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“Where There Is Dialogue, There Is Hope”

**Nation, Gender and Transversal Dialogue in Belfast, Northern Ireland**

Eitrem Holmgren, Linda

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# “WHERE THERE IS DIALOGUE, THERE IS HOPE”

NATION, GENDER AND TRANSVERSAL DIALOGUE  
IN BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND

LINDA EITREM HOLMGREN

LUND UNIVERSITY

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**SERIES EDITOR:**

Ivan Gusic, Lund University

**CORRESPONDENCE TO:**

ivan.gusic@svet.lu.se

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

It was an ordinary Sunday in Belfast in March, 2014. I was sitting in my hotel room, going through the week's interviews.

CRASH.... Silence..... CRASH..... Silence. BANG. Silence.  
“OPEN THE F\*\*\*ING DOOR!”.  
CRASH..... Silence..... BANG. “OPEN THE DOOR!”

The noise was coming from my door. I sprang out of bed, ran to the door and looked through the door's spy-hole. Outside was a masked man pointing some kind of weapon at my door, at me. He was yelling and thrusting something heavy into my locked door over and over again.

After getting over the first seconds of shock I began assessing the situation. I noticed he was not wearing a mask which would allow him to see in front of him, but rather had put his coat with a hood on backwards, so that his face was completely covered. I remember thinking that that was weird. Then I noticed that the “weapon” he was holding was actually a fire extinguisher, pointing the jet pipe towards the door which made it look like he was looking through the aiming telescope of a rifle pointed right at me. By then I calmed down, realizing that he was not going to shoot me. He kept yelling at me and thrusting the fire extinguisher into the door, making it rattle. Another man came into the area of sight allowed by the door's spy-hole. He was holding a camera phone, filming his friend and laughing. He soon realized the mistake they were making and exclaimed: “It's the wrong door!”. They both left within seconds of realizing that they had been playing a prank on the wrong person.

This experience made me reflect on the research I was doing. First of all, it is interesting that the prank was played by men, not women. This hints at the gendered dynamics of armed conflict. Second, the men involved were drunk and possibly high on a Sunday afternoon, illustrating the problems of alcoholism and addiction that Belfast struggles with today. Third, dressing up as masked men, imitating the behavior of paramilitary groups, is seen as being an acceptable and “funny” way of playing a prank on someone. This tells us

that militarism and a war-like mentality is still present in today's Belfast, a city that is supposed to characterize peace.

For me, this was a prank gone wrong. For women and men in Northern Ireland, this was real life experience during the armed conflict and, in some cases, even since then. For the majority of the population in Northern Ireland, this was a kind of incident that was not uncommon. The difference being how it ended: for me with an increased sense of caution and reflection on my work; for people in the North with being intimidated from their home or having a family torn up and witnessing a family member being beaten up, taken to prison or even killed. The situation mimicked many instances of violence during the armed conflict in the North of Ireland: placing men (paramilitary groups, police and British soldiers) as perpetrators; and women as victims. These roles, assigned to women and men during conflict, are often guided by the conservative ideas of masculinity and femininity that are frequently associated with nationalist discourses and movements (Wilcox 2010: 73). Nationalism is a gendered phenomenon which often places women in symbolic roles as guardians of the nation and its traditions (Ryan & Ward 2004), while men are idealized as the strong warrior protecting the nation from physical violence by using violence. Nationalist movements need these gendered ideologies to gain support and often seek the participation of women, but in strictly limited ways and for limited time periods (Wilcox 2010: 73).

For instance, in the North of Ireland many women, Catholic and Protestant, became actively involved in the politics of the conflict. They did not accept the role of solely being the victim, and fought in order to substantially take part in the armed conflict. Throughout the war they played roles ranging from weapon smugglers and taking up arms as members of paramilitary organizations; to being protestors and community workers. Although women have always participated in nationalist movements during armed conflicts, their activism has often been confined to the margins in the social and political life of the post-war state.

Despite the participation of women in nationalist movements, gender has long been a neglected category of analysis in the research on nation building, the

nation-state and nationalism (Blom 2000: 3). Although this gap in research has started to be filled by feminist scholars during the past two decades, International Relations theories have been slow to incorporate their findings. There is still a need for more research to be done and many issues are yet to be explored with a gender perspective.

The main goal of the study is twofold, the first aim being more general and the second more specific. Firstly, my aim is to contribute to the growing feminist literature on issues of armed conflict, specifically the intersections of gender and nation. As Cynthia Enloe argues: “a lot of people are listening. A lot of minds can be changed [...] It is the diggings and the public sharing of findings by dozens of people in dozens of countries that manage to unsettle masculinist collective thinking, moving it an inch, sometimes a yard” (Enloe 2010a: IX). Demonstrating how nations are *not* gender-neutral is part of this contribution. In addition to this, it is also important to bring attention to and make visible parties of a conflict, such as women, who are usually constructed and made invisible in theory and practice or are only perceived to be the victims of nationalist conflicts.

Secondly, I aim to give an update on the present situation of gendered nationalism in Northern Ireland, showing how discourses of nationalism intersect with discourses of masculinity and femininity; and how the identity of Northern Irish women (and men) gets shaped through nationalist discourses today. Previous research has explored the relationship between nationalism and gender in the North during the armed conflict (see Aretxaga 1997; Cockburn 1998), but little has been written on the topic since then. The dominant focus in research on the conflict in Northern Ireland tends to prioritize the ethno-nationalist antagonisms, pushing gendered research “even further than is usual on to the margins of mainstream social science” (Ashe 2012: 232). By building on this previous research and its findings, I wish to bring light to the present-day post-armed conflict situation of Northern Ireland and the possibilities for building peaceful transversal relationships between women in working-class Belfast.

The gendering of nations has dire consequences for issues of gender equality in a society. This paper shows how women’s subordinate position in the public

sphere of society is a consequence of being symbolically constructed, within nationalism, as mothers belonging to the private sphere. Therefore, understanding the intersection of gender and nation and its effect on transversal dialogue is crucial. By combining theoretical understandings of gendered nationalism with the – still quite unexplored – theory of transversalism I aim to answer the following research question:

*How is a peace-building transversal dialogue encouraged and discouraged by the way women make sense of the intersections of gender and nation in Northern Ireland?*

In order to answer this question, three more specific sub-questions have been drafted and will also be answered:

*How are Nationalist/Republican<sup>1</sup> and Unionist/Loyalist<sup>2</sup> women in working-class Belfast confronted with and make sense of the cultural, biological and national roles of motherhood?*

*How are Nationalist/Republican and Unionist/Loyalist women in working-class Belfast confronted with and make sense of the political consequences of the symbolic gendering of nationalism?*

*What is the potential for building transversal dialogue across difference among Nationalist/Republican and Unionist/Loyalist women in working-class Belfast?*

## **PAPER OVERVIEW**

Following this introductory chapter, background of the present-day situation in Belfast and Northern Ireland, as well as a short historical overview of the Troubles, are given in Chapter 2. These aspects are necessary in order to demonstrate how the sectarian divisions have been formed. Definitions of the main national identities and relevant information about Belfast are also presented. In Chapter 3, the main theories about gender, nations and nationalism are presented and concepts like gender, nation, and nationalism are defined. In Chapter 4, the methodology of the paper is discussed, including

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<sup>1</sup> People who believe that Northern Ireland should be part of the Irish Republic

<sup>2</sup> People loyal to the Monarchy of the UK and oppose unification with Ireland



sections on feminist methodology, case study method and interviews. In Chapter 5, the material collected in the interviews is analyzed in accordance with the theories presented in Chapter 3. The way gendered national identities have traditionally been constructed and used, symbolically and substantially, in Northern Ireland is shown, providing background knowledge and acting as a backdrop for the rest of the analysis. In Chapter 6, the conclusions of the paper are presented, including answers to the research questions.

## **2. THE CASE OF BELFAST**

Cynthia Enloe has eloquently argued that “[w]ars don’t end abruptly [...] Postwar is an era that can last a very long time” (Enloe 2010b: 224). This is evident in the case of Northern Ireland. Since the signing of a peace agreement in 1998, Northern Ireland has had relative success in creating mechanisms such as principles of non-violence and a cease-fire monitoring body to deal with security issues (Mac Ginty 2008: 112). Despite this, there has been a failure to deal with the issues related to the chronic mistrust between the societies (ibid.) and the Agreement has not managed to challenge the basis on which the conflict is founded and reproduced (Shirlow & Murtagh 2006: 35).

During the 2000s, Belfast has experienced an increase in informal, more sectarianized and repetitive forms of violence, such as interface<sup>3</sup> rioting and attacks upon symbols of tradition (Shirlow & Murtagh 2006: 3; Mac Ginty 2008: 121). This type of violence is largely sectarian and conformed to the Catholic-Nationalist versus Protestant-Unionist positions, but usually based on local grievances rather than a formally expressed political project (Mac Ginty 2008: 121). For example, between 1996 and 2004, 6623 sectarian incidents took place, just in northern Belfast (Shirlow & Murtagh 2006: 52).

Shirlow and Murtagh argue that “[p]ublic discourse within Belfast is driven by poverty, sectarianism, racism, myth and cultural hyperbole” (2006: 2). Poverty is key here, as there is a high overlap between the poorest communities and the places of conflict-related violence (Ní Aoláin et al. 2011: 247). This is evident in Belfast as middle-class communities have more or less stood outside the

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<sup>3</sup> Places where the two communities live side by side separated by a wall

armed conflict, living in areas materially unaffected by it (Rooney 2000: 174f). Unemployment, anti-social behavior and mental health issues present big problems in working-class areas today. Belfast has suffered high rates of depression and soaring suicide rates among young people, among the highest in Europe (Dawson 2010: 16).

In formal politics the situation has also been unstable over the past decade. The Northern Ireland Assembly has been suspended four times since 1998 due to conflicts over issues such as the decommissioning of weapons, the latest suspension lasting until May 2007. During these periods of time, Direct Rule from London has been reintroduced (Shirlow & Murtagh 2006: 183). Since 2007 the North has been governed by a constituent assembly, since 2012 led by First Minister Peter Robinson of the Democratic Ulster Party (DUP) and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness of Sinn Féin.

### SECTARIAN IDENTITIES

To understand the present situation in Northern Ireland, a definition of *sectarianism* is needed. Sectarianism is represented by a strong internal unity within a group that shows intolerance towards other views, most often in a political context. This tends to result in discrimination of and hatred towards the other group, arising from attaching importance to perceived differences based on religion or politics. In Northern Ireland, the sectarianism is connected to politics (Unionists/Loyalists vs. Nationalists/Republicans), religion (Protestants vs. Catholics) and national identity (Britishness vs. Irishness). However, the conflict is *not* based upon religion; religion rather acts as a boundary marker regarding forms of Britishness and Irishness (Shirlow & Murtagh 2006: 15).

*Unionists* and *Loyalists* articulate the idea of an identity based around Protestant culture, with a distinct history and allegiance to the British monarchy (Ashe 2006A: 150). As the majority group within Northern Ireland, they believe they have the right to determine its sovereignty (ibid)<sup>4</sup>. Unionist/Loyalist are thus

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<sup>4</sup> In 2012 the population of Northern Ireland was constituted of 53 percent Protestants and 44 percent Catholics.

political terms for people, most often Protestant, who want to keep Northern Ireland part of the UK and usually identify as British.

*Republicans* and *Nationalists* see the Irish people as having been denied their political, civil and cultural rights in the North and have been forced to live under the illegitimate sovereignty of a foreign British power (Ashe 2006A: 150). Nationalist<sup>5</sup>/Republican are thus political terms for people, most often Catholics, who want the North to be part of the Irish Republic and usually identify as Irish.

## THE TROUBLES

Many historic events are actively used by the nationalist movements to construct the idea of a unified nation today. This section therefore focuses on key events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that are of great relevance to present day politics and conflict.

*The Troubles* is the name one of Europe's most intractable armed conflicts (Ranstorp & Brun 2013: 7): the violence in Northern Ireland that started at the end of the 1960s, caused by the friction between Nationalists/Republicans and Unionists/Loyalists (McCullough 2010: 236). It had two main dimensions: the British Army fighting against Republican paramilitary groups; and Republican forces fighting against pro-British Loyalist paramilitary groups (Dawson 2010: 8f). About 3600 lives were lost during the Troubles (ibid.).

In 1921 the *Anglo-Irish Treaty* was signed by Ireland and Great Britain, ending a war between them. The treaty divided the island in two: six Protestant counties of the North came to form one unit and the rest of Ireland the other (Aretxaga 1997: 15; McCullough 2010: 203ff). Northern Ireland<sup>6</sup>, with its 67 percent Protestant majority, voted to remain part of the United Kingdom and became locally governed by a Protestant administration (Ranstorp & Brun 2013: 10). The result was "an inherently unstable state" filled with violence and discrimination (Aretxaga 1997: 30). Discrimination of the Catholic population

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<sup>5</sup> to differentiate between nationalism as a general phenomena and Nationalism as in the Irish Nationalist movement, I have capitalized Nationalism when referring to the Irish movement/identity.

<sup>6</sup> Republicans usually refer to it as 'the North', while Loyalists say 'Northern Ireland'

existed everywhere, but most importantly in jobs, housing and electoral politics (Cockburn 1998: 19). Electoral systems were rigged, the poorest people (often Catholics) were not allowed to vote and housing allocations were used to maintain the Unionist majority (McCullough 2010: 234; Jakobsson 1993: 9; Ranstorp & Brun 2013: 10; Ward 2004: 191).

In 1967, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was established to use peaceful protest to overthrow these injustices (Ranstorp & Brun 2013: 11; Jakobsson 1993: 11). NICRA organized peaceful marches the following years demanding fair local government, jobs on merit, housing on need and a fair electoral system (Cockburn 1998: 19). The demonstrations were followed by counter-demonstrations and unrest (Ranstorp & Brun 2013: 11). Many marches quickly turned into riots (McCullough 2010: 236).

These demonstrations-turned-riots were the prelude for the Troubles and the rule of the gun soon became more important than the rule of law (McCullough 2010: 235). Snipers firing on civilians, areas becoming no-go-zones and barricaded, random house and body searches, censoring of media, beatings and gunfire became part of life in Belfast (ibid. 236; Jakobsson 1993). Random murders of civilians, bombs in bars and shopping centers were not uncommon, with politicians being shot dead and British troops and security forces routinely targeted (Roulston 1997: 44). The Unionist government lost control of the situation (ibid.) and the administration was disbanded, Westminster imposing direct rule and governing the North until 1998 (Cockburn 1998: 20; Shirlow & Murtagh 2006: 183).

The police force's, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), failure to stop the violence forced the British government to deploy troops to Ireland in 1969<sup>7</sup> (Ranstorp & Brun 2013: 13). Initially, the British troops were welcomed by the Catholic population, but "their heavy handed tactics soon turned the Catholics against them" (McCullough 2010: 237). The security forces were granted in principle unrestricted authority (Jakobsson 1993: 13), including the "neutral" RUC, who in many instances protected the interests of the Protestant

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<sup>7</sup> The troops were withdrawn in 2007 (McEvoy 2010: 141)

community (McCullough 2010: 235). The Catholic population was meanwhile defended by the IRA (ibid.)<sup>8</sup>.

The violence continued and escalated during the 1970s following the introduction of *internment*<sup>9</sup> in 1971; *Bloody Sunday*<sup>10</sup> in 1972; and a *criminalizing strategy* in 1976, where the imprisoned perpetrators were to be seen and treated as criminals, not political prisoners (Jakobsson 1993: 14). Detainees were put through brutal interrogation methods and tried in Diplock courts without juries (ibid.). This led to protests from Republican prisoners: the blanket protest<sup>11</sup>, a dirty protest<sup>12</sup> and eventually hunger strikes in 1981, resulting in the death of ten Republican prisoners. The Thatcher government of Britain denied all responsibility for what was happening (Roulston 1997: 53). Communities reached a point of near-hysteria (ibid. 51), tensions rose and sectarian violence increased.

## **BUILDING PEACE**

In 1970, *Women Together* was formed as a cross-community peace movement (Roulston & Davies 2000: 188). In 1976, Catholic Mairead Corrigan and Protestant Betty Williams created a peace movement called the *Women's Peace Movement* (Aretxaga 1997: 181) or the *Peace People* (Fairweather et al 1984: 28). The movement spread quickly amongst Loyalist and Republican women, holding rallies of 20 000 in Belfast and Derry (ibid. 28f). Corrigan and Williams were later rewarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts (Roulston & Davies 2000: 188). These are the closest things to transversal dialogue that have been implemented at a formal level.

There have also been several attempts to negotiate peace inter-governmentally between Britain, Ireland and the North. The first attempt was in 1973 when

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<sup>8</sup> An internal split within the IRA in 1969 resulted in the formation of the Provisional IRA (Ranstorp & Brun 2013: 11f). For the duration of this paper, the provisional IRA will be referred to as the IRA.

<sup>9</sup> the imprisonment of suspected 'terrorists' without the right of early trial (Cockburn 1998: 20).

<sup>10</sup> British soldiers shot dead 14 civilians during a march (Dawson 2010: 90)

<sup>11</sup> Republican prisoners refused to wear the prison uniform and instead went naked, save for a blanket (Fairweather et al. 1984: 50).

<sup>12</sup> Prisoners refused to leave their cells either to wash or to slop-out, instead trying to get rid of their waste by throwing it out the window, or smearing their feces on the walls (ibid. 52).

the British government tried to restore self-rule to Belfast in the form of an assembly, in the *Sunningdale Agreement* (Jakobsson 1999: 7). The second attempt was made in the mid-80s, when the British and Irish governments signed the *Anglo-Irish Agreement* (ibid. 8; McCullough 2010: 239f). The third attempt was in 1991 when multilateral negotiations were initiated (Jakobsson 1999: 10). In 1993, the *Joint Declaration for Peace*<sup>13</sup> was signed by the British and Irish Prime Ministers (ibid. 12). Finally in 1994, the IRA and the Unionist/Loyalist Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), Ulster Defense Association (UDA) and Red Hand Commando agreed to disarm in order to negotiate a peace (ibid. 13; McCullough 2010: 240).

Years of multilateral peace talks, in spite of the breakdown of ceasefires and parties leaving negotiations, eventually resulted in a peace agreement. On Good Friday 1998, the concerned parties signed *the Belfast Agreement*, also known as *the Good Friday Agreement* (Fearon & McWilliams 2000: 129)<sup>14</sup>. All the participants promised to use only peaceful and democratic methods in the ongoing negotiations (McCullough 2010: 241). It was agreed that there will be no change to the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, unless a majority of its population voted in favor of a change (ibid.).

The Agreement was put to a vote in Northern Ireland and the Republic. 81 percent of the Northern Irish population participated in the referendum (Jakobsson 1999: 29), and the majority of them, 72 percent, voted in favor of the Agreement (McCullough 2010: 241). The Northern Ireland Assembly was formed and took over decision-making from London (Shirlow & Murtagh 2006: 183).

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<sup>13</sup> also known as *the Downing Street Declaration*

<sup>14</sup> For Protestants, the Agreement is referred to as the Belfast Agreement while Republicans refer to it as the Good Friday Agreement. (McEvoy 2010: 149). Henceforth it will be referred to as the Agreement.

### 3. GENDERING THE NATION

To answer the research question(s), theories of nationalism are used. The major theories of nationalism are gender-blind (Malečková 2008: 197; Anand 2010: 284; Wenk 2000: 63) and because of this, they are not that useful when studying nations as gendered phenomenon. In line with the following quote by Cynthia Enloe, feminist theories focusing on gendered nationalism are used instead:

[I]f we do not try to make feminist sense of wars, we are unlikely to make reliable sense of any war (Enloe 2010b: 218).

The following sections include: definitions of the main theoretical concepts; the intersections of gender and nation; the concept of transversal politics; and the operationalization of the theories is outlined.

#### DEFINITIONS OF THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

Some definitions of key concepts are presented in the following sections to give the reader background knowledge.

##### *GENDER*

Gender is defined as being socially constructed through interaction and varies according to social context (Shepherd 2010: 8; Sjoberg & Via 2010: 4). It is continually reproduced by processes of identity construction (Wilcox 2010: 64) and must be performed within particular cultural and historical boundaries for it to be recognizable and acceptable (Shepherd 2010: 12; Whitworth 1994: 42). Masculinity and femininity are constructed in relation to one another (Kronsell 2012: 8), reinforcing men's stated superiority (Tickner 1992: 6).

Although genders are socially constructed, and therefore have the ability to change or be changed, this does not make them or their social implications any less real (Sjoberg & Via 2010: 4). On the contrary, gender relations are well-protected and cemented in a way that makes it very difficult to undermine or challenge them. They cannot be easily opted out of (Rönblom & Eduards 2008: 13). The privileging of masculinity makes the unequal relationship

between men/masculinity and women/femininity to appear “natural”, making critique and resistance difficult.

#### *INTERSECTIONALITY*

The unequal gendered relation of power intersects with other dimensions of power, such as class, ethno-nationality, age and sexuality (Cockburn 2010: 110; Kronsell 2012: 8). These power relations shape each other and use the same institutions and cultural processes to achieve their effects (Cockburn 2010: 110). Not paying attention to the oppression that occurs differently depending on which part of the identity-dimension one looks at can help promote a hegemonic social order that legitimizes the exclusion of certain groups (Ålund 1999: 157f).

In this paper the focus is placed upon three dimensions of identity: nation, gender and class. The *emphasis* is placed on the relationship between gender and national identity, as this is the aim of the study. Since the study takes place in working-class areas, class identity is included in the analysis to the extent that it affects the intersections of gender and nation. If other categories of identity are brought up in the analyzed material, these are also analyzed to the extent that they influence gender and nation.

#### *NATIONS AND NATIONALISM*

Just like gender, nations and national identities are constructed, or in the words of Benedict Anderson (2006): imagined. A nation can be defined as:

a community of people whose members are bound together by a sense of solidarity rooted in an historic attachment to a homeland and a common culture, and by a consciousness of being different (Johnston & Longhurst 2010: 113).

Nations are configured through specific sets of histories, focusing on the boundaries of exclusion and inclusion (Eley 2000: 32) as well as myths of common destiny (Yuval-Davis 1997: 43). As Anderson argues, “to compensate for the relatively short history of the nation, nationalists turn myth into history to give the nation a long and distinguished past” (Anderson in Pierson 2000: 48). Flags, anthems, uniforms, monuments and ceremonies are used to remind



members of the national collectivity of their common heritage and culture (Smith 1991: 16f).

The shared commonality of a nation can be politically mobilized (Anand 2010: 282) and used to turn one group of people against another previously living together in peace (Slocum-Bradley 2008: 1). Cockburn argues that “the notion of nation always suggests a project of power. [...] nations necessarily involve nationalism” (1998: 37). It is therefore important to also define nationalism:

an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population [...] [that] constitute[s] an actual or potential ‘nation’ (Smith 1991: 73).

Nationalism involves the process of “Othering”: using binary framing of “us” versus “them” to assert the identity of one nation and distinguish it from others (Anand 2010: 289; Wibben 2011: 108; Mayer 2000: 1). “Others” are rendered inferior, leading to a justification of the violence of war, directed towards “them” (Peterson 2010: 21). “Othering” is often a gendered and racialized process (ibid; Pierson 2000:53), as members of other nations are constructed in terms of femininity or subordinate masculinity (Wilcox 2010: 72f). Nationalism is thus often based on conservative and traditional ideas of differences between the sexes used to demarcate the nation from “Others”.

### **GENDERING THE NATION: BIOLOGICAL, CULTURAL, AND NATIONAL MOTHERHOOD**

Constructions of gender are central to the construction of nations, which are gendered in several ways and on different levels. By using specific gender roles, nations are able to continuously (re)construct themselves and their collective identities (Yuval-Davis 1997: 66f). A key role is *motherhood*, which can be found both in symbols and in practice. Women “bear a double burden of representation: as national cultural icons and as mothers of citizens” (Werbner & Yuval-Davis 1999: 14). The main points of women’s roles as mothers are presented as follows:

*Women are biological reproducers – mothers – of members of the nation*

*Women are symbolically constructed as cultural mothers – the carriers and reproducers of the identity of the nation*

*The nation is symbolically constructed as a woman, often a mother*

#### BIOLOGICAL MOTHERHOOD

Women are biological reproducers of members of the national collectivity (Yuval-Davis 1997). This is of importance since, as argued by Yuval-Davis (1997: 26), “given the central role that the myth (or reality) of ‘common origin’ plays in the construction of most ethnic and national collectivities, one usually joins the collectivity by being born into it”. The consequence of this is often a legal framework regulating reproductive rights such as states adopting policies to regulate child-rearing. Some policies encourage and promote an increase in births to ensure that the collectivity will survive (Cockburn 1998: 43), others limit the number of children being born and some prevent certain women from having children to ensure a “pure” national collective (Yuval-Davis 1997). Another consequence of the centrality of motherhood and biological reproduction, is that rape is often used as an effective way of “penetrating” an enemy nation’s defenses (Cockburn 1998: 43).

Being the *biological* reproducer of a nation affects, and is affected by, being the *cultural* reproducer. By nations symbolically focusing on women’s role as mothers and cultural reproducers, women’s identities as biological reproducers become central for nationalist movements.

#### CULTURAL MOTHERHOOD

Women are also symbolically constructed as mothers of the nation and as cultural reproducers (Yuval-Davis 1997). Their responsibilities are articulated in terms of culture: to preserve traditions, language and culture (Wenk 2000: 65). Women are thus constructed as symbolic transmitters of nations (Yuval-Davis 1997: 2, 61), and are represented as guardians of the nation’s unique tradition (Oikarinen 1996: 208f). As caretakers and guardians of the family and community, women become central in producing and maintaining cultural group identity (Jenichen 2010: 141). Gender relations are often seen as constituting the “essence” of national cultures, as ways of life to be passed

from mother to child (Yuval-Davis 1997: 43). The idea of motherhood has therefore been of crucial importance for nations (Anand 2010: 285; Kronsell 2012: 22; Thapar-Björkert & Shepherd 2010: 270).

So, women are constructed, personally and collectively, as the symbolic bearers of the nation's identity and honor and thus become the embodiment of the nation (Yuval-Davis 1997: 45). By behaving and dressing "properly", women come to embody the boundaries of the collectivity (ibid. 46) and mark the difference between nations (Anand 2010: 286).

When a collectivity feels threatened by "Others", the management and control of cultural differences intensifies (Yuval-Davis 1997: 46). This leads to an increased and stricter emphasis on and regulation of the cultural codes defining the characteristics of a "proper woman" as well as "proper" relationships between men and women (ibid.). In times of conflict, it thus becomes very important for nations to both protect *and* control women.

#### *NATIONAL MOTHERHOOD*

Nations are often symbolized by a female figure, most often a mother (Yuval-Davis 1997: 45; Lorenz 2008: 46; Goldstein 2001: 369), for example Mother Ireland. Mothers thus also have a special position in the narratives about the origins of nations (Wenk 2000: 66).

In conflicts the female nation is seen as being threatened by foreign men and needs to be defended (Lorenz 2008: 46). Nationalist violence is therefore often legitimized in gendered terms: men are asked to defend and fight for the feminized nation, to protect "their" women and "their" women's honor (ibid.). The metaphors of family used in nationalism replicate the patriarchy and traditional norms of conventional familial forms (Eley 2000: 32). These hegemonic constructions of gender often go against the interests of women (Yuval-Davis 1997: 67) and lead to gender being profoundly essentialized: men are warriors and women are nurturers (Cockburn 1998: 42). By using this type of imagery and reasoning, men are enabled to take violent action which is made to seem moral and even commendable (Wilcox 2010: 75).

Defense of the national interest is thus filled with positive symbols of masculine power (Horn 2010: 60) and nationalist movements are foremost expressions of masculinized bodies (Anand 2010: 288). Not only are women within the nation feminized, but enemies are also dehumanized or feminized (Wilcox 2010: 71), constructing them as inferior. This production of gender identities has been a necessary condition of nationalism and helps legitimate the nationalist movement by naturalizing the domination of one group (ibid. 74).

### **POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF GENDERED NATIONS**

In this section practical aspects of the gendering of the nation are discussed. These can be seen as consequences of the symbolic gendering of the nation as a mother, although this is not a one-way process. The practical, political aspects are influenced by, and in turn, influence the symbolic gendering of the nation focusing on motherhood – they are interdependent.

#### *HISTORY – WHERE ARE THE WOMEN?*

Without the reconstruction of a common history, a national movement cannot exist (Wenk 2000: 66). Nations tend to exaggerate the past, while often not seeing that the national narrative is based on myths (Mayer 2000: 3). History is thus of utmost importance, regardless of how “true” it is. In the histories of nations, women tend to be forgotten or misrepresented. Their symbolic classifications as mothers result in that battles (armed and unarmed) fought and won by women tend to be erased or forgotten (see Ward 2000). The narratives of nations are constructed by those who control the writing of history, which usually tends to be men (Ward 2000: 242; Berger & Lorenz 2008: 543). With women, as mothers, being relegated to the private sphere of the home; men can often construct national narratives without fear of being contradicted.

Despite the misconception of national histories, women have always participated in the more “masculine” parts of nationalist movements. But what happens with the gender relations and women’s roles in society when the nationalist struggle is over? This is discussed in the following section.

*POST-WAR: (UN)EQUAL CITIZENSHIP AND PARTICIPATION*

During advanced states of nationalist struggles women are allowed and even encouraged to act publicly (Anand 2010: 287). Then, during the period of initial national consolidation of the new state, women are often granted less freedom than during the struggle (ibid.). Once peace is restored, women are urged to step aside and return to “their” domain, the home (ibid.; Enloe 1990). Women are thus often excluded from the national collective and are seen as objects rather than subjects (Yuval-Davis 1997: 47; Puechguirbal 2010: 172). So, in moments of crisis the active involvement of women has been tolerated, solicited and sometimes celebrated, but when the struggle has ended women’s participation and power has often been resented and suppressed (Pierson 2000: 46).

This has to do with the private/public divide that is integral to the conservative gender order of nationalism. States have offered a particular powerful solution to questions of belonging, identity and power by basing its construction on this divide (Hansen 2010: 23). The gendering of nations has legitimized the public/private distinction, “banishing” women to the private sphere of the family (Werbner & Yuval-Davis 1999: 14), while at the same time reproducing the constructions of gender that keeps it in place.

This is directly connected to issues of citizenship, the civic dimension of nationalist projects. By being symbolically and practically confined to the private space of the home, women are removed from the public sphere of politics, obstructing their citizenship. Women have often been denied a role as equal citizens as a result of being placed in the private sphere and being elevated as reproducers of the nation (Werbner & Yuval-Davis 1999: 12; McClintock 2002: 90). Due to this, women occupy an ambivalent position as citizens. As Mercer (1990) argues:

on the one hand, [women] are considered fully fledged members of the political community – often, together with their children, its most precious possessions [...] On the other hand; they are subjected to special rules and regulations aimed at controlling their behaviour (Werbner and Yuval-Davis 1999:13).

By being conflated with the private and primarily constructed as mothers, women are excluded from public institutions of power and sometimes from public life. This then leads to women's roles as biological, cultural and national mothers become even more central to the community, and motherhood as the main identity for women becomes emphasized, regulated and encouraged. Thus, the cycle of gendered nationalism continues.

Due to women's exclusion from the public arena, a main issue for the study of nation and gender has been to ask if nationalism emancipates or domesticates women. As research has shown that although women contribute actively to nationalist struggles, they seldom gain advances in gender equality (Ashe 2006A: 159), some argue that nationalism is at odds with gender equality. Others see nationalism as a way for women to gain rights that are previously reserved for men.

### BEYOND NATIONALISM?

As previously discussed, the symbolic gendering of the nation that centers on motherhood has practical consequences for the life of the nation – socially, economically and politically. The figure below shows the different ways in which gender and nation converge; and how these convergences relate to each other. By influencing each other, they build a cycle that self-reinforces the gendered understandings of nations.

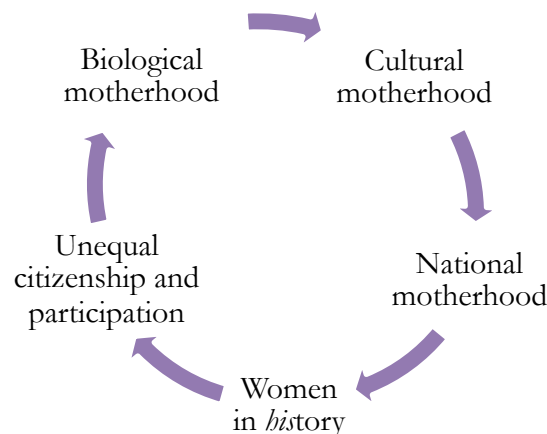


FIGURE 1 *The ways that gender and nation converge, or intersect, with each other. The figure has been modeled by me after the previously presented theoretical understandings.*

This wheel of gendered nationalism spins continuously, in the process reinforcing itself. It not only reinforces a conservative construction of gender, but also helps maintain and legitimate the continuation of conflict between competing nations.

So, is there any way of breaking this cycle that reinforces both women's positions as second-class citizens *and* the continuation of conflict? It has been argued that to build a sustainable peace, the transformation of unequal gender relations is necessary (Cockburn 2010: 110). Since conservative gender relations are at the heart of nationalism, challenging them might be a way of challenging nationalistic understandings of the "Other". Women's struggles for rights thus hold important potentials for peace-building (Jenichen 2010: 137).

One method of eliminating the inequality of conflict-torn societies *and* building peace is called transversal dialogue (Werbner & Yuval-Davis 1999). This method was born out of meetings between women from different sides of ethno-national conflicts and is a description of a political activity, a way of organizing peace-building dialogues, *and* a normative model of political activism (Yuval-Davis 2006: 280).

#### *TRANSVERSAL DIALOGUE*

Overall, there is quite limited research on the topic of transversal dialogue<sup>15</sup>, even though it is used more frequently in practice in grass-roots level projects. Below is a summary of the theorization of it.

There are three key characteristics of transversalism. *Firstly*, it recognizes that from each positioning the world is seen differently and knowledge based on just one positioning is unfinished (Yuval-Davis 2006: 281). Building transversal dialogue across difference is thus a way to problematize women's homogeneity, replacing the identity politics<sup>16</sup> of yesterday (ibid. 276; Cockburn & Hunter 1999) and the relativism of postmodern feminism that sometimes paralyzes action (Yuval-Davis 1997: 125; 1999: 98). It is recognized that one

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<sup>15</sup> Transversal dialogue, transversal politics and transversalism are used synonymously

<sup>16</sup> Identity politics assumes that "any member of any social category or identity can speak for all the other members of that category" (Yuval-Davis 2006: 277).

woman cannot be seen as representing all women, not even all members of her specific ethno-national collective (Yuval-Davis 2006: 280).

*Secondly*, transversal politics follows the principle of encompassment of difference by equality (Yuval-Davis & Werbner 1999). In other words, differences are important and should be encompassed by notions of equality, rather than replace them (Yuval-Davis 2006: 281). The social differences in location must be recognized and respected and grasped in all their complex intersections instead of being understood as a single prioritized identity (Werbner & Yuval-Davis 1999: 9f).

*Thirdly*, transversalism differentiates between positioning, identity and values (Yuval-Davis 2006: 281). It is based on the premise that positionings like class, gender and sexuality, cannot be automatically conflated with political values (Werbner & Yuval-Davis 1999: 9). Therefore, activists should not automatically see themselves as representatives of their collectivities, but rather as advocates working to promote their common cause (Yuval-Davis 2006: 282). This is based on the idea that groups can share common value systems across differential positionings and identities (Yuval-Davis 1997: 131). The message, rather than the messenger, is key to transversalism (*ibid.*).

To manage this, feminists have introduced the concepts of *rooting* and *shifting*. Each participant brings with them the reflective knowledge of their identity and positioning (*ibid.*). This represents the *rooting*. It is important that rooting does not render the participants incapable of movement (Cockburn 1998: 9). *Shifting* entails putting oneself in the situation of those with whom they are in dialogue with, the “Others” (Yuval-Davis 2006: 282). This process should not involve de-centering oneself or abandoning one’s sources of belonging (Cockburn 1998: 9).

The goal is to listen to the situated knowledge of the other participants and empathetically imagining and positioning oneself in the position of them (Yuval-Davis 2006: 283). By defining the boundaries between each other in terms of what they want to achieve instead of in terms of who they are, transversal politics can be achieved (Jenichen 2010: 144f; Yuval-Davis 1997).



The transversal coming together should be not with the members of the other group *en bloc*, but with those who, in their different rooting, share values and goals compatible with one's own (Yuval-Davis 1997: 130f).

The aim of transversal dialogue is to reach closer to a shared reality (Collins cited in Werbner & Yuval-Davis 1999: 10). This is not always possible and antagonistic interest of people situated in different positionings are not always reconcilable (Yuval-Davis 1997: 130f).

## FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

The operationalization of the theoretical concepts is explained in the following sections. The analysis is foremost based on interviews, and therefore depends on the *perceptions* of women, and do not represent an ultimate, universal, and objective “truth”. The focus is placed on how women are confronted with and make sense of the intersections of gender and nation. The interviews are then anchored in previous research, bringing in empirical data and conclusions from other studies.

### MOTHERHOOD

The operationalization of motherhood is based on the three connected identities as mothers:

(1) *biological motherhood* – whether or not there is a societal pressure to have a certain amount of kids.

(2) *cultural motherhood* – “rules” about raising kids; family life; maintaining traditions; and how women are allowed to dress, behave and participate in public life.

(3) *national motherhood* – how the nation as a whole is imagined: does the nation take the figure of a woman?

### POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES

The operationalization of the political consequences of the gendered nation is based on two spheres of interest:

(1) *skewed history writing* – the participation of women in the Troubles versus the historical legacy they receive.

(2) *post-war society in which women's agency is denied* – The peace process is reviewed, including women's inclusion in negotiations and contemporary views of the Agreement. The consequences of growing up and living in segregated societies due to armed conflict are analyzed. Lastly, gender equality in the post-Agreement society is investigated focusing on the public participation of women from the perspective of the interviewees.

#### BEYOND NATIONALISM

The operationalization of transversal dialogue is based on three things:

(1) *the compatibility of feminist and nationalist ideas* – what women have gained or lost in the nationalist struggles regarding gender equality.

(2) *ideas about the future* – women's dreams for the future.

(3) *cross-community relations and projects* – women's experiences of cross-community projects and relations, rewards and difficulties.

## 4. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This is a *descriptive study*: it answers questions asking *how* (Esaiasson et al. 2002: 35f). Of course, descriptive studies need to contribute more than just a description. Therefore, the material needs to be used in an interesting way based on a set of concepts, reaching conclusions other than obvious ones (ibid.). This is what I aim to do by using the theory outlined previously. The goal is to widen the understanding of the phenomena of interest: the intersection of gender and nation. The results can be seen as a foundational groundwork for anyone wishing to increase their understanding of the subject (Thomsson 2011: 30).

The study is also of a *comparative* nature. The focus is placed on a comparison of two communities in Belfast. This study also contains *normative* aspects, as it

contains a vision of how the world ought to be organized; contrasting with the way the world is currently structured to the disadvantage of women (Wibben 2011: 11). Even though the main goal is not to present a normative claim, a particular political vision – feminism – is articulated throughout.

The following sections of this chapter outline the methodological choices made: the choice of case; interview method; reflections on subjectivity; participatory method; the way the material has been transcribed and analyzed; and a discussion of how the research results can be used.

### **CASE STUDY: BELFAST**

To narrow down the geographical area of analysis, two communities in Belfast were chosen: Falls and Shankill. The communities are situated side by side (see map below). The Falls area in West Belfast is predominantly Catholic/Republican/Nationalist. The Shankill area in northwest Belfast is predominantly Protestant/Loyalist/Unionist. I wanted to avoid supporting the lack of interest the academic community (and media) has shown for the Unionist communities and therefore choose to include both communities. Both areas mainly house working-class families.

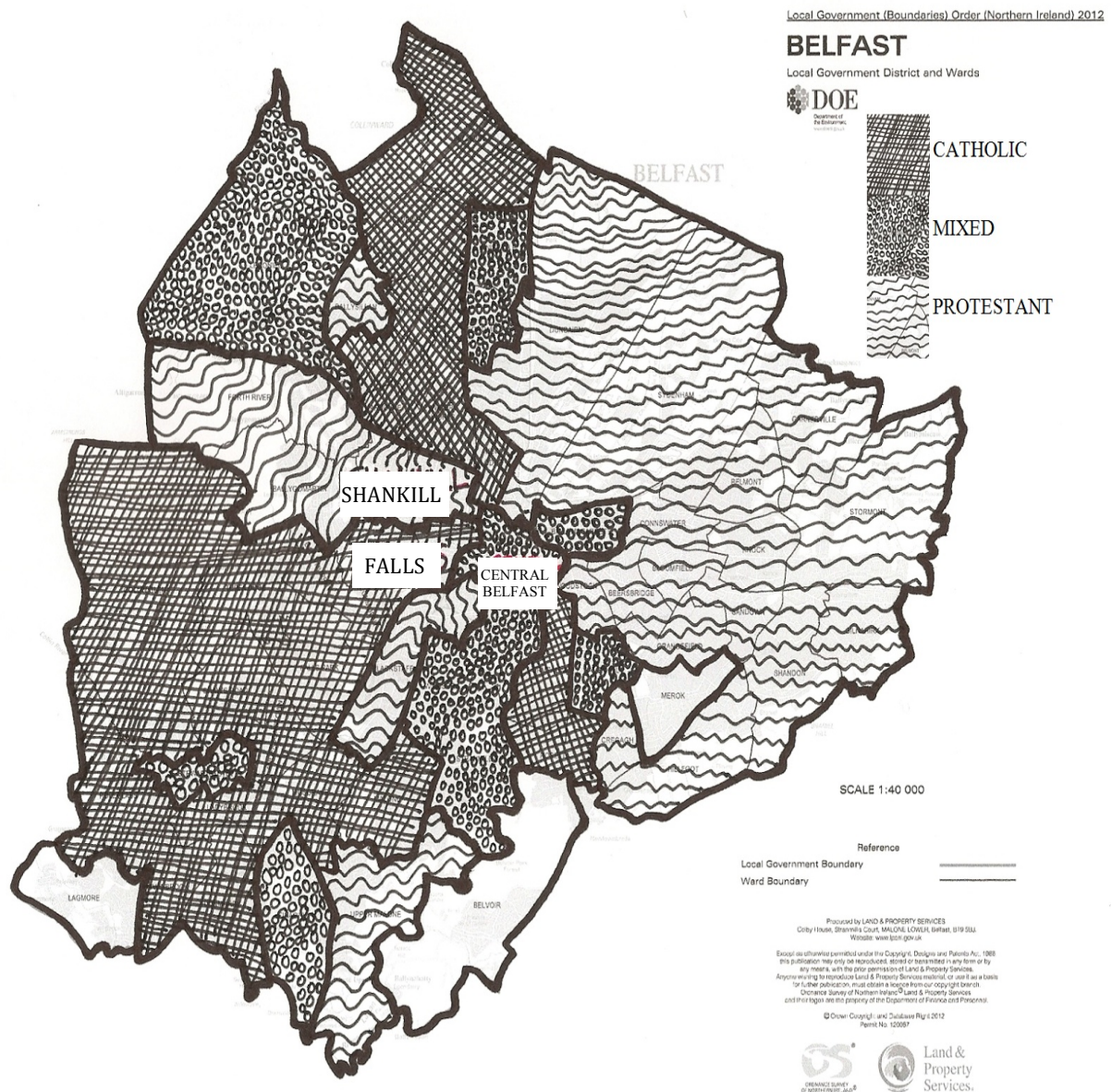


FIGURE 2 Map showing the different communities in Belfast.<sup>17</sup>

Both the Falls and Shankill have historically had strong nationalist movements and identities because of their centrality during the Troubles. Almost 40 percent of the killings took place in these communities (Dawson 2010:10). Due

<sup>17</sup> The map is based on statistics taken from the 2011 Census of Northern Ireland, from the website of NINIS of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). The original map of the Belfast wards for 2012 can be found on the Department of Environment's website.

to being hit hard by violence during the Troubles, segregation among the different groups was cemented (Nordlöf-Lagerkranz & Karlsson). This has led to a polarization of identities and heightened friction between them (Dawson 2010:10). Segregated areas such as these are often places of social exclusion within which resistance against “Others” is commonplace (Shirlow & Murtagh 2006: 1). The greater Falls and Shankill therefore provide a setting of contemporary communities where nationalistic identities are still strong, allowing for the research questions to be explored and answered.

## **INTERVIEWING WOMEN**

Qualitative interviews as a method is the most appropriate to use to answer the research questions. It is difficult, if not impossible, to answer the questions by using quantitative data or by only reading and analyzing texts. These methods require there to be quantitative and qualitative data already produced about women in present-day Belfast, which is not the case. Conducting a qualitative interview study can help us understand a complex reality including contradicting meanings (Mattingly & Lawlor 2000 in Wibben 2011: 100).

### *WHO AND HOW MANY?*

The analysis is mainly based on interviews with women conducted in the greater Falls and Shankill areas during the spring of 2014. The participants were chosen through the Falls Women’s Centre (FWC) and the Shankill Women’s Centre (SWC). Both centers offer self-development and confidence-building courses for women, in addition to more traditional classes in spelling, math, and computer science (Cockburn 1998: 63). The centers also offer childcare, as well as cross-community projects (SWC website; FWC website).

The participants were chosen by using two methods. The first, and most common, was that I approached women at activities the centers hosted and asked if I could interview them. The second method, used only in a few cases, was the snowball method – the initial interviewees helped me find additional people to interview (Esaiasson et al 2002: 212).

The aim was to be able to reach “average” local women. The interviewees are women who visit the center; as well as some staff members. They are all older

than 21 and have extensive experience of living and/or growing up in Belfast. To my knowledge, all of the interviewees identify as heterosexual and most of them have kids and are, or have been, married. Sexuality has not been specifically looked at as a dimension of identity in this study.

I decided to do at least 10 interviews. According to Thomsson, doing about 10 interviews should be enough to explore the research questions, develop an understanding of the subject contributing to reflection, as well as finding variations that enrich the knowledge given (2011: 56). When in Belfast, I adhered to the idea of reaching “saturation”: when enough people have been interviewed to be able to interpret a plausible and interesting understanding of the material, the researcher has reached saturation (ibid. 55; Esaiasson et al 2002: 187). As Kvale and Brinkmann argue: “beyond a certain point, adding more respondents will yield less and less new knowledge” (2009: 113).

Based on both the temporal and monetary limitations of doing fieldwork, and the research questions that I wish to answer, I conducted 14 interviews: 7 with women in the Falls (including 2 staff) and 7 with women in the Shankill (including 2 staff). The staff interviews were conducted to gain an overview societal perspective that is broader than the more individual-based perspective contributed in the main interviews. I made sure to interview an equal amount of women from each community.

#### *WHERE AND HOW?*

Every woman was asked where she would prefer to be interviewed, and most chose either the women’s center or their place of work. There were many advantages to interviewing at the women’s centers and at places of work. It increased feelings of security and trust since the environment was well-known to the interviewee. It also allowed for a quiet space where no one else could overhear the interview and where outside interruptions could be kept to a minimum. Being at the work place of the women also had a practical advantage: they were not preoccupied with looking after children, which was the case in the interview conducted at the woman’s home. Being at the women’s center or at the workplaces also leveled the playing field, making the power relation between me and the interviewee more equal, as the settings made me the outsider.

The conducted interviews were of a semi-structured and in-depth nature, allowing the interviewees to “give answers that do not conform to the researchers’ (known or unknown) expectations” (Ackerly & True 2010: 168). The interview questions were written beforehand, but still allowed for a flexible interview situation, many times mimicking that of a life story. Thanks to knowing the questions well before starting the interviews, I did not have to strictly follow the order they were written in, or keep checking my notes to read the questions. I was therefore able to concentrate on listening and asking follow-up questions when needed. It allowed the interview to be on the terms of the interviewee, but still left room for me to get my questions answered.

The interviews were conducted in English and audio-recorded. I focused on listening to the interviewee, creating a safe space for an open dialogue, and asking follow-up questions. Note-taking was minimal. Each interview took about one hour.

#### *ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS*

Every participant was asked to voluntarily participate in the interview beforehand and given written information about the research, including my contact information. That way she had time to think about her participation and could change her mind. I was open with the purpose and source of support for my research and presented the interviewees with a non-academic summary. The participating women were also informed of the confidentiality of the study in written form. It was made clear to them that the recordings of the interviews will only be listened to by me and used only for the purposes of my research.

The interviewees are anonymous and have been given fictional names. Any sensitive personal information that can expose whom the interviewee is, has been removed. The interviews were conducted in as private a setting as possible, to keep the information shared in the interview confidential to people in the vicinity.

In the written information it was stated that each participant were to be given a small token of appreciation, which they were. Other than that, this was not

something that was discussed beforehand. Therefore, I conclude that the participation of the interviewees was not due to this.

## **REFLECTIONS ON SUBJECTIVITY**

This study has been guided by feminist methodology, of which one of the key ideas is a rejection of positivism, according to which, research should aim to reach intersubjectivity. That is, the research should be independent of the researcher, transparent and value-free (Esaiaasson et al 2002: 23). Within feminist research, this way of presenting accounts of reality as objective and easily replicable is rejected. The “truths” of positivist research are often based on ideologies serving to legitimize and sustain a particular societal order (Tickner 1992: 21), while claiming to be universal and objective (Tickner 2006: 21).

In feminist research, the results would likely be different in the hands of different theorists (Ackerly, Stern & True 2006: 7). It is argued that analyses cannot provide an ultimate “truth”, but can only provide insights into how certain meanings are encouraged and reproduced (Wibben 2011: 46). Objectivity, in the positivist sense, is therefore questioned (Tickner 1992: 36) and many feminist researchers strive to achieve “strong objectivity” instead, by “acknowledging the subjective element in one’s analysis” (Tickner 2006: 27). Researchers should nonetheless aim to provide a high level of openness, making other researchers “see” what the primary researcher has “seen” (Esaiaasson et al 2002: 23). By doing this, the understandings that are produced by feminist researchers can be as free from unexamined beliefs as is possible (Harding quoted in Wibben 2011: 18). Instead of making the research more subjective, this self-reflexivity strengthens the objectivity of the research.

One method of managing prejudices is to read a lot of literature, both fiction and non-fiction, about the studied subject (Thomsson 2011: 47). I have tried to not only read as much as possible, but also watch movies, documentaries, and listen to music from and about the North. By reading a lot of texts, not only non-fiction and academic, that are not directly used in the paper, the researcher can generate new ideas, as well as keeping one’s reflective stance alive (ibid. 27). I have thus read autobiographies of people involved in the Troubles, as



well as fictional works. This was an attempt to “inhale” the culture, politics and history of people in Northern Ireland. This method also allowed me to question preconceptions and gain a multi-sided perspective of the conflict, preventing my pre-conceived ideas of being central to the research.

By writing the questions beforehand, I was able to reflect about what kind of answers they could generate (Fägerborg 2011: 100). It also showed me instances where I had pre-conceived perceptions that I was not aware of, which allowed me to change the question and to question my own way of thinking. I was made aware of ideas that I had and was not conscious of, and how these affected my research.

Differences between the interviewer and the interviewee concerning for example gender, ethnicity, education, profession and class are important to observe, although not always possible to avoid (Thomsson 2011: 95; Fägerborg 2011: 95). For example, being female was an advantage when conducting the interviews. Had I been a man, I might not have been able to gain access to the interviewees, nor gained their trust enough to have them be open about their experiences. Being from Sweden was another advantage. If I had been from the UK or from Ireland, I would not have been seen as a neutral party, and this would have made it more difficult to conduct the study.

Showing genuine sympathy for the interviewee is an important tool when doing interviews with participants that economically, or in other ways, are worse off than the interviewer (Thomsson 2011: 94). At the same time, it is important that this sympathy should not turn into pity (*ibid.*). Being a university student is maybe not a high position of power in itself, but when compared to being unemployed and/or uneducated, it can be. By being aware of how I dressed and spoke, I tried to level out these differences in perceived power positions and tried to show understanding (and *not* pity).

It is also important whether the researcher is considered to be an insider or an outsider (Fägerborg 2011: 95). In a sense I am an outsider, since I am not from Belfast or Northern Ireland or identify as being Catholic or Protestant. I can also be considered an insider having extensive knowledge of the culture and society of the North, and by having previously studied and visited the area

many times. Simultaneously belonging to both positions, facilitated my interviews and helped me gain access to thoughts that are both controversial and sensitive.

## **PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION**

In addition to conducting interviews, I also used the method of participant observation to look for patterns of social behavior. Observation can give us knowledge about things that are so taken for granted that people do not speak of it (Pripp & Öhlander 2011: 114) or things that are too difficult or controversial to talk about, especially when the interview is recorded (Keith 1986 quoted in *ibid.*). Participant observation therefore gives the researcher the possibility to compare similarities and differences in what people *do* and how they *describe* what they do (Pripp & Öhlander 2011: 114).

I have taken part in social situations that have been relevant to my research during my stay in Belfast, such as lectures, workshops, and event launches. During these events I have talked to, spent time with, and observed women in different settings. I kept a journal with me at all times, writing field notes and reflections on what I saw, heard and experienced. My journal included empirical, methodological and reflective notes, including chronological observations and descriptions; methodological choices and considerations; as well as theoretical lines of thought that have influenced the observations (Kaijser 2011: 59f)

## **TRANSCRIBING AND ANALYZING THE INTERVIEWS**

If one wants to use the exact words of the participants in the research project, reflect on their choice of words, and find contradictions, it is necessary to have access to the interview in its entirety (Thomsson 2011: 87). This means that the interview must be transcribed. The most basic rule for transcribing interviews is to include everything that is said, word by word (Fägerborg 2011: 108). The transcribed interview should also include things such as hesitation, pauses, laughter, and words or sentences that are emphasized (*ibid.* 105). I have followed these guidelines as closely as possible.

After transcribing the interviews and removing any identifying information, they were analyzed using thematic coding. The codes have been modeled after the interview questions, corresponding to the type of answers given. All of the transcribed text (approximately 300 pages) has been characterized using these codes and the coded segments are then transferred into one document, organized thematically and analyzed in accordance with the research questions.

## **INTERPRETING THE RESULTS**

The researcher needs to be aware of the aim of the research, as not to find stories that can be used only to provide authenticity for preconceived ideas (Wibben 2011: 110). It is also important to remember that groups should not be understood as homogeneous and dichotomous (Yuval-Davis quoted in Blom 2000: 20). The consequence of this is that there is no experience that “can be taken as authentic statements of what (marginalized) women really think, feel or want” (Hansen 2010: 24). One also needs to be careful not to depict women as marginalized victims, as this is based on an understanding of women as passive, to be pitied rather than as proper political agents (Aradau 2008 quoted in Hansen 2010: 24).

Even though my study revolves around traditional female roles such as being a mother, I do not wish to reproduce a stereotypical view of women as *solely* mothers. By discussing and analyzing the political consequences of this restrictive view of women and femininity within nationalism, I hope to show that women are a lot of things other than marginalized and passive victims. My aim is also not to reproduce the notion of the “peaceful woman”, with “natural” abilities to broker peace. The kind of peace-building that is key to this paper, transversal dialogue, places women as active political agents in the public arena. It also requires differences among participants (such as sectarian identities) to be encompassed by equality. This idea rests on the fact that women have many different identities and views, some which can be very bigoted and sectarian. The point is to respect these differences and not disregard them. Transversalism is therefore *not* built on an idea of women as an inherently peaceful and homogenous group, but rather that women, through rooting and shifting, can achieve peace by working together despite their differences.

## 5. WOMEN, NATION, BELFAST

The research questions are answered and analyzed from the perspectives of the interviewed women. The analysis is focused on constructions of gender and nation, and anchored in previous research conducted on gendered nationalism in Northern Ireland. The focus of this previous research has been to demonstrate how women and femininity have been used as symbols for the nation. It has also explored the relationship between feminism and nationalism. The majority of it has focused on Nationalism/Republicanism, leaving a huge gap regarding Unionism/Loyalism (see McEvoy 2010).

Most of the interviewed women tended to predominantly use the religious concepts (Catholic/Protestant) as markers of identity when asked how they would define themselves and their community, especially in the Shankill. In the case of women from the Falls, some used the religious concepts almost synonymously with the political ones (Nationalist/Republican) to define themselves and their community. This is shown in the table below.

<b>Falls</b>	<b>Herself</b>	<b>Community</b>
1	Irish, Catholic	Catholic, Republican/Nationalist
2	Irish, Republican	Catholic, Nationalist, Republican
3	Irish, Catholic	Catholic
4	Irish, Catholic, Nationalist, Republican	Catholic, Nationalist, Republican
5	Irish, Republican	Republican
<b>Shankill</b>	<b>Herself</b>	<b>Community</b>
1	Northern Irish, Protestant	Protestant
2	Northern Irish, Protestant	Protestant
3	British, Protestant	Protestant
4	British, Protestant	Protestant
5	British, Protestant	Protestant

TABLE 1: *Women's definitions of themselves and their communities. The women chose the words they felt most accurate amongst the following: Catholic, Republican, Nationalist, Protestant, Loyalist, Unionist. For their national identity they could also choose between: Irish, Northern Irish, British.*

Therefore, in the Analysis, the terms are used more freely than in the previous sections, where the definitions presented in Chapter 2 are adhered to. Whenever women are quoted or their answers are paraphrased in this chapter, I have used the language they used in the interviews. Which community the women belong to is sometimes shown by (F) or (S), representing the Falls or Shankill.

The analysis of the material is divided into three parts:

- (1) Motherhood – how are women confronted with and make sense of their roles as biological, cultural and national mothers?
- (2) Politics – how are women confronted with and make sense of the political consequences of gendered nationalism (the invisibility of gendered accounts of national histories; and the public/private divide and its relation to citizenship)?
- (3) Transversalism – is there a potential for building transversal dialogue?

## **MOTHERHOOD**

In the following sections motherhood is discussed from different perspectives.

### *BIOLOGICAL MOTHERHOOD*

Both communities' views on having children have changed over the last 20 years. During the Troubles there was a stigma attached to being a single mother, at least in the Catholic community. There was also a pressure in the Catholic community to have more kids once you were married. Today the situation is different. A majority of the women agreed that there are not really any unspoken rules today regulating having children. You do not have to be married before you have kids, and it is okay if you are a young single mother, which is quite common in both communities. Even though this is the case, most of the interviewed women concluded that this is *not* due to pressure being put on them, but it has rather become the norm today. Families, especially in the Catholic community, also seem to have fewer kids today compared to during the Troubles. Many women explained this by the church not having

that much of a say in family planning nowadays. They also said this could be due to the high costs of child-care.

*CULTURAL MOTHERHOOD: FAMILY LIFE AND RAISING CHILDREN*

Both Nationalism and Unionism ascribe to and encourage specific models of normative femininity associated with domesticity (Ashe 2006A: 151). Women's roles are predominantly placed in the private sphere as mothers (Kaufman & Williams 2007: 178). In all of the interviews, there was a consensus regarding society's view of women as caretakers of the family. Raising children and doing housework is still very much the responsibility of women, although the situation has changed since the Troubles. This was said without hesitation by most of the interviewees.

For the generations born in the 1950s and 60s, it would have been the mother's job to do everything, while today it does not have to be this way. Today, many of the interviewed women tended to see their own family as an example of an equal division of domestic labor, while in society in general, women tend to do most of the work. Although this seems to be the case, things are changing with the younger generations. Mona, a staff member of the Falls said:

I think there's about 50 percent of the fathers drop their children into our childcare now, where years ago the whole childcare was the own responsibility of the woman.

This was reiterated by Helen (S): "things that you see now on the Shankill, men pushing prams, you just wouldn't have seen that 20 years ago".

The increase in equality, Elizabeth (S) explained, is partly due to the fact that both parents need to work to make ends meet. This was echoed by Mary (F), saying that working full time has helped keep an equal share of housework in her home. Helen (S) also agreed, stating that women are sometimes the breadwinners today. She also said that while women may be working more outside the home now than during the Troubles, they tend to have part-time jobs like cleaning, jobs that men traditionally do not do. Women are thus still very much associated with the private (domestic) sphere of society.

### *CULTURAL MOTHERHOOD: MAINTAINING TRADITIONS*

When it comes to maintaining traditions, it is not as clearly the woman's role to do so. Many women said that maintaining traditions depends both on the tradition and on the family. Traditions seem to be enforced and maintained by parents, other family members, and the community, sometimes simultaneously. May (F) argued that in the Catholic community,

there's no getting away from [the culture]. You never really do get away from it, even if you don't practice anything in the house, you'll hear it from someone else. [...] it's built into the community.

Ellen, staff member at SWC, said that a lot of cultural activities are maintained by the community also in the Protestant neighborhoods, and by what kids hear from their peers and on TV. Christine (S) argued that traditions are upheld by the community:

[S]ince from you're a baby you go watch the bands [...] [F]rom [...] their first 12th<sup>18</sup>, they are there and they are dressed in like red-white-and-blue [...] from the start. So they get their kids really into it, so they just grow up with it.

Throughout the interviews the idea that Protestant culture is being eroded came up. Elizabeth, a Protestant, feels to some extent that it is being made more difficult for her community to express their culture. She mentioned the importance of maintaining traditions and how traditions become even more important when they are restricted or when someone is threatening to take them away. Ann also spoke about how she sees her culture being restricted and understands why the Unionist community is so adamant and feels it needs to make a stand "because if we don't make a stand we're going to have nothing. They are going to take everything".

This can be contrasted with the ease and happiness many of the Catholic interviewees spoke about their culture and identity. Mona said:

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<sup>18</sup> The Protestant community celebrates the victory of William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne every 12th of July with parades.

I don't need a flag flying. I don't need to [...] show someone I'm Irish. [...] I don't need my identity to be displayed [...] to believe that I'm Irish, I *am* Irish.

This sentiment was shared by other women from the Falls. Mona (F) also argued that there are quite a lot of people like that, including Loyalists, that don't need to throw their identity in your face in order to feel secure.

Both staff members from the Falls said that the Catholic identity seems to be more stable than that of the Protestant community. Elizabeth argued that issues like flag protests<sup>19</sup> or parades<sup>20</sup> are not really about these things, they are about deep-rooted cultural identity issues. And, she continued, maybe the Nationalist community has gotten further in this process. Ann, herself from a Unionist community, mentioned that the Nationalist community seems to have a more clear idea of where they are going and where they want to be, while the Unionist community is more divided.

#### *CULTURAL MOTHERHOOD: RULES FOR PROPER DRESS AND BEHAVIOR*

The stability and morality of the cultural identity of ethno-national groups in Northern Ireland have been associated with women and their behavior (Ashe 2006B: 575). In Irish Nationalism there is a connection between the nation and women's "moral" behavior (Ashe 2006A: 153). Irish women's sexual behavior became a signifier for the Catholic community, not only representing the honor of the nation, but also marking the cultural boundaries of the community (Ryan and Gray cited in Ashe 2006A: 153). The chaste and self-sacrificing Virgin Mary has been the traditional symbol and ideal of womanhood within Nationalism (Ashe 2006B: 575).

Within the Unionist community, women's sexuality is also surrounded by strict customs (Sales 1998 cited in Ashe 2006B: 576). The Unionist model of normative femininity shares many features of the Virgin Mary ideal, expecting

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<sup>19</sup> In 2012, Belfast City Council limited the flying of the Union flag from Belfast City Hall. As a response Loyalists hold street protests.

<sup>20</sup> Parades, an important part of Protestant culture, usually become controversial when they go through areas that belong to the "Other" community.



women to be self-sacrificing for the family and the community (ibid.). Women are seen as upholding the moral values of the nation (Ashe 2006A: 152).

Regarding what kind of behavior is acceptable for men and women in relationships, the women from Falls and Shankill gave similar answers. During the Troubles, women's behavior was more restricted than today. If you broke the rules set up by the community, you were punished in some way, verbally or physically. Christine (S) argued that there has been a change today:

I think women nowadays expect to be treated the same. And if they're not, I think they have something to say about it [...] I don't think women nowadays see why a man has the right to do something and a girl doesn't.

Although this is the case, Mary (F), Monica (F), and Patricia (S) mentioned that it is still more acceptable for men to have numerous sexual partners, while women would get called derogatory names for the same behavior. Women who engage in behavior that is not acceptable are looked down upon, but not as severely punished as during the Troubles. The activities of women are generally not as monitored and restricted today. Nowadays women are allowed to participate in most public arenas, be it sport, politics or religious life, according to the interviewees.

There also seems to be a change in the acceptance of domestic violence in both communities. Mary (F) argued that there's less and less acceptance of a man hitting "his" woman today in her community, even though physical and mental abuse still goes on. She comes from a family with domestic violence and she says that back then, it seemed to be the norm. When she found herself in an abusive relationship, her mother helped her out of it, whereas earlier the phrase "You made your bed, now lie in it" was symptomatic of society's view of domestic abuse.

The younger generation does not necessarily tolerate the things that their mothers did, even though it is not an easy fight to win even today. Mary (F) said:

[Y]ou maybe don't tolerate what your mummy would have tolerated. [...] you'd fight it tooth-and-nail. [...] but it still goes on. There's still a certain amount of acceptance of women that this is what they take.

All of the interviewed women agreed that there is no particular dress code in their communities nowadays, but that people are still judged by the way they dress. This was even more common during the 60s and 70s and women from both communities gave examples of how there was a stricter dress code for women then. Staff member Ellen (S) explained this:

I think in those days it was different, the men did have very much [the] rule of the roost and the men did what they want[ed] and the men went to the pub and the women stayed at home and minded the kids.

Fiona (F) said that people do still make assumptions if you are wearing a short skirt for example, but you are not shunned for doing it nowadays. Helen (S) agreed with this, stating that some people wear clothes that maybe are not acceptable and get comments like "she deserved all she get" if something were to happen. Mary (F) agreed with the fact that people are judged by the way they dress, especially girls, and expressed that she would not want her daughter to wear just anything because of that. She thinks women should be able to wear what they want, but sees that this is difficult to live up to in real life because of prejudices.

Also when it comes to activities, there are some unspoken rules for what women should (and shouldn't) do, according to Mary. Women being out in a bar on a Monday night, or even on a Friday night, may get comments that they should not be there, that they should be at home with their children. Ann, from a Protestant community, said that "in areas where there's not so much employment or education, you would still get men dominating women."

#### *NATIONAL MOTHERHOOD*

The gendering of the nation as feminine can be seen in the case of Ireland – it is frequently allegorized as a woman (Innes cited in Steel 2004: 96). Portrayals

of the country have tended to either depict Ireland as a passive and virginal maiden (“the Mother of God”) or as a ferocious and sexualized mother (“Mother Ireland”) (Steel 2004: 97, 106, 112; Martin 2000: 67ff). These images “helped construct appropriate roles for women: selfless assistants and caring mothers” (Ryan 2004: 54). The description of women as “motherly” and “homely” has naturalized their relationship to men, making their devotion that of a mother rather than an activist or political actor (ibid. 56).

Unionism has no equivalent to the ideology revolving around Mother Ireland. This can be explained by the fact that the symbolism within Unionism is much more masculine and revolves around male-dominated institutions (such as Orange lodges) (Sales cited in Ashe 2006A: 152). Therefore the nation is not represented through the same gendered imagery. However, Unionism does still value women for their roles as devoted mothers and wives (Ashe 2006A: 152) and has marked the public sphere of politics and national defense as a masculine terrain (Ashe 2006B: 575). Women are valued for their roles as mothers and wives, supporting men and socializing children into the “correct” ideology (Sales 1998 quoted in Ashe 2006B: 575).

### **POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE GENDERED NATION**

Even though women are identified with ethno-nationalist culture, this does not necessarily mean that they simply reproduce the gendered roles prescribed by nationalism (Ashe 2007: 766). The armed conflict has acted to open some spaces for resistance to traditional gender identities (ibid. 770) and women’s activism has sometimes challenged the traditional division of labor and gender roles.

#### *PARTICIPATION VS. HISTORIC LEGACY: WOMEN DURING THE TROUBLES*

Through her research on female combatants in ethno-nationalist military organizations, Miranda Alison (2004) challenges the idea of the inherently peaceful woman and argues that anti-state and liberatory nationalist movements, such as the Nationalist movement in Northern Ireland, “often provide more space (ideologically and practically) for women to participate as combatants” (447). Alison also demonstrates how although both Republican and Loyalist women have participated in paramilitaries in a variety of roles,

they “have been much more militarily active in republican groups than in loyalist ones” (2004: 451). This is evident during the Troubles, where Nationalist women, in particular, played active roles in the armed conflict. In contrast, as Unionism is not a revolutionary movement, there has not been the same strategic or ideological need for women’s involvement (ibid. 454).

#### THE NATIONALIST COMMUNITY

Many of the active Nationalist women were in direct confrontation with state security forces and the criminal justice system (Corcoran 2004: 115; Hackett 2004: 150). Women directly confronted the British army to thwart military control (Hackett 2004: 151f; Persic 2004: 169). Other women were active in more traditional gender roles, such as providing food and shelter for combatants (Ashe 2006A: 154). Aretxaga summarizes their activities:

Women [...] walked the streets of their neighborhoods at night to prevent their menfolk from military detention, [...] took arms against the state, defied the penal system by smearing their prison cells with feces and menstrual blood, clad themselves in blankets and traveled the world to break the silence on state violence, [and] argued to assert a distinctive feminist voice within male-dominated organizations (Aretxaga 1997: 10)

Until recently, their engagement in politics and paramilitary organizations has been marginalized in history (Ashe 2006A: 154). Women have often been left out because they have not been recognized as socially relevant. When they have been included in the history, they are interpreted either as “an extension of a domestic role without broader transformative implications or as cooptation in a male-led war” (Aretxaga 1997: 9). Their active involvement is usually portrayed in gender-specific ways: situated in the domestic sphere and distinguished from men by their femininity (Ryan 2004: 50).

According to one of FWC staff members, there is a general knowledge of women’s participation during the Troubles, which was reiterated by many of the Falls women. There are murals depicting women’s participation in the Troubles. Some women are especially well-known and talked about, being high profile for being arrested or killed. Although there is a respect for women’s

participation, Mary also points out that the respect is probably higher for men and their participation. Nora also pointed out that there is a difference between younger and older generations, where the older generation has a deeper knowledge.

#### THE UNIONIST COMMUNITY

Loyalist women's activities during the Troubles included tasks such as:

transporting arms, munitions and intelligence in baby carriages, purses, cars and on their bodies; conducting surveillance; cleaning crime scenes and destroying evidence of paramilitary crimes; storing arms and munitions in their homes; [...] and armed robbery (McEvoy 2010: 134f).

Ellen, from the Shankill, said in her interview that there is not a general knowledge about women's participation during the Troubles and argued that this is partly due to that very few Protestant women got involved in the armed struggle, compared to the Catholic community. Elizabeth (S) said that not everybody has a general idea of women's participation, usually just if they knew somebody personally who was active. There is not a tradition of storytelling in the Protestant community and people have been reluctant to tell their stories, but storytelling has started to increase over the last years:

Very, very few stories [are] being told from a Protestant background [...] I think Protestant people didn't think they had a story to tell. [...] it's all part of the culture, that you tell nobody your business.

There also seems to be a difference in how people involved in the Troubles were (and are) appreciated by the community. In Catholic communities, ex-prisoners are respected and gained an important position within the community. Whereas in the Protestant community, the situation seems to differ. One of the Protestant women, whose brother went to prison, explained this:

Looking back on it we were ashamed. Whereas if he had been a Republican, you would have been quite proud of him. [...] But we almost had a sense of shame. [...] And then you've got like the DUP and that who would always look down their nose on people who went to prison and things like that.

So the intra-community cohesiveness seems to differ between the Falls and the Shankill, already during the Troubles. An effect this could have had was how women in the Falls, whose husband went to jail, were given more attention than their counterparts in the Shankill, because of the shame that was attached to being involved in the armed conflict. This could also partly explain the lack of stories having been told from the Protestant community.

#### *THE PEACE PROCESS AND AGREEMENT*

An exclusion of women from formal politics was evident during the 90s peace process. Feminists were worried and angry because of the invisibility of women in the process (Aretxaga 1997: 5) and Republican feminists expressed concerns about once again being asked to bury their demands (Ward 2004: 192f). To remedy this exclusion of women, the cross-community party the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) was established in 1996, unifying Nationalists and Unionists (Ward 2004: 185, 196; Sales 1997: 6). These women realized that unless they formed themselves into a political party the negotiations and outcome would be overwhelmingly male centered (Ward 2005: 13).

The representation of women at the peace talks had two characteristics. Firstly, women were represented as non-partisan and peace-brokering, rather than as combatants (McEvoy 2010: 144). Combatant women were systematically excluded from peace processes, thus reifying gender stereotypes (ibid.). Secondly, the women present were unable to pursue women's issues (ibid.). NIWC contributed to disrupting the patriarchal politics but came to serve as a buffer between Unionists and Republicans, and because of this had little opportunity to advance their own agenda (ibid. 143). At the same time they brought attention to the underrepresentation of women in politics (Ashe 2012: 234).

#### *VIEWS OF THE AGREEMENT*

Many of the interviewed women stated that although they are happy that the Agreement was signed, they are unhappy with the lack of implementation of it. The communities are starting to realize they do not have peace yet. Elizabeth (S) said “I don’t believe for one minute that we are in a peaceful society”. According to Helen (S), a lot of people voted for the Agreement even though they were not totally happy with it, but saw that it was the best they were going to get at the time.

Elizabeth (S) also mentioned that there is a feeling in the Protestant community that they are paying the price of the Agreement to the benefit of the Catholic community. Some in the Unionist/Loyalist community began viewing it as an equality agenda that would favor the position of the Nationalist community over the Unionists (Aughey cited in Ashe 2007: 775f). Ann (S) reiterated this:

They [the Unionist community] just see it as being a Nationalist deal and nothing for the Unionist community. [...] the Unionist community feels terribly under threat.

Nora from the Falls said that people in the Catholic community also feel like they have been sold down by the Agreement. Despite this, she argued that the Agreement was necessary to end the violence and to bring something new.

Fiona (F) said that it is hard to generalize about the feeling around the peace Agreement in the Catholic community since it has not been fully implemented. Mary (F) says that she would like to see things move much quicker, and that today the communities are taking two steps forward, and one step back. Helen, SWC staff, gives the example of the Civic Forum that was suspended and has never been reestablished. Elizabeth also mentioned this and the need for it to be re-established in order to hold politicians accountable. Reestablishing it would give the Agreement more confidence among the population. Another example, given by Helen (S), is that Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security has not been implemented.

### SEGREGATION

Most of the women agreed that one of the main effects of growing up in a nationalist area was the segregation that came with it, both during the Troubles and today. One of the Falls women summarized this isolation:

When I was growing up I would never have known any Protestants at all, none, [I'd] never have met them. Because everything I did in my life was on this road. [...] By the time I went to university myself it was like [...] going [...] into a new world<sup>21</sup>.

During the Troubles, the movement of both communities was restricted and the “Others” areas of Belfast became no-go-areas. In addition to not being able to access certain areas, growing up in a segregated community meant not having access to different opinions, other than those that existed in one’s own community. This, and the physical restrictions, built up a fear of the outside, of the “Other”. This fear, and a tendency to stay within your own group still exists quite strongly in both communities today. This was expressed by Mona (F):

I think the biggest thing, which still continues and carries through today, and it’s very strong even in the Loyalist/Unionist community: you live in your own community. You do *not* leave your own community.

Fiona (F) said that today, if people could move somewhere and know that they would be safe, they probably would but since this is not the case people prefer to stay in their areas. Keeping to one’s own community was also mentioned by Elizabeth (S).

Even though there is less fear of the “Other” today, this mentality still exists and is being passed on to the next generation:

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<sup>21</sup> the school system is mostly segregated, although there are some integrated schools. Universities are mixed, welcoming Catholic and Protestant students.



Don't go too far, don't stray too far... You can go live in America, you can go live in Australia, that's fine. But don't be going to live in the Shankill.

Bridget, who is in her mid-20s, exemplified this:

People now, at our age, [...] they're only going along with it because it's what they hear their own parents and grandparents say.

Staff member Ellen (S) told me that because of the widespread segregation, cross-community relations (outside of organized projects) rarely happen:

It's very difficult because we are so close, but you've got a wall [...] that divides us and it's closed every night at half six. [...] And then if you don't cross over, how do you ever get to meet anybody?

#### *POST-WAR: GENDER EQUALITY?*

Women are mainly viewed as noncombatants and traditional ideas about women's "natural" ability towards peace-making are popular (Ashe 2007: 774). Both nationalist movements have generated gendered discourses and practices that structure women as primarily familial, while men are seen as political actors (Ashe 2007: 768; 2009: 310). This being said, it is also evident that the armed conflict has politicized the home, drawing women into the conflict (Ashe 2006A: 149). When violence spills over into the home, it threatens "normal" family life, leading to women being more visibly involved in the conflict (ibid.; Aretxaga 1997).

After the signing of the Agreement, there is some evidence that the separation of the public and private spheres has been reasserted (Hackett 2004: 166). Maintaining the presence of gender issues has proved difficult. In transitional states there is a tendency for a gap between the rhetoric of equality and enforcement measures on the ground, which has been seen in Northern Ireland (Ní Aoláin et al. 2011: 203). The right for women to full and equal

political participation is written in the Agreement, thanks to the NIWC, but this has not been reinforced (Ward 2005: 15).

Both communities are concerned with the protection of their interests and gender issues are filtered out (Ashe 2012: 234). Gender equality continues to be placed low on the priority list because of this (Ward 2004: 201). NIWC was accused of having little to contribute to negotiations between sectarian groups (Ashe 2012: 235). Elizabeth (S) said that the orange-and-green vote became the downfall of the NIWC. The Coalition lost its last seat in the Assembly in 2005 and ended in 2006 (Ashe 2012: 234).

Helen, from SWC, argued that even though there has been an increase in the number of women at Stormont, it is not clear how much of a say they have. Although the numbers of female politicians elected to the Assembly has somewhat increased (from 13 percent in 1999 to 16,7 percent in 2003), this has not been accompanied by a greater representation in decision-making (Ward 2005: 3). Elizabeth (S) argued that some parties are engaging women, but at a very low level, without any real power to make decisions.

Several interviewees said that Sinn Féin tends to have more female politicians. Sinn Féin has been more active on issues of gender inequality than the other parties because of the pressure Republican women put on the party (Ashe 2006A: 161). Fiona (F) explained by saying that within Irish nationalism there have always been famous women (like Maud Gonne and Constance Markievicz) that have played key roles in the armed conflict. Having women represented in Sinn Féin is therefore not surprising. Ellen (S) said that the Protestant community “is still very much dominated by men. Women’s voices aren’t really listened to”.

Women are represented at the grass-roots level in communities (Cowell-Meyers 2001: 67), but when it comes to management committees and decision-making bodies higher up, there are few, if any women present. Women in Northern Ireland tend to have influence within community activism rather than in party politics (Persic 2004: 178). In the institutions that are most directly concerned with conflict prevention women have remained largely excluded (Ward 2005: 21). Women are also absent in key institutions such as

the criminal justice system and at senior levels of most political parties (ibid. 21f). Especially in Unionist communities, very few women have held positions of power (Ashe 2006A: 152).

### **BEYOND NATIONALISM?**

Women in the North share a range of inequalities that have emerged from the conflict (Ashe 2006B: 576) and the lack of gender equality is a key factor in preventing the development of a shared future (Ward 2005: 1). The war has been a major block to women's emancipation and all other issues have been regarded as being subservient to it (Talbot 2004: 132, 140). As Helen (S) said:

A lot of things we accepted here, because there was other issues that were a priority at that time [during the Troubles].

Many of the usual boundaries between the public and private became blurred during the Troubles, giving space for women to be active (Hackett 2004: 147, 166). At the same time, although becoming politically aware, women did not necessarily change their views towards a feminist understanding of their position in society (Persic 2004: 170). Rather, women's political action was often understood as an extension of their domestic role (ibid.). Ashe summarizes the complexity of women's public participation:

So while they involve women stepping into the public arena thereby giving women a public voice in male dominated nationalist societies, the women involved often draw on their traditional identities as a basis for their political action, potentially, reinforcing those identities. (2007: 767).

Women's activism during the Troubles did not fundamentally challenge their position and the traditional gender roles have remained largely unchanged (Persic 2004: 167), in some cases have even been reinforced.

### *IDEAS AND DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE*

When asked what they wished for the future for themselves, their families and their communities, the women gave a range of different answers. Most of them

said they wanted real peace. Mary (F) said she wants people to be able to live together. Elizabeth (S) said:

I've never known peace, I don't know what peace is. I don't know what it is to live in a society [...] without fear.

Most of the women discussed the Peace Walls<sup>22</sup> and were ambivalent about them being taken down. Bridget (F) stated that “people are afraid, really, really afraid” still. Most of the women said that they would like to see the walls come down but that a lot of peace-building needs to happen before this is possible, concluding that, for the time being, the walls are needed. Some women argued that taking the walls down would make peace possible, while others argued the opposite – that it might make things worse.

A Shankill staff member said she would like to see peace dividend for women:

There *has* to be some type of dividend to women for keeping our communities together and in a lot of cases, *still* keeping our communities together.

She argued that people from working-class backgrounds have to fight for everything, suffering from problems with drugs, suicide, and the health of their communities. These communities are especially in need of receiving a dividend. Fiona (F) expressed the same thing saying that there is a big difference between middle-class and working-class areas in Belfast. Middle-class areas are less segregated, have better amenities, and education levels are higher.

Several women also mentioned the fact that having people from other countries moving into the area makes a big difference, as they do not care about the sectarian divisions. A Falls staff member said “Areas can't just be one thing now”, which is interpreted as something positive. Children being born in mixed-race marriages and identifying as being from Belfast will hopefully challenge the division between the Catholic and Protestant communities that exists today.

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<sup>22</sup> High walls, called Peace Lines: defensive barriers that function to lessen the contact between the communities (Shirlow & Murtagh 2006: 8).

A lot of the interviewed women, in both communities, wanted to see more mixed schools and daycare centers in the future, where children and their parents can get to know each other in a safe space. Mona (F) discussed the future in terms of a generational shift that will help accommodate a change towards a more peaceful society. The younger generation is not all buying into the sectarian ideas of their parents. Mary (F) painted a different picture when she talks about her son, who is showing sectarian tendencies, which she is not happy about. So the younger generation is not always more open-minded than their parents.

In addition to a lot of positive and optimistic ideas about the future of their communities, a few women also expressed doubt of whether peace will be achieved and if it will be possible to live without fear. One of the women from the Falls community expressed this:

I just wish that everyone could get on and this could be a peaceful Ireland. [...] I think this country will *never* change. Never. And the only way this country would change, if there was an apocalypse and if everything just, everyone, and everything was just demolished and they'd start over again.

#### *CROSS-COMMUNITY RELATIONS*

FWC and SWC have been working together on cross-community projects for the past 30 years, sometimes “under the radar” as a staff member from Shankill put it. The centers both have Catholic and Protestant women among their staff and their users. The centers do things together more or less all the time according to Mona at FWC, they work together on projects and jointly apply for funding.

In the communities, cross-community relations are not as common but they do occur. Fiona (F) said that it does happen that people in the Falls have friends, acquaintances or relationships with Protestants. Before the Troubles it happened all the time, as all the streets were connected and mixed. Bringing a Protestant friend over to your house is fine and nobody is bothered by it in the Catholic community.

When it comes to the Protestant community, Elizabeth (S) painted a different picture, saying that the reaction you get when having Catholic friends or associate with Catholic culture depends on who you associate with in the community. Patricia (S) also said that her neighbors would not be bothered, but the UVF or the UDA might not like it. Elizabeth (S) told me about her son, who is engaged to a Catholic girl and how this was not spoken about openly in her family:

I have two brothers and if they knew he was marrying a Catholic, his life would be hell. [...] So you know, even within my family this wedding could be a dangerous thing.

Having friends from a Catholic community is seen as more okay for the younger generation, but many older people in the Protestant community still have a problem with this, according to Ann (S). She explains this by the fear that still exists among the older generation.

One staff member from the Falls said that although she does go in to Protestant areas nowadays, it still makes her feel very uncomfortable sometimes. Bridget (F) said:

I always start being a bit worried, no matter where I am. The simple fact is, you never know what can happen.

Monica (F) also said that the fear of going into other communities exists today, even though she does not feel it:

[A] lot of people would have that fear, they haven't been out of the ghetto they were born in.

Both Nora (F) and May (F) feel this fear. Nora said "I wouldn't go anywhere near the Shankill Road, I wouldn't feel safe" and May said that she wouldn't feel comfortable going over to a Protestant neighborhood, "You just imagine they are going to attack you or something".

## REWARDS

There are many positive aspects of cross-community projects. People making friends and families coming together from different communities is one example. Another example is finding out the commonalities that exist between the communities and hearing both sides of the story, as Jane (S) put it. Elizabeth (S) described cross-community projects as eye-opening and said she really enjoys getting to know new people no matter who they are:

If you get to know a person, you find it very hard to hurt them or hit them.

Education is key in cross-community projects, generating a deeper understanding of the “Other” community and the similarities between them. This was mentioned by all the interviewees. Realizing that there are misconceptions and false ideas, as well as hurt and violence on both sides can add to a greater understanding between the communities. Getting over the fear and prejudices that exist is a positive aspect of cross-community projects. Mary (F) told me that the first time she went to a Loyalist community for a cross-community project she was petrified and said to her colleague “What if they murder us?”. Now, she goes into Protestant communities without blinking an eye, saying “they are just like me!”.

Another reward of working cross-community is the ripple-effect the newly gained knowledge can have on the participant’s community. Mona, FWC staff, summarized this:

At the end of the day it has a ripple-effect because you will not pass on your learned behavior during the conflict to your children. Cause you are learning new behavior and you are learning new attitudes and learning to think a different way yourself.

Elizabeth (S) decided to involve her children in cross-community projects after having participated herself. May (F) said something similar “I’ve never really preached anything to [my kids]”, while Bridget (F) said that “I’ll always tell [my son] he can be whatever he wants to be, he can marry whoever he wants”.

Many of the Catholic women spoke of the importance for their kids to know their culture and explained how it helps you show who you are and gives you confidence. At the same time, most of them also mentioned the importance of respecting and learning from other cultures and being able to choose freely what they want to be.

Everybody that was interviewed thought that cross-community projects are a good idea and should continue to exist between their communities. Ellen (S) summarized this:

[I]t's only when you start doing this type of work that you get to meet people, and you get to know people and you build up relationships with them and you build friendships with them.

One participant concluded that “unless we [make] the change ourselves, [the conflict] will never go away.”

#### DIFFICULTIES

There are several difficulties with cross-community projects. If women find that these difficulties outweigh the rewards, this can have a discouraging effect on the possibility of building transversal politics.

One difficulty is building trust. There is a lot of bitterness and hatred in both communities. Fiona (F) told me that sometimes she comes across people who are bitter and angry, “people who genuinely hate you just because of what your name is”. Bridget (F) also expressed this:

Sometimes when people find out what you are, then they don't want to talk [...] just because of what I believe.

It was expressed by Helen from the Shankill how important it is to first build a relationship in order to then build trust. She said that although a lot of people are very passionate about their national identities, and as long as there is trust being built, there is room for that. One of the interviewees from the Shankill said that being able to open up can be difficult in cross-community projects:



I could talk to you because you are not from here, but I couldn't talk to other people from my community like this. It's difficult to be yourself.

Ann (S) said that through participating in cross-community projects she has learned that there are still some very bigoted, sectarian ideas in society, which are very hard to break down. These, together with the unwillingness to interact with other people and to learn about them, make cross-community projects difficult.

A second difficulty is getting people to be comfortable coming into different areas. It is not always easy to find a suitable site for activities that is not a contested space. Fiona (F) gives the example of organizing a cross-community street festival at a neutral venue without upsetting anyone in the community. In order to use the venue they needed to get permission from a lot of different people. Regarding this she said: "people who should have absolutely no authority whatsoever but they can make things difficult".

Another difficulty can be other things going on in the community that influence the cross-community work. There is still a gate-keeper attitude in the Protestant community, according to a Shankill staff member. Things like protests create fear in the community of doing something that somebody may report. This can make people in the affected areas who are active in cross-community to not feel as safe. Fear, bitterness and hatred can make it difficult to successfully arrange cross-community projects. A staff member from SWC talked about the bitter minority making it difficult for cross-community projects to have any effect:

[P]eople do live in fear and until that's corrected, what I am doing [cross-community projects] is a wee drop in the ocean. [...] There would need to be thousands of people doing this for it to make the difference that is needed.

Mary (F) also commented on how important it is to break down and change people's perceptions: "They may take a wall down, they may take a gate down,

but unless you get rid of these barriers [in your head]...”. So, it is important to make sure that the real issues are tackled and not ignored. Elizabeth commented on this:

[T]he issues have to be tackled and sometimes, you know, there’s an elephant in the room that’s never divulged.... it’s never discussed. That can then maybe break relationships.

Another difficulty that was mentioned is what happens after the project is over. A staff member at FWC said that even though participants may have changed a bit of their own attitude, this can sometimes get lost when you go back into your own community at the end of the project. The divide is re-established because the communities are not quite ready to change. Keeping the momentum going is crucial.

#### *WOMEN-ONLY TRANSVERSAL PROJECTS*

Most of the interviewees saw an advantage to having cross-community projects for women only, although some were open to also join mixed projects. Helen, at SWC, argued that having only women creates a safe place from the start. Fiona (F) also expressed this as an advantage:

Women are much better communicators. That is, they are much more open to doing things. In my own experience, it is much easier to get women to do things than it is to get men to do things. And women are much... better at building friendships over whatever [...] a lot of the times it has to do with their children [...] Cause they have very similar experiences in things like that [...] So they have more maybe more in common and maybe a lot of what men have in common is harder to discuss.

Elizabeth agreed and argued that women can be more honest and are able to talk issues through. In projects where both men and women participate, men tend to take over and women have to take a step back and keep quite. Both Monica and Mary agreed with this stating that women are “definitely more open” and they would talk a lot more. Mary said:

I'm not saying that they're not suspicious or they're not weary [...] but I think they have a tendency to be more....I don't know... but to speak more from the heart. [...] Women are cautious too, [...] but [they] get in and break the barriers down, and I think women are more relaxed really.

Ann also addressed the idea that women are not as peaceful and open as they are often portrayed to be:

Women can be very hateful too sometimes. You know [they can have], very strong, bigoted views.

In the interviews, half of the women expressed an interest in joining projects that were goal-oriented, working with something other than the conflict; while the other half wished to join projects that dealt with conflict issues.

The FWC and SWC houses projects focusing on subjects other than the conflict. Mona told me about a cross-community project about democracy and gender equality, bringing bigger issues in instead of just discussing the conflict. At the center they have said "let's not talk conflict, let's talk what we want for our health and education" instead.

If someone said tomorrow, something around health, or around education, you would find women really do come together, and can lobby in that. And that's our new way forward.

Elizabeth and Ann from the Shankill both argued that that both types of cross-community projects are needed and equally important: those that deal with the past and the conflict directly; and those of a more transversal nature where the goal is to work with an issue in both communities. Mary argued that it is better to start off with projects that are goal-oriented, to build trust and relationships, while eventually incorporating conflict-related issues. Ann also addressed the importance of incorporating the "real" issues:

[O]nce the trust has been built, you need to then go into the harder issues. Cause it's only by getting into the harder issues that things are gonna be solved.

All in all, building transversal dialogue between women in Belfast is encouraged by all the interviewed women. A difficulty is bridging the sectarian and antagonistic position of women without the project ending in political fragmentation. Both Ward and Hackett argue that a truly inclusive feminism in Northern Ireland is improbable because the divisions are so entrenched and deep (Ward 2004: 196). The only way to create the basis for strong alliances is by “acknowledging the different identities of women rather than striving for a common ground that may only be an illusion” (Hackett cited by Ward 2004: 196). This can be done through transversalism.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter the main research question is answered:

*How is a peace-building transversal dialogue encouraged and discouraged by the way women make sense of the intersections of gender and nation in Northern Ireland?*

The conclusions have been drawn according to the theoretical understanding of transversal dialogue presented in Chapter 3. In line with the theory, I have identified three different conditions needed for building transversalism:

- (1) flexibility and willingness to root and shift
- (2) recognizing and respecting differences of fellow participants
- (3) sharing compatible goals and values

This concluding chapter has been written with these conditions as a basis for understanding gendered nationalism of Northern Ireland and to answer the research questions. Each condition includes an analysis of both encouraging and discouraging signs as to if the conditions can be fulfilled. The focus is placed on the main research question, but the three sub-questions will also be indirectly discussed and answered.

## **ROOTING AND SHIFTING**

Transversal dialogue requires the flexibility and willingness to root and shift, as this is its key method to promote peaceful relations between women from different communities. Based on the findings, there are both encouraging and discouraging signs as to if rooting and shifting is possible. The rewards of cross-community projects showed women's great capacity to root and shift in order to gain a deeper understanding of the "Other" community. Building trust and overcoming fear and misconceptions through rooting and shifting is difficult, but central to transversal cross-community projects, as is emphasized in the paper. If these factors are not handled with care, they can derail the project and thus make transversal dialogue become impossible.

This study has shown that the burden of maintaining cultural traditions is shared by both parents and the community at large. There is no clear indication that it is the woman's role, as a cultural mother, to maintain traditions or the cultural stability of her community. This is positive for transversalism, since it gives women room to explore other cultural and national ideas and identities without being restricted by their role as cultural mothers.

Most of society is not as progressive as the interviewed women – most of whom referred to themselves as exceptions in an otherwise quite conservative gender order. So it is possible that many women are pushed to, or agree to, raise their children in line with sectarian ideas – strengthening the division instead of questioning it. This makes transversalism harder, making the process of rooting and shifting more difficult.

Through this paper it becomes clear that the framing of the ethno-national groups as mothers rewards and encourages a particular kind of femininity: that connected to motherhood. Although the Unionist community has no direct equivalent of Nationalism's Mother Ireland, women are still valued most as mothers and placed in the domestic sphere. This view of femininity discourages transversalism as it entails a questioning of the basic conservative gendered order of the nation. My research indicates that transversal dialogue requires room to explore different identities, which can be difficult to do when one's identity is so strongly connected to one role. It is also difficult when the

identity of the ethno-national collectivity is so dependent upon this division of labor, as is the case in Belfast according to my findings.

It becomes clear that questions of orange-or-green are still able to take over any attempts within political life to overcome or challenge this division, like the NIWC did. Women are not exempt from these kinds of sectarian views. It can be difficult to bridge the sectarian divide that exists between women in the area, and because of this an inclusive feminism can be hard to achieve. This is problematic for transversalism, because the more cemented sectarian identities are, the more difficult it is to shift out of them. This is also connected to the current segregation of working-class communities, which results in a feeling of threat from the outside. This reinforces feelings of isolation, fear and the need for self-protection of one's community. It also closes the outside world, physically and psychologically, as community is homogenized. Due to this, a process of Othering can go on without being challenged. My paper clarifies that segregation and fear can lead to difficulties for transversalism, as they restrict the ideas that are seen as appropriate and make it harder for women to shift out of their identities.

### **RESPECTING DIFFERENCES**

Transversal dialogue also requires the participants to recognize and respect the differences of the other participating women and that these differences are encompassed by notions of equality. This entails a questioning of sectarianism as it is based on intolerance, discrimination and hatred towards "Others". There are both encouraging and discouraging signs to whether this is possible, although they are predominantly encouraging.

At large, the interviewed women tended to question sectarian identities and they see the importance of understanding and respecting people from the "Other" community. The women do not seem to raise their children in accordance with nationalist (and exclusionary) ideas. Rather they pass on the importance of understanding and respect, as well as a commitment to cross-community work. They teach their children to challenge sectarianism. This is encouraging for building transversal dialogue since it shows that the women

are accepting the differences that exist and do not see them as a reason not to participate.

This being said, I have found that women are not exempt from sectarianism, and therefore, how strong the national identities are of the women themselves matters. Having a strong sense of identity and self is valued in both communities. It is argued that as long as you are accepting of what other people consider themselves to be and respect that, and learn to accept whatever people want to think of themselves, then a strong identity does not have to be a source for conflict. Wanting to maintain your culture identity does not necessarily mean that you are antagonistic toward the “Other”. Therefore, identity constructions based on the intersections of gender and nation do not necessarily have to promote conflict as long as the differences are recognized and respected.

### **SHARING COMPATIBLE GOALS**

Transversal dialogue requires that participants share compatible goals and values. In this study, this translates to a shared commitment to peace-building cross-community work. Transversalism also emphasizes working for a shared goal. This is illustrated by exploring if there is a possibility of working towards gender equality in both communities in cross-community projects.

All of the interviewees wished to see real peace for their communities. This is encouraging because it demonstrates a willingness to work to achieve real peace and a shared goal of a peaceful North. All of the interviewees have expressed feelings of disappointment over the lack of implementation of the Agreement, but argue that it is better than nothing. This disappointment can lead to a feeling that something needs to be done or a feeling of hopelessness. However, looking at the interviewees, I believe that this encourages transversalism, as they are prone to act to change their situations and are tired of nothing happening.

My research shows that all of the women were positive about cross-community projects in general, and specifically cross-community projects that are open only for women. The rewards of cross-community work that the women

outlined, together with the fact that the women's centers have a long history of working together on cross-community projects, greatly encourage transversalism. The acknowledgement of the difficulties of cross-community work is also an encouraging sign, since being aware of these can help avoid them. I conclude that the positive views on these kinds of projects show that there is a great potential for conducting more of them in the future. Not only is there a potential for these kinds of projects, they are already happening.

Through my research I have pointed out that regarding women's participation in the armed conflict and their legacy, the situation is somewhat different between the two communities. Within the Republican movement, feminists have organized to fight for gender equality. This has shown that women can participate in other capacities than as peacemakers and mothers. This is encouraging for transversalism since it enables women to place themselves in the public sphere, acting as political subjects. I also conclude that this is positive because it helps women continue on the path of working towards gender equality through transversal politics.

The feminist tradition has not been as strong within the Unionist community, and neither is the general knowledge of women's participation in it. As has been demonstrated, this could be due to that the Unionist community has more masculinist symbolism. It can also be explained by the (historically) low rate of story-telling from this community and the relative lack of academic research and media interest that has been shown for it. My findings are that this could be discouraging for transversalism, especially when the goal is to increase gender equality, since it can be hard to work for women's rights in a community that is to a large extent dominated by men and one where there is not a strong tradition of feminism.

It has become clear that there are also some intersections that are more ambiguous. They can be summarized by looking at the state of gender equality in Northern Ireland today: gender issues do not have a high standing and the lack of gender equality is a problem for creating a shared future. This can have different effects: it can encourage transversal dialogue as gender equality is a goal that still needs to be achieved – the stronger the hold, the more there is



challenge; or it can discourage it as it can be difficult to work for gender equality and challenge inequalities in a society where it is not a prioritized issue.

I have found that although the rules regulating women's behavior and activity are more relaxed today, women are still very much in charge of raising children, despite the increase in father participation. Due to the maternal responsibility for raising kids, having the main responsibility for housework and working jobs connected to domestic life, the home is still very much the domain of women and women are associated with the private sphere of society. This could be encouraging for transversal politics, if women are prone to question this gender order and if women are aware of the inequalities that exist. The majority of the interviewees are aware and would question the prevailing gender order. On the other hand, it can also mean that this order is so cemented in society that it is hard to challenge and is seen as natural – discouraging transversalism. Seeing as how the society is quite conservative, this might be more difficult to do on a larger scale.

In conclusion, women's subordinate position in the public sphere of society is a direct consequence of being symbolically constructed, within nationalism, as mothers belonging to the private sphere. Therefore, understanding the intersections of gender and nation and its effects on transversal dialogue is crucial, which has been emphasized in this paper.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH**

There are many interesting ways of building on this research in the future. One idea would be to compare middle-class and working-class communities to see if the results are different. It would also be interesting to deepen the research on the differences between older and younger generations. A third idea would be to include sexuality as a dimension of identity, seeing as this study has only included heterosexual women.

Cynthia Cockburn (1998: 41) has drafted a list of questions to evaluate a nationalist movement and its relationship to feminism. It would be interesting to analyze the case of nationalism in Northern Ireland and other similar cases by answering Cockburn's questions. An international comparison would be

fruitful by including women from other divided cities, such as Jerusalem and Sarajevo.

It would also be interesting to further investigate if there is a possibility that transversalism enforces traditional and conservative gender roles, following the idea of Fidelma Ashe (2006B). Could it be the case that transversalism does not always succeed in abating women's nationalist identities, but rather reinforces them by using traditional aspects of femininity (such as motherhood) as a basis for cooperation? Using a genealogical approach to gender politics, as suggested by Ashe, could be one way of exploring this dilemma.

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## **INTERVIEWS**

*Falls (Nationalist/Republican/Catholic)*

BRIDGET – born in the 1980s. Married, has one child.

FIONA (staff) – born in the 1980s. Engaged.

MARY – born in 1970s. Has two children.

MAY – born in the 1950s. Has children.

MONA (staff) – born in the 1960s. Has children.

MONICA – born in the 1950s. Married, has children.

NORA – born in the 1950s. Married, has four children.

*Shankill (Unionist/Loyalist/Protestant)*

ANN – born in 1960s. Has children.

CHRISTINE – born in the 1990s. Lives with boyfriend.

ELIZABETH – born in the 1960s. Married, has two children.

ELLEN (staff) – born in the 1960s. Married, has children.

HELEN (staff) – born in the 1950s.

JANE – born in the 1950s. Has children.

PATRICIA – born in the 1990s. Has one child.