits of remaining attuned to the narratives and actions of women themselves, not top-down structures, in order to yield a more accurate vision of conflict transition experiences.

Into Tomorrow

New directions for future research can be identified on the basis of these findings. The often feminist post-war politics of republican combatant women should serve as a formidable caveat to the prevailing exaltation of 'womenandpeace' (El-Bushra 2007) and the chorus of calls for women's institutional inclusion as the optimum site for feminist political activism. Throughout this research, many republican women cite state-centric structures as important yet also insufficient to deliver their political objectives. While their awareness of the limitations of formal structures as a source of feminist activism is hardly surprising, the findings here however, stand in stark contrast to the overwhelming trends within current approaches to women, peace and equality in the North of Ireland.

Given the decreasing levels of sanguinity regarding the much-celebrated SCR 1325 (Farr 2011; Gibbings 2011; Pratt & Richter-Devroe 2011), it is an opportune moment to re-examine the approaches hitherto to women, peace, equality and conflict transition. In addition, recent research from the North of Ireland suggests that the much extoled legislative affirmations of gender inequality in the GFA, has yielded little by the way of substantive gains (Cockburn 2013; O'Keefe 2013). The notion of persisting in examining 'women of peace' with a view to their institutional inclusion bequeaths a body of literature suffering

from a lack of diversification and theoretical stagnation. This research therefore arrives at an appropriate moment for signposting future feminist theorising on conflict transition which demands new and alternative perspectives.

This study contends that the primary line of feminist inquiry over-relies on drawing from a similar pool of perspectives, producing a limited and largely stagnant feminist dialogue. The apparent homogeneity of women's transitional experiences suggested by existing research is undermined by the diverse and alternative accounts contained in this research. The necessity of alternative avenues of enquiry is underscored by the hegemony of prevailing feminist calls for women's inclusion within existing structures and cultures. This study suggests the most sanguine line of investigation resides in a plural standpoint approach which eschews broad assumptions and generalisations, and instead focuses on the ways women experience multiple forms of oppression and identities. By attending to differences *between* women, this research identifies the dividends feminist research can potentially yield if it remains attuned to such multiplicities. In doing so, such an array of voices and perspectives can re-energise feminist endeavours while turning the tide away from the invariable pitfalls of essentialism.

All feminists have a stake in drawing attention to a diversity of women's roles in conflict transition, including those of combatant. Such a move however requires a re-calibration of feminist lenses. Exploring the lives of combatant women and recognising their diverse experiences should not be understood as a point of feminist weakness. All too often, the fissures among women are interpreted by some as undermining the political potential of feminism. Rather than extracting or weakening feminist post-war struggles, exploring the standpoints of combatant women can add significant theoretical understandings to the ways in which differentially positioned women respond to patriarchy in conflict transition.

Remaining acutely aware of the differences among women ensures that we expose patriarchy is all its various guises.

Unquestionably, the resurgence of interest in 'women of peace' stems from SCR 1325 where the tantalising prospect of a place at the negotiating table appears to trump all other concerns. In the fog of peace, the deafening call by many feminists to 'add women' drowns out other important, alternative voices. Despite the increasing interest in women's role in peace building and the zealous commitment among international bodies and nation-states for gender embracing, very little has changed within the realm of conflict transformation (Pankhurst 2003). Those beguiled by the liberal promise of including women and mainstreaming gender within formal processes must remain vigilant of the fact that the dismantling of patriarchy and the pursuit of feminism resides not in reformation from within but in the radical transformation of gender relations. Unfortunately, the current strategy of 'adding women' resides in the former not the latter.

In order to generate new and alternative strategies with regards to women and conflict transition, more case-studies of other marginalised groups of women are needed to instigate a meaningful feminist exchange in the literature. For too long, the relatively one-way dialogue has created a body of scholarly work which fails to reflect the diversity and multiple realities among women. In particular, there is an urgent need to expand our explorations of female combatants beyond the DDR moment and capture their entire transitionary experiences. The significant findings here certainly warrant research of combatant women in similar post-war regions. The obvious examples are of course Palestine and South Africa. While this research did not have a comparative element, the findings in this research undoubtedly prepares the ground for such a study. Building on this research, a comparative approach involving combatant women in other regions experiencing conflict transition certainly warrants further

research. Furthermore, the conflict transition experiences of loyalist women in the North of Ireland have yet to undergo significant research.

In addition, the current activism of those republican women who chose to relocate their political activism to what are termed 'dissident' or dissenter groups could provide a productive exploration of those who believe that the 'war is not over'. While initial research design for this study intended to include some women who remain involved in dissident or 'spoiler' groups, alas such an endeavour presented many challenges (Chapter Two). Both dissident and loyalist case-studies would provide distinctive and useful studies against which research such as this could be compared. As Sinn Féin steadies itself for the tantalising prospect of being in government on both sides of the Irish border, it is evident that the party will accelerate its journey of institutionalisation. Future research on republican women is warranted if we are to examine if the agency and political mobility uncovered here represents a fleeting moment or evidence of a larger resurgence of women's agitating within the Provisional republican movement.

Concluding Thoughts

It would be folly to suggest that the North of Ireland is not in a significantly better position than it was thirty years ago. With armed conflict largely absent, the city centres and rural beauty of the North do not look dissimilar to that of any other region. Peace, however, demands far more than the absence of 'conventional violence' and the North remains deeply polarised, as well as bearing many of the trademark scars of a society emerging from armed conflict. Despite the formal declaration of 'peace', the North of Ireland's institutions of government appear to be in perpetual crisis, marred by high levels of mistrust. The ubiquitous façade of smiles and handshakes, coupled with the congratulatory declarations of a consociation consensus, conceals the lingering and latent enmities of the past. An increase in

sectarian violence after the GFA, including the extending of the so-called peace walls at ethno-sectarian interfaces (Tonge 2006: 145), clearly challenges and contradicts those trumpeted declarations of a society at peace.

In addition, issues of parades, commemorations, dealing with the past, contentious (and often violent confrontations) over flags and emblems are indicative that the GFA represents a prudent form of conflict *management* as opposed to conflict *resolution*. At the time of writing, formal political parties have concluded a series of negotiations over these issues, and others, including cross-party support for an austerity budget from Westminster. Despite the alleged agreement secured by all parties in December 2014, the Stormont House Agreement has yet to be published and remains hidden from the citizens. For all the rhetoric regarding a progressive and inclusive society, recent political events only serve to remind us of the vast work still required if society there is to undergo a meaningful transformation. The recent Stormont House Agreement which remains hidden from the citizens of the North of Ireland dismally indicates however, that it is largely business as usual.

Beyond the realm of formal politics and the ethno-national/sectarian divide, many communities, particularly those in disadvantaged areas, continue to endure significant levels of economic deprivation and social exclusion. The latest collapse of global capitalism has taken its toll, with marginalised communities blighted by the double-burden of high unemployment rates and cuts to vital public services. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation which monitors poverty and social exclusion in the North, in the last five years household incomes, poverty rates and unemployment have all worsened in the North of Ireland at levels far greater than in Great Britain[89]. Between 2007 and 2013, unemployment doubled to 5.8 per cent, average household incomes fell by 10 per cent and poverty rates

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[89] To view the entire report, see http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/monitoring-poverty-and-social-exclusion-northern-ireland-2014

among young adults rose by 8 per cent. In addition, a 2014 study by Queens University, Belfast finds that suicide rates have soared, almost doubling in the aftermath of the negotiated settlement[90]. Recent figures indicate an alarming statistic that suicide is now claiming as many lives each year as the Troubles did.

Of great significance, is the fact that little has changed for women where they continue to experience high levels of physical and sexual violence, are concentrated in low-level employment, do the majority of unpaid care and continue to be the most likely to be in poverty (Cockburn 2013; Fearon & Rebouche 2006; O'Keefe 2011: 84). Given the levels of structural and cultural violence, coupled with the issues directly related to the legacy of the conflict, the North of Ireland is not a society which bears any semblance to 'a place at peace'. Any process or institution which renders such insidious and multiple instances of post-war violence as normal and acceptable lets slip the mask of elitism and androcentricism. The peace which exists in the North of Ireland today is not a genuine peace; it is a patriarchal peace.

Gender equality and women's struggle for emancipation are rarely afforded priority, particularly in conflict transition, and are often placed on the back-burner for some other more pressing concern. Feminists are often reminded by the powers that be "of the need to wait and look at the bigger picture". Cynthia Enloe retorts with trademark pinpoint precision, asking 'what if patriarchy *is* the big picture?' (2005: 280). When we examine the case of the North of Ireland, and in particular the lack of meaningful change for women there, then feminists need to remain steadfast in ensuring that the big picture always remains in view. This research consistently argued for the need for feminists to remain attuned to the vast differences *between* women as they face that big picture. Republican women interpret and

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[90] For more information on this report, see http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/suicide-rates-in-northern-ireland-soared-following-the-peace-agreement-26879484.html

experience patriarchy in different ways to other differentially positioned women, therefore they also resist it in very different ways. Alongside their other struggles against imperialism and capitalism, their feminist struggles are rooted in their day-to-day activities, embedded in working class republican communities. I am not, nor have I suggested that they hold the answers but by being attentive to their experiences, feminists can yield significant new insights into differentially situated struggles in post-war scenarios.

As women take their seats in the vast theatre of social and political life, the "big picture" on the screen is undoubtedly patriarchy. But women are positioned differently, and spread unevenly throughout this vast theatre. Some sit close to the big picture, others far away at the back; some have privileged seats, others have restricted views. Their differential seating and positioning ensures that women will see, experience and interpret the big picture in vastly different ways. As long as feminists remain mindful of these differing positions and views, then we can ensure that patriarchy - in all its many manifestations - remains the big picture.

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