



**RETHINKING PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES**

*SERIES EDITORS:*

OLIVER P. RICHMOND · ANNIKA BJÖRKDAHL · GİZİM VISOKA

# Bridging Divides Through Gender-Just Citizenship

Women's Political Participation, Grassroots  
Peacebuilding and Transversal Politics in  
Northern Ireland

Linda Eitrem Holmgren

**OPEN ACCESS**

palgrave  
macmillan

# Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies

## Series Editors

Oliver P. Richmond, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK  
Annika Björkdahl, Department of Political Science, Lund University,  
Lund, Sweden  
Gëzim Visoka, Dublin City University, Dublin, Ireland

This agenda-setting series of research monographs, now more than two decades old, provides an interdisciplinary forum aimed at advancing innovative new agendas for peace and conflict studies in International Relations and other disciplines. Many of the critical volumes the series has hosted so far have contributed to new avenues of analysis directly or indirectly related to the search for positive, emancipatory, and hybrid forms of peace in the structural and ethical context of global justice and sustainability. Constructive critiques of liberal peace, hybrid peace, everyday contributions to peace, the role of civil society and social movements, international actors and networks, as well as a range of different dimensions, nexuses, and scholarly generations of peace (from peacebuilding and statebuilding, to youth contributions, photography, the arts, gender debates, spatial innovations, embodiment, and emotional aspects, and many case studies) have been explored so far. The series raises important critical and political questions about what peace is, whose peace is, and peace for whom, as well as where peace takes place. In doing so, it offers new and interdisciplinary perspectives on the development of international peace architecture, peace processes, peacebuilding, peacekeeping and mediation, statebuilding, and localised peace formation in practice and theory. It examines their implications for the development of local peace agency and the connection with theoretical advances about emancipatory forms of peace and global justice, which remain crucial in different conflict-affected regions around the world. This is related to the ongoing transition from a so-called liberal international order to a more multipolar and authoritarian version associated with older notions of conflict management and the post-colonial, economic, and environmental challenges against the Eurocentrism and inequalities associated with liberal peace. This series' contributions offer both theoretical and empirical insights into many of the world's most intractable conflicts, also investigating increasingly significant evidence about blockages to peace, counter-peace, the breakdown of the liberal order, and the rise of alternative approaches (for better or worse). Its monographs and edited collections contribute—we hope—to the potential for new innovative and transformative approaches to emerge that may radically improve the international peace architecture or its possible alternatives.

This series is indexed by Scopus.

Linda Eitrem Holmgren

# Bridging Divides Through Gender-Just Citizenship

Women's Political Participation, Grassroots  
Peacebuilding and Transversal Politics  
in Northern Ireland

palgrave  
macmillan

Linda Eitrem Holmgren   
Department of Political Science  
Lund University  
Lund, Sweden



ISSN 1759-3735                      ISSN 2752-857X (electronic)  
Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies  
ISBN 978-3-031-83474-5              ISBN 978-3-031-83475-2 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-83475-2>

This work was supported by Lund University.

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2025. This book is an open access publication.

**Open Access** This book is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this book are included in the book's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the book's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover illustration: © MC Richmond

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG  
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

If disposing of this product, please recycle the paper.

*To all everyone who works tirelessly to challenge exclusionary politics,  
improve all women's lives and create a gender-just future.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to those who made this book possible. First of all, I would like to thank all the women who participated in this study and so generously shared their time, experiences and ideas with me. This includes the women who participated in interviews and also those who welcomed me into their groups for participant observation. Without you, there would not have been a book! Thank you to Kellie Turtle, Emma Campbell and Elaine Crory for insightful conversations about feminist activism in a deeply divided society. I would also like to offer my special thanks to Irene Sherry, Head of Health and Well-being, and Áine Magee, former Legacy Coordinator at Bridge of Hope—I appreciate the opportunity to work with you. Áine, thank you for being so kind, encouraging and helpful. I learned so much from our conversations and your ability to facilitate critical discussions on difficult issues.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my great PhD supervisors, Dr Kristian Brown and Eilish Rooney at the Transitional Justice Institute at Ulster University. Your support, guidance and encouragement have meant a great deal to me. Your attention to detail, extensive knowledge and constructive feedback have allowed me to develop as a researcher and encouraged me to find my academic voice. I have thoroughly enjoyed our many conversations! Part of what made my PhD journey so great was also the open and welcoming research environment at the Transitional Justice Institute—special thanks to Professor Rory O’Connell for this, and for

your support. Thank you Professor Bill Rolston, Dr Fidelma Ashe and Dr Catherine O'Rourke for insightful conversations and scholarly inspiration.

I am deeply grateful to Dr Priyam Yarnell—our weekly dates have meant the world to me! Thank you for inspiring me to never give up and for being so supportive! Special thanks to Clémentine Thiers, Jenny Björkbacka and Anne Stein for your friendship and encouragement no matter where life takes us. Many thanks to my mum, Gunilla, and dad, Torgny, for your unwavering support and for inspiring me to follow my dreams. To my sisters and best friends, Katrin and Klara—without you, none of this would have been possible. Thank you for your love and encouragement and for always believing in me!

Last, but not least, I would also like to thank Editorial Director Sarah Roughley and Project Coordinator Ananda Kumar at Palgrave Macmillan for your great support, as well as Production Supervisor Belsiya Catherin, the anonymous reviewers and the series editors, Oliver P. Richmond, Annika Björkdahl and Gëzim Visoka.

**Competing Interests** This book is an output of research work developed under the scope of doctoral studies at the Transitional Justice Institute at Ulster University, funded by the university's Vice-Chancellor's Research Studentship.

**Ethical Approval** This study was performed in line with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of Ulster University (UK) in 2019 and by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority in 2023 (Dnr. 2023-04756-01). Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Lund, Sweden  
November 2024

Linda Eitrem Holmgren

# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	<i>Theoretical Foundations</i>	2
1.1.1	<i>Gender and Intersectionality</i>	3
1.1.2	<i>Intersections of Nationalism, Citizenship and Gender</i>	4
1.1.3	<i>Gendered Citizenship in Deeply Divided Societies</i>	4
1.1.4	<i>Gendered Citizenship in Transitional Societies</i>	5
1.1.5	<i>Transversalism, Agonism and Gender-Just Political Citizenship</i>	6
1.2	<i>Introducing Northern Ireland</i>	7
1.2.1	<i>Ethno-National Identities, Religion and Gender</i>	8
1.2.2	<i>Violence, Social Deprivation and Segregation</i>	11
1.3	<i>Conducting Feminist Research with Women in Northern Ireland</i>	13
1.3.1	<i>Data Collection</i>	15
1.3.2	<i>Ethical Considerations</i>	21
1.3.3	<i>Data Analysis</i>	23
1.4	<i>Research Contributions</i>	24
1.5	<i>Outline of the Book</i>	26
	<i>References</i>	27

<b>2</b>	<b>Theorising a Gender-Just Political Citizenship in Deeply Divided Transitional Societies</b>	<b>35</b>
2.1	<i>Gendered Political Citizenship in Ethno-Nationally Deeply Divided Transitional Societies</i>	36
2.1.1	<i>Citizenship, Political Participation and Gender</i>	36
2.1.2	<i>Nationalisms, Citizenship and Gender</i>	38
2.1.3	<i>Women’s Political Citizenship in Transitional Ethno-Nationalist Societies</i>	46
2.2	<i>Agonistic Peace and Transversal Politics</i>	53
2.2.1	<i>Agonistic Peace</i>	53
2.2.2	<i>Transversal Politics</i>	58
2.3	<i>Gender-Just Citizenship Through Transversal Politics</i>	62
2.3.1	<i>Intersectionality and Multi-Layered Membership</i>	63
2.3.2	<i>Multi-Sited Citizenship Participation: Challenging the Public/Private Divide Through Grassroots Activism in Transitional Societies</i>	65
2.3.3	<i>Citizenship Coalitions and Solidarity Across Difference</i>	70
2.4	<i>Conclusion</i>	74
	<i>References</i>	76
<b>3</b>	<b>Women’s Public Participation and Political Activism During the Troubles</b>	<b>87</b>
3.1	<i>Introduction</i>	88
3.2	<i>The Troubles</i>	91
3.3	<i>Women’s Ethno-National Activism</i>	92
3.3.1	<i>Nationalism and Republicanism</i>	93
3.3.2	<i>Unionism and Loyalism</i>	98
3.4	<i>Maternal Politics, Community Organising and Women’s Activism</i>	102
3.4.1	<i>Community Development Activism, Maternal Politicisation and Family Feminism</i>	103
3.4.2	<i>Maternal Peace Activism</i>	106
3.4.3	<i>Feminist Potential of Maternal Community Activism</i>	107

3.5	<i>Women's Rights Activism for Citizen Equality</i>	109
3.5.1	<i>Activism for Civil Rights, Women's Rights and Feminist Reform</i>	109
3.5.2	<i>Feminist Solidarity? Dealing with Difference</i>	113
3.6	<i>Transversal Politics and Intersectional Activism</i>	116
3.6.1	<i>Women's Activism for Rights and Equality</i>	117
3.6.2	<i>Women's Activism for Gender-Just Peace</i>	118
3.7	<i>Conclusion</i>	123
	<i>References</i>	127
<b>4</b>	<b>Gender, Citizen Participation and Women's Political Activity in Post-Agreement Northern Ireland</b>	<b>135</b>
4.1	<i>The Ideal Citizen Participant?</i>	137
4.1.1	<i>Female Problem-Solvers and Male Troublemakers</i>	137
4.1.2	<i>Political Self-Image and Lack of Recognition</i>	141
4.1.3	<i>Fear of Voicing (Dissenting) Opinions</i>	145
4.2	<i>Gendered Obstacles to Women's Citizenship</i>	146
4.3	<i>Defining Women's Citizen Participation in Formal Politics</i>	148
4.3.1	<i>Political Parties and Citizen Participation</i>	149
4.3.2	<i>Women and Voting as Political Participation</i>	151
4.3.3	<i>Female Politicians, Feminism and Double Standards</i>	154
4.4	<i>Consociational Restrictions to Women's Participation</i>	158
4.4.1	<i>Rewarding Political Polarisation, Ethno-National Politics and Instability</i>	159
4.4.2	<i>Lack of Focus on Gender Equality Issues</i>	162
4.4.3	<i>Transitional Trends in Women's Participation and Gender Equality</i>	175
4.5	<i>Conclusion</i>	180
4.5.1	<i>Encouraging Trends</i>	180
4.5.2	<i>Discouraging Trends</i>	181
4.5.3	<i>Concluding Comments</i>	183
	<i>References</i>	184

<b>5</b>	<b>Women's Cross-Community Activities, Agonistic Dialogue and Transversal Politics in Belfast</b>	<b>195</b>
5.1	<i>Introduction</i>	197
5.2	<i>Building Solidarity Through Trust, Respect and Shared Identity</i>	200
5.2.1	<i>Building Trust, Respect and Democratic Ideals</i>	200
5.2.2	<i>Transforming Identities</i>	202
5.3	<i>Dealing with Difference</i>	207
5.3.1	<i>Recreational and Educational Activities</i>	208
5.3.2	<i>Legacy-Based Activities</i>	210
5.3.3	<i>Feminist Activities</i>	219
5.4	<i>Building Coalitions</i>	226
5.4.1	<i>Identifying Shared Issues and Goals</i>	226
5.4.2	<i>Challenges of Building Coalitions</i>	228
5.5	<i>Conclusion</i>	232
5.5.1	<i>Building Alliances, Trust and Shared Identities</i>	232
5.5.2	<i>Dealing with Difference</i>	234
	<i>References</i>	237
<b>6</b>	<b>Moving Forward—Trajectories Towards Gender-Just Transversal Citizenship in Northern Ireland</b>	<b>241</b>
6.1	<i>Introduction</i>	241
6.1.1	<i>Brexit and Women's Rights in Northern Ireland</i>	243
6.2	<i>Uniting the Feminist and Women's Sectors</i>	244
6.2.1	<i>Organising Together</i>	246
6.2.2	<i>Secure and Sustainable Funding</i>	251
6.2.3	<i>Sharing Community Space with Men?</i>	254
6.3	<i>Channelling Women's Experiences and Participation in Formal Politics</i>	256
6.3.1	<i>Party-Political Routes</i>	257
6.3.2	<i>Civic Routes</i>	267
6.4	<i>Conclusion</i>	273
6.4.1	<i>Transversal Grassroots Feminism</i>	273
6.4.2	<i>Bridging the Formal/Informal Political Divide</i>	274
	<i>References</i>	277

<b>7 Conclusion</b>	<b>285</b>
7.1 <i>Citizenship as Political Participation: Grassroots         Activism as Acts of Citizenship in an Ethno-National         Society</i>	285
7.2 <i>Gender Equality: Progress or Backlash?</i>	288
7.3 <i>Transversal and Agonistic Dialogue in Theory         and Practice</i>	292
7.4 <i>Transversal Citizenship: Making Democracy Out         of Difference</i>	294
7.5 <i>Concluding Remarks</i>	297
References	298
<b>Index</b>	<b>301</b>

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Dr. Linda Eitrem Holmgren** works at the Department of Political Science, Lund University. She completed her doctoral studies at the Transitional Justice Institute at Ulster University, Northern Ireland, in 2020 and has a Master of Science in Political Science (2014) and a Bachelor of Science in Political Science and Economics (2009) from Lund University. Her research draws on feminist approaches and gender perspectives in Peace and Conflict Studies, Transitional Justice and International Relations. Her PhD thesis addressed the intersections of gender, political citizenship, ethno-nationalism and women's grassroots activism in contemporary Northern Ireland. Linda's research interests also include the UN Women, Peace and Security Agenda, local peacebuilding and sustainable feminist peace practices. She has conducted studies on Northern Ireland, Israel and Palestine, and Columbia and has published articles in journals such as the *Journal of International Relations and Development* and the *Swedish Journal of Political Science (Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift)*.

## ABBREVIATIONS

AFC	Alliance for Choice (est. 1996)
APNI	Alliance Party Northern Ireland (est. 1970)
BFN	Belfast Feminist Network (est. 2010)
CA	Citizens' Assembly
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979)
CNR	Catholic/Nationalist/Republican
DPW	Derry Peace Women (est. 1972)
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party (est. 1971)
EU	European Union
FICT	Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition (est. 2016)
GB	Great Britain
GFA	Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (1998)
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
IRA	Irish Republican Army (est. 1919)
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly of Northern Ireland
MP	Member of Parliament
NAP	National Action Plan
NDNA	New Decade, New Approach Deal (2020)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NI	Northern Ireland/the North of Ireland
NIA	Northern Ireland Assembly
NICRA	Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (est. 1967)
NICVA	Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (est. 1986)
NIHRC	Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (est. 1999)

NIWC	Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition (est. 1996)
NIWEP	Northern Ireland Women’s European Platform (est. 1988)
NIWRM	Northern Ireland Women’s Rights Movement (est. 1975)
PM	Prime Minister
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland (est. 2001)
PUL	Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist
PUP	Progressive Unionist Party (est. 1979)
ROI	Republic of Ireland/the South of Ireland
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary (est. 1922)
RVY	Raise Your Voice Against Sexual Harassment (est. 2019)
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party (est. 1970)
SF	Sinn Féin (est. 1905)
SHA	Stormont House Agreement (2014)
SPF	Shared Prosperity Fund
STV	Single Transferable Vote
UDA	Ulster Defence Association (est. 1971)
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations (est. 1945)
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
USA	United States of America
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party (est. 1905)
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force (est. 1913)
UWUC	Ulster Women’s Unionist Council (est. 1911)
WAI	Women Against Imperialism (est. 1978)
WIG	Women’s Information Group (est. 1980)
WIP	Women Into Politics (est. 1993)
WPG	Women’s Policy Group
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WRDA	Women’s Resource and Development Agency (est. 1983)
WSN	Women’s Support Network (est. 1989)

# LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1.1	Protestant national identity, 1968–2018	10
Fig. 1.2	Catholic national identity, 1968–2018	10
Fig. 2.1	Symbolic gendering and practical consequences	47
Fig. 2.2	Breaking ethno-national gendering through transversalism	63
Fig. 3.1	Categories of women’s activism during the Troubles	90
Fig. 3.2	Women’s ethno-nationalist activism during the Troubles	93
Fig. 3.3	Women’s maternal activism during the Troubles	103
Fig. 3.4	Women’s rights activism during the Troubles	110
Fig. 3.5	Women’s transversal activism during the Troubles	116
Fig. 4.1	Voter turnout, 1998–2024	152
Fig. 4.2	Voter turnout by gender, 2001–2010	153
Fig. 4.3	Voter turnout by community, 2001–2008	153
Fig. 4.4	Percentage of manifesto photos of women and men	175
Fig. 5.1	Women’s cross-community activities in post-Agreement Northern Ireland	236
Fig. 6.1	Unionist, Nationalist and Neither identities, 1998–2023	264
Fig. 6.2	Men and women identifying as Neither/Other, 1998–2023	265
Fig. 6.3	Percentage of NIA and council seats held by non-aligned parties, 1998–2023	266

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1	Women’s and feminist groups in Northern Ireland	17
Table 4.1	Perceived top characteristics of male and female politicians	140
Table 4.2	Desirable characteristics of politicians per gender and community	140
Table 4.3	Citizen participation analysis of party manifestos 2017–2024	151
Table 4.4	Female MLAs elected to the NIA, 1998–2022	155
Table 4.5	Female MLAs by community designation, 1998–2022	166
Table 4.6	Female candidates and elected councillors by community designation, 2019 local election	166
Table 4.7	Gender analysis of party manifestos 2017–2024	169
Table 5.1	Study participants’ shared key political priorities	227
Table 5.2	Women’s transversal and agonistic cross-community activities	233
Table 6.1	Percentage of APNI seats in NIA and local councils, 1998–2023	266
Table 7.1	Women’s descriptive and substantive representation in formal and informal politics, 1998–2024	289



## CHAPTER 1

---

# Introduction

This book explores how women in societies plagued by ethno-national conflict can help build peace and gender equality, even in places where deep divisions have existed for generations. It uses an approach called *transversal politics* to analyse how women from different communities work together across an ethno-national divide to build coalitions on shared values and common goals. The book also explores how *agonistic peace* can help create space for inclusive dialogue, identity transformation and reconciliation in divided societies. Both these approaches encourage difference to be recognised rather than ignored or erased. They see diversity as a strength, not an obstacle to be overcome, which is crucial for transforming relationships and building lasting alliances in deeply divided societies. Studying how grassroots women's groups use transversal politics and agonism in their work can help us imagine a more inclusive society which can transcend ethno-national divides. It can also inspire foundations for building a *gender-just citizenship* that both validates and promotes women's political participation. One of the key ideas in this book is thus how we can imagine political citizenship in a more inclusive way, especially for women. The book argues that for societies to move forwards after ethno-national conflict, they need to recognise women as equal citizens, deserving of the same political rights and responsibilities as men.

By looking at Northern Ireland (NI)<sup>1</sup> as a case study, the book explores the specific ways that ethno-nationalism, gender and political citizenship interact in deeply divided societies. Ethno-nationalism is built on gendered ideas of belonging, ideas that can marginalise women and leave them with fewer opportunities to participate in the public, political life. As such women face specific, and often significant, obstacles to full political citizenship in deeply divided ethno-national societies. These obstacles tend to be rooted in traditional gender roles that place women in the private sphere of home and family, leaving them out of the public political sphere. After years of armed conflict, societies transitioning to peace are in a unique position to question what it means to be a citizen, what political participation entails, and how these ideas are gendered. At the same time, transitional societies often entail a backlash against women's rights and gender equality issues. This is often the case even in societies where women have been politically active and made progress in terms of gender equality during the conflict. This book explores how women, particularly those involved in cross-community groups, challenge these gendered norms and risk of backlash to fight for a more equal society, both through formal political processes and grassroots action. Ultimately, this book presents a vision of gender-just citizenship that embraces diversity and inclusivity; a political citizenship that acknowledges the unique struggles and contributions of women in transitional societies and their grassroots political participation. It shows how women's participation in the political life of deeply divided societies can not only transform their own lives but also help build more gender-just and peaceful societies for everyone.

## 1.1 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

This book combines theories of ethno-nationalist conflict, gendered citizen participation and transversal and agonistic peacebuilding to explore how a gender-just political citizenship can be built, especially in deeply divided transitional societies. A gender-just political citizenship is one that, in different ways, recognises, validates and promotes public

<sup>1</sup> The name of the region is contested. Catholics/Nationalists/Republicans usually refer to it as “the North”, while Protestants/Unionists/Loyalists use “Northern Ireland” or “Ulster” (though more so in the past). In this book, “NI” is used when referring to the region.

political participation of all genders. The concept of transversal politics is used to imagine such a citizenship which incorporates three core ideas:

1. A broad understanding of politics that includes both formal and informal political activities and, as such, builds on multi-sited participation;
2. An intersectional understanding of identities and oppression, allowing for difference to be recognised and embraced; and
3. The ability to build coalitions based on shared values, common goals and an acknowledgement of difference.

Women's cross-community activities in Northern Ireland, rooted in transversalism and agonism, have served as an inspiration for this conceptualisation of political citizenship. The reason for focusing on gender-just citizenship is its potential to change women's lives. Citizenship has historically "provided socially excluded groups with a lever to demand inclusion and their fair share of public resources and social recognition" (Goetz, 2007, p. 33). Exploring ways to renegotiate citizenship in a way that produces gender equality is thus key, both for women and men, but also for producing a society based on equality and justice. The main ideas of the book's theoretical framework are introduced below and elaborated on in Chapter 2.

### *1.1.1 Gender and Intersectionality*

Gender constructions constitute an important part of how society is organised: they influence how we view ourselves; how we understand and interpret the world and our place in it; and how we relate to others (Krause, 1996). Through context-specific constructions of femininity and masculinity, we identify as gendered beings. There is a power hierarchy at the heart of gender relations, where norms and behaviours associated with (hegemonic) masculinity are in general valued higher than those associated with femininity. As Sjoberg (2010, p. 3) writes, gender is "a system of symbolic meaning that creates social hierarchies based on perceived associations with masculine and feminine characteristics". As such, gender norms are politically significant and often used to justify inequality between men and women, as well as in relation to non-binary and queer people. In addition to gender, people have a range of other

identity markers such as class, ethnicity, ability, sexuality and age. Women (nor men) “constitute homogeneous categories as either social agents or social objects” (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 116). It is therefore key to incorporate an intersectional analysis when studying any form of identity or oppression. As Gready and Robins (2014, p. 354) argue, intersectionality is “an approach that explores the way gender intersects with other identities to produce both opportunities and oppression or multiple forms of discrimination”. Power relations that govern gender inequality and those encouraging oppression based on class, ethno-nationality or sexuality, often intersect (Cockburn, 2010; Kronsell, 2012). Intersectionality has thus become a key analytical concept and practical tool for feminist researchers and activists, as it allows for the analysis of power relations and inequality regarding many facets of identity.

### *1.1.2 Intersections of Nationalism, Citizenship and Gender*

Nationalism’s focus on the right of self-determination, i.e., the right of a nation to form a state and as such have the power of regulating citizenship, closely ties it to issues of citizenship. Gender also plays a central role in both concepts as gender norms greatly inform the understanding and practice of nationalist movements as well as states’ interests (or lack thereof) in including women as full and equal citizens. The norm of the “rational male citizen”, along with the importance of military service, and the highly gendered public/private divide, create obstacles for women’s political participation as citizens. The idea of the public/private divide is also evident within nationalisms, which tend to elevate women as mothers and guardians of the nation, placing them in the private sphere of society and, as such, deny their roles as equal citizens (Lister, 2003; McClintock, 2002; Ryan & Ward, 2004; Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999; Yuval-Davis, 1997). Due to women being constructed as belonging to the private (“non-political”) sphere of society, they are not considered to be political actors, which limits their access to full and equal citizenship. As such, it is not possible to separate gender from nationalism and citizenship—they are constitutive of each other.

### *1.1.3 Gendered Citizenship in Deeply Divided Societies*

Ethno-nationalist gender norms can intersect with citizenship politics in specific ways to obstruct women’s full and equal political participation.

A fundamental problem in deeply divided societies is the contested legitimacy of the political system due to a divide based on ethnicity, class, caste or clan for instance (Guelke, 2012). Such societies have a “sustained division [...] [which is] seen as having overriding importance, so that its influence extends over a wide range of issues” (Guelke, 2012, pp. 28–29). As such, deeply divided societies tend to view all political issues, even those otherwise considered routine administration, through the prism of the division, which prevents cooperation across the divide (Guelke, 2012; Horowitz, 2000). As the focus of formal<sup>2</sup> politics tends to be on issues closely connected to ethno-national parties, i.e., issues that tend to reinforce the ethno-national divide, other issues such as women’s rights and gender equality, are seldom prioritised. Thus, the struggle for equal citizenship not only has to overcome norms associated with the historically rooted, gendered public/private divide, but also the disinterest of the formal political elite in advancing issues outside the range of what is considered important in terms of ethno-nationalist aims. In such contexts, equality politics are often interpreted in terms of the main ethno-national groups being treated fairly, rather than based on identities such as gender or class.

#### 1.1.4 *Gendered Citizenship in Transitional Societies*

Transitional societies<sup>3</sup> are those in the process of moving from war to (positive or negative<sup>4</sup>) peace, and/or from systematic discrimination and

<sup>2</sup> Formal politics refers to the party-political system and the electoral and institutional politics practised through local councils, parliaments and government bodies. Informal politics are constituted of extra-institutional grassroots and community activities in civil society, for instance in trade unions, women’s movements and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In NI, the term “small-p” politics references informal politics and work in voluntary associations, while “big-P” politics is used as a synonym to formal politics (Donahoe, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> In this book, “transitional” is used instead of “post-conflict” when referring to societies emerging from war. “Post-conflict” signals the end of conflict, which is misleading as a clear break between armed conflict and its aftermath is rarely a lived reality, especially in terms of gender relations. Violence and structural discrimination tend to carry over from the public to the private sphere after ceasefires and peace agreements. “Transitional”, on the other hand, more effectively conveys the notion of a process rather than an event.

<sup>4</sup> Achieving positive peace requires aspects such as cooperation and integration between groups, freedom from fear and want, absence of exploitation, equality and justice, rather than solely the absence of collective violence (i.e., negative peace) (Galtung, 1967). It

human rights abuses to a just and equal society. A transition is a complex, long-term and multi-faceted process that requires a lot of a society (Sharoni, 1998). Previous research has shown that transitional societies offer a window of opportunity to re-imagine and re-define the core values a society is built on, including how citizenship is configured (Brown & Ní Aoláin, 2015; O'Rourke, 2012; Pankhurst, 2008). Integrally linked to this are issues of gender relations, as the transitional phase also represents a critical juncture to bring gender issues to the agenda and challenge the existing gender order, including the lines of the gendered public/private divide. Issues of citizenship can thus potentially be renegotiated on the basis of gender equality and what is considered "political" can be challenged. However, research has also shown that a backlash in terms of gender equality and women's rights can often be observed in transitional societies (Enloe, 1990; Meintjes et al., 2001; O'Rourke, 2013; Pankhurst, 2008; Pierson, 2000; Rooney & Swaine, 2012). Potential gains made during conflict by women are as such often restricted or lost in the aftermath of war and women's participation tends to be confined to the margins in the social and political life of the post-conflict state. Women's needs are thus often systematically ignored and marginalised (Pankhurst, 2008).

### *1.1.5 Transversalism, Agonism and Gender-Just Political Citizenship*

Ethno-nationalism and post-war backlash can have negative consequences for women's citizenship in transitional societies. Women's cross-community<sup>5</sup> groups have found inventive ways to mitigate these consequences by practising transversal and agonistic dialogue. This has in turn inspired a conceptualisation of a gender-just political citizenship that takes into account women's multiple, intersecting identities, encourages collective action and challenges the public/private divide. As such, this book explores what we can learn from women's activities and grassroots participation, studying the potential to build a gender-just citizenship that both recognises and encourages women's public, political participation.

also entails the absence of structural violence: "violence [that] [...] shows up as unequal power", such as women's subordination (Galtung, 1969, p. 171).

<sup>5</sup> In NI, the term "cross-community" signals participation of people from both the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities.

Women’s cross-community activities are evaluated in terms of their potential to accommodate transversal politics and agonistic dialogue. Both transversalism and agonism aim to navigate political conflict in divided societies through the recognition of difference. Agonism builds on the idea of transforming former enemies into legitimate adversaries and facilitating an open, plural and inclusive dialogue across and about difference. Similarly, transversalism advocates for the recognition of difference, while focusing on creating a shared space for negotiation with the potential of building alliances. Ultimately, this book examines how these approaches—transversal politics and agonistic dialogue—offer a pathway for reshaping citizenship in transitional societies, fostering not only the inclusion of women but also a more inclusive, democratic political landscape that embraces difference and promotes equality for all.

## 1.2 INTRODUCING NORTHERN IRELAND

In this book, the case of Northern Ireland is used to investigate how ethno-national identities and citizenship in a transitional society make it possible, or obstruct, a gender-just (political) citizenship. A bottom-up perspective is used to broaden the understanding of both what politics is and what public, political participation entails. As such, the book analyses women’s citizenship through both electoral participation and participation in informal grassroots politics in NI since the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (GFA) was signed in 1998. The GFA (largely) brought an end to the public, political armed violence of the region’s thirty-year conflict, “the Troubles” (1968–1998). In many ways, the Troubles was a conflict over citizenship rights within an ethno-nationalist framework. After decades of political and socio-economic inequality and discrimination in a state dominated by one ethno-national identity (i.e., Unionism), the violent response to the civil rights movement of the 1960s was the start of large-scale violence. In present-day NI, “citizenship rights, based on civil belonging, remain disputed” (Side, 2009, p. 80). As such, exploring what citizenship entails is an important endeavour in understanding NI.

NI has the potential to generate valuable insight into gendered citizenship in a deeply divided society transitioning from violent conflict. What makes the case significant, is that in many aspects it differs from other such societies. For instance, it is situated in western Europe, part of the Global North, with two established liberal democracies—Great

Britain (GB) and the Republic of Ireland (ROI)—as its closest neighbours. Not only does this entail a proximity to a contemporary tradition of democratic rights and institutions, but it has also enabled and encouraged support and interest from international institutions and actors in terms of upholding the GFA. The power-sharing arrangements in NI are furthermore acclaimed to be a successful example of ending ethno-national conflict. In terms of women’s participation, NI has a long history of women’s activism, with influences from international second wave feminism, including representation in the peace negotiations. As such, NI emerged from its armed conflict with a peace agreement guaranteeing the right of women to full and equal political participation. In theory, women are granted equal political rights, although significant barriers persist. All in all, these aspects potentially provide NI with possibilities to enhance women’s citizenship rights and prevent a severe backlash from taking place. This makes NI an interesting case to explore in terms of what happens with women’s participation in transitional societies, and if these aspects can potentially mitigate backlash. If so, there are lessons to be learned in terms of gender-just citizenship for other deeply divided societies. As such, the findings of this study can have broader relevance for other cases of deeply divided, transitional societies regarding ways of building gender-just citizenship. The following sections briefly cover the ethno-national groups in NI and explore the legacy of the conflict.

### 1.2.1 *Ethno-National Identities, Religion and Gender*

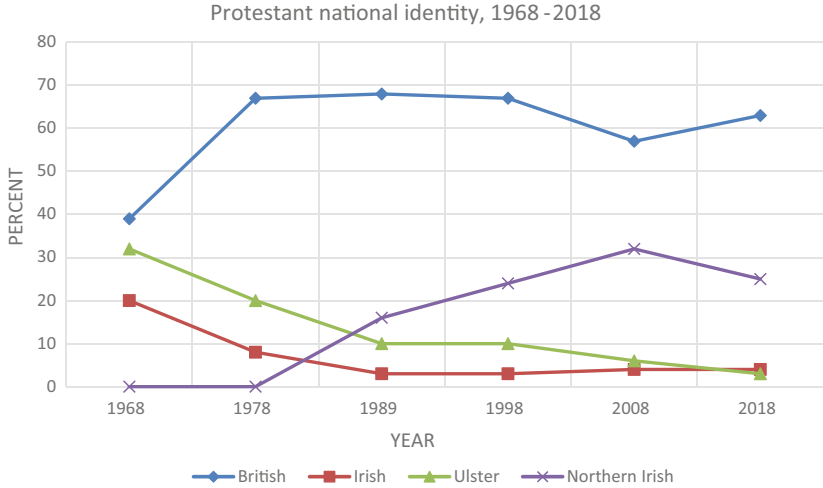
In 2021, NI had a population of roughly 1.9 million people (Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency, 2022), constituting about 2.8 per cent of the United Kingdom’s (UK) total population. For the first time in the history of NI, there are now more people from a Catholic *background* (45.7 per cent) than Protestant one (43.5 per cent) (Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, 2023). When asked about their current religion, 42 per cent stated they were Catholic, 37 per cent Protestant and 19 per cent having no religion (Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, 2023).

There are two main ethno-national identity groups in NI: Unionists/Loyalists and Nationalists/Republicans<sup>6</sup> (Mitchell, 2018; O’Dowd, 1998;

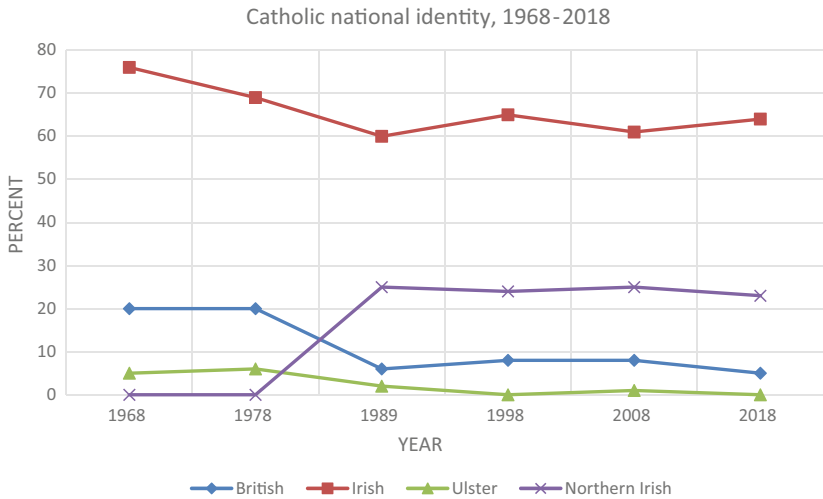
<sup>6</sup> To differentiate between nationalism as a general phenomenon and the Irish Nationalist movement, the word is capitalised when referring to the Irish movement/identity.

Ward, 2004). While Unionists and Loyalists defend the union between NI and GB, Nationalists and Republicans favour a United Ireland. Both sets of identities build on (fluid) constellations of culture, sports, religious traditions and historiographies. Recent research has shown that children as young as five identify with (ethno-)political symbols such as flags, the poppy and shamrock and painted kerbs in NI (see Taylor et al., 2021). The political identities also entail attachment and allegiance to separate states. As Sales (1997, p. 3) argues: “Northern Ireland’s contested nationality is at the heart of the conflict”. Despite the high correlation between religious and ethno-national identities, the contemporary conflict is not based on religion and has little to do with religious doctrine. The conflict is not a religious war despite “Catholic” and “Protestant” often being used, misleadingly, as “labels under which the conflict can be compartmentalised” (Murray, 1995, p. 216). Rather, religion acts as a boundary marker regarding forms of Britishness and Irishness (Shirlow & Murtagh, 2006), as illustrated in Figs. 1.1 and 1.2. As such, religion is a marker of ethno-national differences and political identity (Alison, 2009; Guelke, 2012; Sales, 1997). However, religious discrimination, intolerances and identity have played a part in the conflict and religion “contributes enormously to how identities in [NI] have come to be constituted” (Alison, 2009, p. 80). In this book, the terms Catholic/Nationalist/Republican (CNR) and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist (PUL) are used to denote the two communities, rather than Catholic and Protestant.

“Unionist” and “Loyalist” are political terms for people, most often Protestants who identify as British and want NI to remain in a union with GB as part of the UK (Aughey, 1996). In 2018, 63 per cent of NI’s Protestant population identified as British, and 25 per cent as Northern Irish (ARK, 2019a, see Fig. 1.1). In addition to maintaining the constitutional link with Britain and a cultural British identity, there is also a religious dimension: “the preservation of the Protestant religion and the Protestant settlement in the Union” (Sales, 1997, p. 47). Historically, the terms Unionist/Loyalist have been used synonymously (Hennessey, 1997) as regional forms of British Unionism (Alison, 2009). Today, Loyalism represents a radical version of Unionism, where armed defence of the status quo is key, or a working-class movement loyal to the British monarchy (rather than the British government), that sometimes but not necessarily, endorses violence (Alison, 2009; Byrne, 2013; McIntyre, 2004; Rolston, 2006).



**Fig. 1.1** Protestant national identity, 1968–2018 (*Sources* (ARK, 1999, 2009, 2019b; Hennessey, 1997; Moxon-Browne, 1991))



**Fig. 1.2** Catholic national identity, 1968–2018 (*Sources* (ARK, 1999, 2009, 2019b; Hennessey, 1997; Moxon-Browne, 1991))

“Nationalist” and “Republican” are political terms for people, most often Catholics, who identify as Irish and want the North to be (re-)united with ROI (Patterson, 1996). In 2018, 64 per cent of the Catholic community identified as Irish, and 23 per cent as Northern Irish (ARK, 2019a, see Fig. 1.2). While Nationalism usually refers to those who “believe in pursuing their goals through political competition and change” (Alison, 2009, p. 64), Republicanism is typically reserved for a militant version of Nationalism (Byrne, 2013; Fitzduff, 2002) or as a movement working for a United Ireland, not necessarily through the use of violence (McIntyre, 2004). Historically, Nationalists and Republicans have fought (constitutionally and violently) to end British rule on the island of Ireland.

As the ethno-national identities largely correlate with religious affiliation, the churches in both denominations have played important roles in cementing identities and shaping the ethno-national system (Sales, 1997). The churches have also influenced the region’s gender conservatism and women’s restricted citizenship and public participation. They have been able to promote conservative opinions on issues, such as sexuality and family life (Sales, 1997). Historically, women’s position in society has been deeply connected to religious and national identities in Ireland (Morgan & Fraser, 1994). Marginalisation and exclusion from power has been the predominant experience of women from both communities (Morgan & Fraser, 1994). The Protestant churches in NI have historically contained large conservative elements (Hennessey, 1997) and have had a fundamentalist streak hostile to feminism (Meaney, 1993). The Catholic Church in Ireland has also remained extremely conservative (Sales, 1997). The tendency to cast women as saint and sinner within both Catholic and Protestant traditions (Morgan, 2003) has had consequences for women’s perceived eligibility as citizens. As mothers, educators of children and supporters of the Christian family within the private, domestic sphere, women’s “influence could be channelled into positive and productive areas” (Morgan, 2003, p. 245). Thus, the denominations and their corresponding ethno-nationalist groups “each framed women’s proper roles as familial and domestic” (Ashe, 2019, p. 42).

### *1.2.2 Violence, Social Deprivation and Segregation*

Since 1998, political violence has greatly decreased in NI, although it has not been entirely eliminated (Ashe, 2019; Gaffikin et al., 2016).

Rather, there has been a shift from “organised-strategic” to “disorganised-opportunistic” political violence (Gaffikin et al., 2016). The number of reported sectarian incidents has decreased over the past decades: the 2018/19 level shows a fall of 58 per cent compared with 2005/06 (Police Service of Northern Ireland, 2019). However, other types of violence have increased. For example, racist incidents more than tripled between 2002/03 and 2004/05 and almost doubled again by 2014/15 (Gaffikin et al., 2016). In terms of homophobic incidents, they multiplied almost by ten between 2002/03 and 2014/15 (Gaffikin et al., 2016).

It is probable that more than half the population has been directly affected by the Troubles (Fitzduff, 2002), in some areas 80 per cent know someone injured or killed (Alison, 2009). Belfast experienced the greatest concentration of violent deaths in absolute and relative terms (Smyth & Hamilton, 2003), with the concentration of killings in the north and west of the city, “which together account for well over half of all deaths” (McKittrick et al., 2007, p. 1560). The highest death rates can be found in areas of high deprivation (Smyth & Hamilton, 2003). In 2017, 50 of the 100 most deprived areas were located in Belfast (Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency, 2017). Additionally, 5 of the 10 most deprived areas are located in North and West Belfast (Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency, 2017), corresponding to the areas with the most conflict-related deaths. There is also a sizeable gap in life expectancy between residents in more and less deprived areas (Barnard, 2018). In the most deprived areas, the rates of suicide and self-harm admissions to hospital were around three and a half times the rates in affluent areas (Department of Health Northern Ireland, 2019). As Lyra McKee (2016) pointed out: “more people took their own lives in the 16 years after the Troubles than died during them”. Additionally, in the most deprived areas, the rate of alcohol-specific mortality and drug-related admissions is approximately four and a half times the rates in the most affluent areas (Department of Health Northern Ireland, 2019). From 2005 to 2014, the number of people with drugs and/or alcohol misuse increased by 69 per cent (Department of Health Northern Ireland, 2016).

The Northern Ireland Executive is criticised for its failure to introduce an anti-poverty strategy based on objective need (Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, 2017). Roughly 20 per cent of NI’s population live in poverty and poverty rates are highest among families with children (Barnard, 2018). The number of children living in poverty is

projected to increase as a result of current social security reforms, among which are stipulations that families can no longer claim tax credit for third or subsequent children (Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, 2017). Welfare reforms and austerity measures disproportionately affect women, as they are twice as dependent on social security than men and, as such, have borne 86 per cent of the total burden of welfare cuts in NI (Women’s Policy Group Northern Ireland, 2019). Poverty rates are also strongly connected to employment opportunities. Compared with GB, NI has higher worklessness and lower employment rates (Barnard, 2018). In terms of community background and economic inactivity, data shows that the most deprived areas are more likely predominantly Catholic (Gaffikin et al., 2016).

Segregation in housing and education is another key aspect of contemporary NI. There is evidence that suggests that residential segregation along religious lines has increased post-GFA (McDowell, 2008). Segregation is also significant in social housing: “over 90% of social housing areas are cast into mainly single identity communities, a figure that increases to 94% in Belfast” (Gaffikin et al., 2016, p. 91). The residential segregation also means that many services (such as health clinics, leisure centres and libraries) exist in duplicate to cater to both communities (Brand & Fregonese, 2013). The primary and secondary education system is also almost entirely segregated, with a vast majority attending either a Catholic (maintained) or Protestant (state-controlled) school (Ashe, 2019). In 2015/16, roughly 7 per cent attended an integrated school (Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, 2017). By 2003, there were 46 integrated schools, educating a small minority (Niens et al., 2003) and there were no new integrated schools established between 2008 and 2017 (Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, 2017).

### 1.3 CONDUCTING FEMINIST RESEARCH WITH WOMEN IN NORTHERN IRELAND

This book is based on an in-depth qualitative case study of women’s political citizenship and public participation in NI. The main part of the study was conducted in 2016–2020 at the Transitional Justice Institute at Ulster University as part of a doctoral degree but has been updated with additional analysis for this book. The study adheres to feminist methodology’s main tenets of self-reflexivity, “strong objectivity” and being informed by principles of equality. Feminist methodology also aims to produce

social change in addition to contribute new knowledge. A main principle of feminist methodology is that research cannot provide *the* ultimate “truth” but should rather aim to provide insights into how meanings are reproduced (Wibben, 2011). Being value-free and objective is impossible due to the experiences and values we all carry (Wolf, 1996). Researchers adhering to feminist methodology therefore strive to achieve “strong objectivity” by “acknowledging the subjective element in one’s analysis” (Tickner, 2006). This is done through reflexivity, by critically reflecting on the research process, choice of method(s) and positioning, scrutinising effects on the research and ethical concerns in terms of preconceived notions, experiences and power relations.

A central dilemma in feminist research relates to power: “the unequal hierarchies or levels of control that are often maintained, perpetuated, created and re-created during and after field research” (Wolf, 1996, p. 2). There are often power differences between researcher and participants stemming from differences in class, nationality, gender, etc. Egalitarian techniques are used to generate trust, ethnographic methods to recognise and reduce the distance between research and participants, and acts of reciprocity and friendships are cultivated to bring participants and researcher closer (Fonow & Cook, 1991; Wolf, 1996). At the same time, it is also important to realise that such measures do not erase inequalities or automatically stop them from being reproduced. As such, these techniques are not unproblematic, as they may result in manipulation and exploitation of participants—even more so than “traditional” distanced methods (Wolf, 1996). There is a risk that the researcher’s power is masked; ultimately the researcher “has much greater control over the research process and product” and “is generally the final author of any account” (Fonow & Cook, 1991, p. 9). Feminist research also includes a normative aspect, as it aims to produce social change in terms of gender equality. “Helicopter research”, in which the researcher goes to the field, obtains data, then leaves “unconcerned about what subsequently transpired for the research participants and their community” (Emanuel, 2008, p. 719), should be avoided. It is crucial to address how the research can be beneficial to participants, as well as how to properly communicate research results to participants and society at large.

### 1.3.1 *Data Collection*

The main part of the data was collected through 22 semi-structured interviews with women in Belfast in 2019 and 2020: 19 interviews with women with a background in either the CNR or PUL community<sup>7</sup>; and three expert interviews with women with experience of coordinating cross-community projects and work within the women’s and/or feminist sector. In addition to interviews, data was also collected through extensive participant observation and through official documents.

#### 1.3.1.1 *Semi-Structured Interviews*

In this study, women from both main ethno-national communities in Northern Ireland—CNR and PUL—were interviewed. Participants were chosen based on what community they grew up in and not based on how they identified as adults. As such, there was no requirement that participants had to identify as either Protestant/Catholic, Unionist/Nationalist, or Loyalist/Republican. This allowed different identifications to shine through and encouraged participation from a diverse group of women. The aim was to speak with women who had experience of cross-community<sup>8</sup> activities that had: (a) taken place after 1998; (b) been for women only; and (c) preferably taken place on more than one occasion.

Participants were recruited through introductions from civil society organisations and snowball sampling. The goal was to include a diversity of women in terms of aspects such as class, community background, age, political identification, and national identity. To determine this, participants were asked to fill out a short survey at the beginning of each

<sup>7</sup> The Covid pandemic coincided with the 20th interview, which had to be cancelled due to lockdown measures prohibiting all meetings. As such, nine interviews were conducted with PUL women and ten with CNR women.

<sup>8</sup> This entails participation of people from both a CNR and PUL background. The term implies a binary ethno-national society, with one group positioned in opposition to another. Historically, this has been reflective of the basic outline of Northern Ireland. Today, however, more people identify outside this binary or are part of a growing international community and, as such, the term obscures the nuances and complexities of NI society. People’s identities are thus in reality not as easily divided into ethno-national groups as the term implies. As such, when talking about “cross-community” work, there is a risk of reifying or essentialising the groups and their members’ identities. Furthermore, the term (and its antonym, “single identity” work), is strongly linked to state interventions and funding in terms of building “good relations” between the communities (see Chapter 6). The term is also often used by society at large to denote mixed groups.

interview in which they were asked to identify how they identified in terms of:

- Religion: Catholic/Protestant/other/none
- Ethno-nationalism: Nationalist/Republican/Unionist/Loyalist/other/none
- Nationality: Irish/Northern Irish/British/European/other/none
- Politics: liberal/conservative/feminist/socialist/other/none
- Family: parent/grandparent/none

Thanks to this, participants came to represent a range of identities across all these categories. The oldest women were born in the 1940s and the youngest in the 1990s.

In NI much research tends to focus on urban working-class areas in Belfast which contributes to a narrative that these areas are representative of what ethno-nationalism looks like. Middle-class areas are thus often left out, and people in such areas are not readily identified as representatives of the ethno-nationalist divide. This is largely due to the high overlap between the poorest communities and conflict-related violence (Ní Aoláin et al., 2011), while middle-class communities have more or less been spared (Rooney, 2000). Also, working-class areas tend to be segregated while middle-class areas are more likely mixed. In this study, it was therefore important to capture experiences from both working-class and middle-class areas in Belfast and enable an inclusion of women living in neighbourhoods with varied socio-economic conditions.

There are several reasons why data collection was undertaken in the greater Belfast area. First, a wide diversity of people lives there, which offers opportunities to explore experiences and opinions of women from differing class backgrounds, rural and urban upbringings, and different levels of education. Secondly, Belfast is the home of a long list of organisations, community groups and women's centres. Since access to participants was gained through organisations, this is an important aspect of the choice of research site. Third, the greater Belfast area has seen a great range of ethno-national contestations which also makes it a useful geographical focus in terms of the research exploration of the ethno-national divide. In the past twenty years, Belfast has experienced public disorder, interface violence, disputes over symbols, parades and territory, paramilitary violence and killings, and numerous security operations. As

such, participants from Belfast, even if they were too young to remember the Troubles, will likely have experienced more recent contestations.

Participants were drawn from two different, though sometimes connected, sectors: the women's sector and the feminist sector (see examples in Table 1.1). In general, while the women's sector focuses on different aspects of women's lives, the feminist sector does so with an explicit feminist analysis and agenda. Women's centres are often situated in working-class areas, work broadly with all kinds of issues, and offer services and support for local women ranging from educational and art classes to therapies and support services relating to domestic violence, physical wellbeing, and mental health. While many of these centres work to improve women's lives and opportunities, and therefore could be seen as feminist, they often do not do so with an explicitly stated feminist agenda, and neither do many of their members. In contrast, feminist organisations, such as the Belfast Feminist Network (BFN) and Alliance for Choice (AFC), define their agenda and work in terms of feminism and their members build alliances based on their identities as feminists. Their membership is much smaller than that of the women's sector. Since the feminist organisations are not situated in working-class areas (few of them even have offices), they attract a more diverse membership in terms of level of education and class belonging than the women's centres tend to do. There are also organisations that work closely with and bridge the sectors, such as the Women's Support Network (WSN) and Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA).

The expert interviews focused on experiences of coordinating cross-community projects and working with different groups of women to add context to the data collected through the other interviews, documentation and participant observation. Conducting the expert interviews at the

**Table 1.1** Women's and feminist groups in Northern Ireland

<i>Women's sector</i>	<i>Bridging organisations</i>	<i>Feminist sector</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's centres/groups</li> <li>• Women's Aid Federation</li> <li>• NI Rural Women's Network</li> <li>• Training for Women Network</li> <li>• Women's Tec</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's Resource and Development Agency</li> <li>• Women's Policy Group</li> <li>• Women's Support Network</li> <li>• Women's Platform</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belfast Feminist Network</li> <li>• Alliance for Choice</li> <li>• Reclaim the Agenda</li> <li>• Raise Your Voice Against Sexual Harassment</li> <li>• Reclaim the Night</li> </ul>

end of the fieldwork enabled conversations about overall trends and tentative findings. As such, the expert participants were able to provide their input on key issues to corroborate and triangulate previously collected data. Participants were chosen, through purposive sampling, because of their experiences, enabling detailed exploration, and understanding of the key issues (see Ritchie et al., 2014). The idea was to speak to women with a broader set of experiences than personal participation in cross-community work and gain insights from different types of cross-community activities. It was also important to talk to experts who have experience and insight into the women's and feminist sectors.

In the process of finding expert participants, one organisation was identified as a hub for issues relevant to the women's and feminist sectors intersect: the WRDA. WRDA supports women's groups and networks across NI by providing training, carrying out policy work and lobbying decision-makers on behalf of women and acts as an information-hub for the women's sector (Women's Resource & Development Agency, 2020). Among other strategic goals, WRDA works to "create opportunities for women to participate at all levels of active citizenship" and "to advance women's equality and participation in all aspects of policy and decision-making" (Women's Resource & Development Agency, 2020). One great advantage is that their work connects with all levels of society and politics: from the local women's centre in a disadvantaged urban area, to elected politicians at Stormont. As such, it has a wealth of insight into women's activism and grassroots cross-community work as well as how to strategically channel women's experiences and needs into the formal political system—both of which are key interests of this book. Therefore, two women from the WRDA were interviewed: Elaine Crory, WRDA's Good Relations Coordinator; and Kellie Turtle, feminist community activist, and WRDA's Women's Sector Lobbyist (2017–2019). In addition to their work at WRDA, they both have experience of working in feminist sector groups such as the Belfast Feminist Network. As such, they provided invaluable insight into how cross-community work and women's political identities manifest differently in the two sectors.

As many of the women interviewed have experience from cross-community work and activities within the *women's* sector, their perspectives needed to be complemented with those from an expert in the *feminist* sector. Emma Campbell was identified as such, both due to her role as the Co-Convenor of Alliance for Choice, which campaigns for

free, safe, and legal abortion access, and her involvement in Belfast Feminist Network. She provided insight into how cross-community activities work in feminist settings, as well as how political issues and identities were defined by participating women.

### 1.3.1.2 *Participant Observation*

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, participant observation was used as a method. Participant observation was conducted at a range of one-off events and in recurring projects during 2019 and 2020. One-off events<sup>9</sup> included, among others, an International Women’s Day rally, a workshop on women’s rights and a seminar about women’s political participation. The participants at these events were cross-community and mostly women. Participant observation can offer insights into behaviours and interactions that are either taken for granted or go beyond what is conveyed verbally (Lewis & McNaughton Nicholls, 2014; McNaughton Nicholls et al., 2014; Pripp & Öhlander, 2011). The method is specifically well-suited to studying relationships and processes within groups (Jorgensen, 1989), which is how it was used in this study. The strengths of the method thus lie in its ability to cover events and actions in real time, being able to contextualise and give insights into interpersonal behaviour (Yin, 2018). The data collected through observation, participation and conversations was recorded in a journal and was directly used in the research, as well as a resource to inform the understanding of research themes. To the extent possible, detailed note taking in the field was avoided to focus on participation. Instead, notes were taken in close temporal proximity to the observation to gain as much detail as possible. The author’s participation varied from an observer-as-participant (allowing for listening and observation) to being a participant-as-observer (focusing on participation).

Much of the participant observation was conducted through the Belfast-based organisation Bridge of Hope, where the author worked as a volunteer. The organisation, founded in 2001 as part of the Ashton Community Trust, supports people impacted by the conflict (Bridge of Hope, 2020). Together with Eilish Rooney and the Transitional Justice Institute at Ulster University, the Transitional Justice Grassroots Toolkit

<sup>9</sup> Although feminist groups are discussed, the analysis is largely based on interview data with feminist activists and participant observation in their public activities, as it was not possible to conduct participant observation within the groups themselves.

programme was developed at Bridge of Hope (see Rooney, 2012a; Rooney, 2012b, 2013, 2014, 2016). The organisation would deliver this programme, based on the toolkit, to groups in Northern Ireland, both in single-identity and cross-community settings. The programme explores transitional justice with a focus on local grassroots engagement, through interactive presentations, groups discussions and individually filling out a worksheet or “grid” (see Rooney, 2012a, 2014). It introduces and discusses transitional justice issues such as institutional reform, truth, reparations, reconciliation, prosecutions and amnesty by providing local, historical and international examples (Rooney, 2012a). The author worked with Bridge of Hope and helped deliver the toolkit programme to different groups in Belfast during 2018 and 2019. This provided many opportunities to interact with and participate in women’s groups in different parts of Belfast. As such, participant observation was carried out during three toolkit programmes in 2019: two in cross-community women’s groups at different women’s centres; and one in a CNR women’s group at a community centre. A fourth workshop programme was planned with a PUL women’s group in 2020, but this was cancelled due to the Covid pandemic. The legacy-based cross-community activities that are the basis for this study were structured around the toolkit programme (see Chapters 4–6).

Through participant observation, the author was continuously able to test out ideas and tentative findings and thus was able to course-correct where the focus of interviews was placed. As some of the interviewed women were also in the groups where participant observation was conducted, it was possible to discuss things in the interviews that had happened previously in the group. This allowed for a deeper understanding of instances of disagreement or discussions of key issues that had taken place in the group. Many of the issues with which this book is concerned were addressed in the women’s groups (not through any intervention by the author). Thanks to this, many of the topics included in the interviews were also (organically) discussed in group settings during participant observation. As such, many of the interview questions were answered by a wide diversity of women without interviewing them one-on-one and more voices could thus be incorporated into the findings. These types of discussions often reinforced interview responses. This is a strength of participant observation: through corroboration of data, it increases both the trustworthiness and the dependability of research findings.

### *1.3.1.3 Official Documents*

In addition to interviews and participant observation, documents have also been used as a source of data. As Yin (2018, p. 115) argues, “the most important use of documentation is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources”. They also “provide data on the context within which research participants operate” (Bowen, 2009, p. 29). Documentation can also bring attention to potential misunderstandings or misinterpretations generated by interview and observation data. In this book, documentation is used as primary and secondary source data. Public files and records such as law texts (including legislation), census data and official statistics, and political party manifestos are all used as primary sources. The primary sources are principally used to account for the part of the theory dealing with intersections of gendered citizenship and ethno-nationalism. Documents such as the GFA and party manifestos are used to unpack the “official” narrative on matters of participation and gender. These have then been compared and contrasted with ideas generated from interviews and participant observation as well as data from a range of secondary source materials, such as academic texts, news articles and NGO reports.

### *1.3.2 Ethical Considerations*

The main ethical implications of conducting interviews are issues related to confidentiality, informed consent and emotional distress. Several steps were taken to mitigate possible harm, exploitation and coercion. Participants were provided with an information sheet that articulated the key issues and were asked to sign a consent form before participating. As participants were able to choose whether to take part, where and when the interview was conducted and which questions they wanted to answer, the risk in participating was minimal. Participants were encouraged to ask questions and were invited to get in touch after the interview with any concerns. Participation was voluntary and participants could stop the interview at any time. The interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent. Information provided by participants was treated confidentially and data was securely stored in accordance with Ulster University regulations and General Data Protection Regulation legislation. In the book, only expert participants are identified as they were interviewed in terms of their professional capacity. However, they were given the choice whether and how to be named and to what extent their

statements could be used. All other participants have been anonymised and any information that could be used to identify them has been removed to ensure anonymity.

Most, if not all, participants have lived in NI for most of their lives and may have experienced traumatic events and some levels of personal harm or loss during the conflict. Although the interviews did not focus on or ask about such experiences, conflict-related experiences did occasionally come up, brought up by participants on their own accord. Since the research addresses issues relating to gender equality and women's lives, personal experiences relating to gender-based violence also came up from time to time in interviews, though it was an unusual occurrence. As such, there was a minor risk of re-traumatisation for study participants. Most of the time, only the issues outlined in the information sheet were discussed. As for the risk of research fatigue, this was mitigated by stating the possible benefits of the study for participants and society at large. By spending time at women's centres and in women's groups through participant observation, the aim was to build rapport with participants and counter the effects of helicopter research.

In terms of participant observation, there are additional ethical issues that needed consideration. As argued by Jorgensen (1989) efforts should be made to minimise the extent to which participation disrupts the studied situation. At the same time, participant observation should strive to be as overt as possible. As such, keeping the observation open is one of the main precautions taken to mitigate potential ethical issues. Overt involvement requires that people know that research is being conducted and requesting permission to observe (Jorgensen, 1989). The substantial part of this study's participant observation was overt. In some situations, where overt observation was not possible or called for, it was covert. For example, observation that took place during the rally for International Women's Day in Belfast or during large one-off events at women's centres did not offer an opportunity or necessity for overt observation. In those types of situations, often consisting of large groups of people, concerns of confidentiality and anonymity were lessened as the author seldom knew enough information about the other participants to be able to disclose anything about them. If asked, the author was always truthful about being a researcher and what the research concerned when talking to people. However, the bulk of observation was overt. The organisations through which research was conducted were given a participant observation information sheet and given a chance to ask questions, raise concerns and reject

the request if they wished (which never happened). When participating in a recurring setting, such as a weekly class at a women's centre, observation was always overt. Participants were given an introduction to the research project and a written sheet with information about how cooperation was voluntary, that their identity would be kept anonymous, and that any information collected would be confidential. They were also encouraged to ask questions. These precautions significantly reduced the risks to participants.

### 1.3.3 *Data Analysis*

To analyse the collected data, thematic analysis through NVivo and qualitative content analysis were utilised. Thematic analysis was used to discover, interpret and report patterns and meaning (Spencer et al., 2014) within the data collected from interviews and participant observation. Interviews and field notes were transcribed and added to data analysis software NVivo where they were coded thematically. Both *in vivo concepts*, using the language of research participants, and *emergent themes*, grounded in the data but devised by the researcher, were utilised (cf. Spencer et al., 2014). After the data had been coded into 88 sub-themes, they were organised into four overarching themes: (1) background information; (2) cross-community work; (3) political agency, issues and identity; and (4) the Troubles. These topical themes and sub-themes were then correlated to a set of analytic themes identified through a review of previous research. Organising the topical themes according to analytical concepts originating in the theoretical framework enabled an analysis that identified connections between the analytic themes, as well as between them and previous research.

Qualitative content analysis was employed to analyse documents such as political manifestos and legislation. This entails analysing both the content and the context of documents (Spencer et al., 2014). Part of the content analysis was quantitative to explore the occurrence frequency of the terms: woman/women, gender, participation and citizen/citizenship. If these words were not mentioned at all, this was also noted, as silences are as important as what is said explicitly. Omissions can show what issues or perspectives are so unprioritised or taken for granted that they do not even make it on to the agenda, which is especially significant in political texts. The main focus of the content analysis was then qualitative, exploring the way themes were treated and presented. This entailed

locating the context of each key word to gain an understanding of what meaning was attached to it. This reading allowed for a deeper contextual analysis. Third, the photographs were scrutinised to see the prevalence of women and men, and their overall representation. Lastly, the text as a whole was read to make sure nothing of value in terms of the research interests was overlooked. This also allowed developing a cohesive understanding of the text's overall messaging, linked to the source of the text.

#### 1.4 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

This book develops and advances a theoretical framework that considers the gender norms that shape the politics of citizenship, ethno-national conflict, and transitional societies, focusing particularly on women's citizen participation in public political life. Empirically, it maps and analyses grassroots notions of citizenship, public, political participation, and women's local cross-community activism in NI. It studies grassroots transversal politics as a method of recognising and advancing women's citizen participation. Furthermore, the book brings attention to women as agents of change and political beings, specifically during and after armed conflict.

*Theoretically*, this book links transversal politics to women's political citizenship by conceptualising transversal citizenship as a way to mitigate the negative consequences of gendered ethno-nationalist politics on women's public, political participation. By incorporating the main tenets of transversal politics, it encourages a broad definition of political participation in multiple societal arenas, as such recognising women's grassroots activities as acts of political citizenship. It also accommodates intersectional identities and facilitates coalitions to be built across ethno-national difference based on shared values and goals. However, for transversal politics to be developed, there needs to be both civic and political space. In deeply divided societies, specifically those with consociational institutions, the influence of identities or groups that challenge or undermine the ethno-national divide tends to be limited. As this book demonstrates, this has significant consequences for the potential of practising gender-just citizenship politics. In addition to this, transversal politics is explored in relation to the concept of agonistic peacebuilding within critical peace research, focusing on power dynamics and local bottom-up initiatives in NI. The book investigates whether transversal politics and agonistic peace

are theoretically compatible, as well as what the concepts and their underlying theoretical assumptions can teach each other. While the concepts share several commonalities, such as their dynamic nature and ability to accommodate difference, they also diverge on some points, such as their different focus on the possibility for consensus politics. These ideas are explored throughout the book.

*Empirically*, this book contributes to our understanding of transversal politics and agonistic peace by highlighting the strengths and limitations of translating them into practice in women's cross-community activities. The book explores how relational transformation, in line with agonistic theory, can be facilitated in grassroots groups in NI and whether transversal politics could be used as a way of challenging the status quo without silencing legitimate grievances. The strength of transversal politics lies in its method of both embracing difference and working together for a shared goal. It is built on a willingness to listen agonistically, sharing compatible values with other participants, and recognising and respecting each other's differences. However, practising transversalism and agonism can be challenging, as differences are not glossed over or ignored, but rather brought into the open to be discussed. This can make mobilisation and coalition-building difficult and is especially problematic in instances of unequal power relations between participants. It requires patience and trust from participants as well as the ability to reflect on their own positionings, and the willingness to shift perspectives. In a deeply divided society, this can be difficult.

The book draws attention to the experiences and identities of women in NI in relation to cross-community work and political participation. As such, the research sheds light on processes associated with backlash against gender equality and women's rights in transitional societies. The case of NI demonstrates the difficulties of achieving transitional gender justice and ensuring women's political citizenship. The analysis shows how the consociational system of government and the deep divide of NI has maintained the public/private divide, creating limited space for women's participation. It also shows a gap between formal and informal politics and demonstrates the need to bridge that gap to protect and increase women's participation. The study has also produced accounts of barriers to women's participation, ranging from material to structural and institutional obstacles such as lack of childcare, lack of funding and lack of attention to gender equality concerns. Therefore, gender equality reforms in the private sphere must go hand in hand with public sphere reforms:

corresponding material changes are needed for the conceptual widening of public, political participation to matter and make a difference.

The book explores different ways of moving forwards by bridging divides and alleviating negative setbacks for women's rights in NI. Finding ways of facilitating inter-sector cooperation between the women's and feminist sectors to build coalitions on shared issues can create new civic space for women's activism and participation. This would also further challenge and disrupt the public/private divide. The women in this study practise politics through their participation in cross-community activities in the women's and feminist sectors in NI. Sharing their experiences, perspectives and concerns not only demonstrates the obstacles to political grassroots work that challenge exclusionary identities and politics, but also the rich potential of furthering progressive, intersectional and transversal politics in a deeply divided transitional society.

## 1.5 OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 offers a deep dive into the theoretical framework. It explores how citizenship, ethno-nationalism and gender intersect, especially in terms of the possibility for women to participate in public, political life. It also analyses women's political participation and community-based work in transitional societies, including the potential for progress and risk of backlash. The concept of a multi-tier transversal citizenship is contrasted with maternal politics, and agonistic peace theory is explored.

Chapter 3 analyses women's activism and public, political participation during the Troubles (1968–1998). It discusses how women became politicised *as women*, presenting four types of activism: ethno-nationalist; maternal; women's rights; and transversal. The chapter also explores the ideas that underpin solidarity among women in different settings.

Chapter 4 then analyses women's political identities and participation in post-GFA NI. It discusses grassroots, party-political and legislative notions of citizen participation and how women participate in political life in party politics, civil society and local communities. NI's ethno-nationally based power-sharing system and the barriers it presents to women's participation are explored. As such, the chapter discusses the potential for and obstacles to women's descriptive and substantive political representation in NI.

Chapter 5 analyses women's cross-community work through transversalism and agonism. The chapter investigates how different activities relate to transversal politics and agonistic dialogue. It explores the possibilities for and limits of practising transversal politics with agonistic listening in a deeply divided society. The analysis focuses on how (ethno-national) difference is dealt with in women's and feminist groups, identifying the use of strategic silences and strategic avoidance of difference.

Chapter 6 explores how women's cross-community activities can be utilised to inform a multi-tier transversal citizenship that encourages gender-equal citizen participation. Additionally, the chapter addresses possible routes to bridging the gap between the women's and feminist sectors, as well as channelling women's grassroots work into the formal political system. The routes are evaluated in terms of their potential to accommodate a gender-just transversal citizenship. Chapter 7 then summarises the main findings of the research and discusses their broader relevance.

## REFERENCES

- Alison, M. H. (2009). *Women and political violence: Female combatants in ethno-national conflict*. Routledge.
- ARK. (1999). *Northern Ireland life and times survey 1998*. <https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/1998/> Accessed 2020-10-10.
- ARK. (2009). *Northern Ireland life and times survey 2008*. <https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2008/> Accessed 2024-07-25.
- ARK. (2019a). *The 2019 Local Government Elections in Northern Ireland*. <https://www.ark.ac.uk/elections/flg19.htm>. Accessed 2024-07-25.
- ARK. (2019b). *Northern Ireland life and times survey 2018*. <https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2018/> Accessed 2020-10-10.
- Ashe, F. (2019). *Gender, nationalism and conflict transformation: New themes and old problems in Northern Ireland Politics*. Routledge.
- Aughey, A. (1996). Unionism. In A. Aughey & D. Morrow (Eds.), *Northern Ireland politics* (pp. 31–38). Longman.
- Barnard, H. (2018). *Poverty in Northern Ireland 2018*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/poverty-northern-ireland-2018> (Accessed: 2020-09-14).
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27–40.
- Brand, R., & Fregonese, S. (2013). *The Radicals' City: Urban environment, polarisation, cohesion*. Routledge.

- Bridge of Hope. (2020). *Bridge of Hope: A Wellbeing Centre*. <http://thebridgeofhope.org/about/> Accessed 2020-07-02.
- Brown, K., & Ní Aoláin, F. (2015). Through the looking glass: Transitional justice futures through the lens of nationalism, feminism and transformative change. *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 9(1), 127–149.
- Byrne, S. (2013). Troubled engagement in ethnicized conflict: Negotiating difference among feminist activists in Israel/Palestine and Northern Ireland. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 16(1), 106–126.
- Cockburn, C. (2010). Militarism and war. In L. J. Shepherd (Ed.), *Gender matters in global politics. A feminist introduction to international relations* (pp. 105–115). Routledge.
- Department of Health Northern Ireland. (2016). *New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase 2. 4th Update Report—July 2016*. Available at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/New-Strategic-Direction-for-Alcohol-and-Drugs-%20fourth-update-july-2016.pdf> (Accessed: 2020–10–15).
- Department of Health Northern Ireland. (2019). *Health Inequalities. Annual Report 2019*. Available at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/hscims-report-2019.pdf> (Accessed: 2020-10-15).
- Donahoe, A. E. (2017). *Peacebuilding through Women’s Community Development: Wee Women’s Work in Northern Ireland*. Springer International.
- Emanuel, E. J. (2008). Benefits to host countries. In E. J. Emanuel, C. Grady, R. A. Crouch, R. K. Lie, F. G. Miller, & D. Wendler (Eds.), *The Oxford textbook of clinical research ethics* (pp. 719–728). Oxford University Press.
- Enloe, C. (1990). *Kvinnor, giv akt!: militariseringen av kvinnors liv* (trans: K. Hertell, & A. von Wright-Grönberg). Göteborg: Pax. Does Khaki Become You?
- Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. (2023) *Census 2021. Briefing: Release 2, Phase 1 Results*. EC/23/01/11. Available at: <https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Corporate/Commission%2520Meetings/2023/cmmeeting250123/EC-23-01-11-Census21databriefingnoteAC>. (Accessed: 2024-11-20).
- Fitzduff, M. (2002). *Beyond violence: Conflict resolution process in Northern Ireland*. United Nations University Press.
- Fonow, M. M., & Cook, J. A. (1991). Back to the future. A look at the second wave of feminist epistemology and methodology. In M. M. Fonow & J. A. Cook (Eds.), *Beyond methodology: Feminist scholarship as lived research* (pp. 1–15). Indiana University Press.
- Gaffikin, F., Karelse, C., Morrissey, M., Mulholland, C., & Sterrett, K. (2016). *Making Space for Each Other: Civic Place-Making in a Divided Society*. Belfast: Queen’s University Belfast. Available at: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/144581146.pdf> (Accessed: 2020-09-13).

- Galtung, J. (1967). *Theories of peace: A synthetic approach to peace thinking*. International Peace Research Institute Oslo.
- Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167–191.
- Goetz, A. M. (2007). Gender justice, citizenship and entitlements: Core concepts, central debates and new directions for research. In M. Mukhopadhyay, & N. Singh (Eds.), *Gender justice, citizenship and development* (pp. 15–57). Ottawa and New Delhi: Zubaan, an imprint of Kali for Women and the International Development Research Centre.
- Gready, P., & Robins, S. (2014). From transitional to transformative justice: A new agenda for practice. *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 8(3), 339–361.
- Guelke, A. (2012). *Politics in deeply divided societies*. Polity Press.
- Hennessey, T. (1997). *A history of Northern Ireland 1920–1996*. Gill and Macmillan.
- Horowitz, D. L. (2000). *Ethnic groups in conflict*. University of California Press.
- Jorgensen, D. L. (1989). *Participant observation: A methodology for human studies*. Sage.
- Krause, J. (1996). Gendered identities in international relations. In J. Krause & N. Renwick (Eds.), *Identities in international relations* (pp. 99–117). Macmillan.
- Kronsell, A. (2012). *Gender, sex and the postnational defense militarism and peacekeeping*. Oxford University Press.
- Lewis, J., & McNaughton Nicholls, C. (2014). Design issues. In J. Ritchie, J. Lewis, C. McNaughton Nicholls, & R. Ormston (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers* (pp. 47–76). London: Sage.
- Lister, R. (2003). *Citizenship: Feminist perspectives*. New York University Press.
- McClintock, A. (2002). No Longer in a Future Heaven”: Gender, race, and nationalism. In A. McClintock, A. Mufti, & E. Shohat (Eds.), *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, nation, and postcolonial perspectives* (pp. 89–112). University of Minnesota Press.
- McDowell, S. (2008). Commemorating dead ‘men’: Gendering the past and present in post-conflict Northern Ireland. *Gender, Place and Culture*, 15(4), 335–354.
- McIntyre, A. (2004). *Women in Belfast: How violence shapes identity*. Praeger Publishers.
- McKee, L. (2016). *Suicide of the Ceasefire Babies*. Mosaic Science.
- McKittrick, D., Kelters, S., Feeney, B., Thornton, C., & McVea, D. (2007). *Lost lives: The stories of the men, women and children who died as a result of the northern Ireland troubles*. Mainstream Publishing.

- McNaughton Nicholls, C., Mills, L., & Kotecha, M. (2014). Observation. In J. Ritchie, J. Lewis, C. McNaughton Nicholls, & R. Ormston (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice: A Guide for social science students and researchers* (pp. 243–268). London: Sage.
- Meaney, G. (1993). Sex and Nation: Women in Irish Culture and Politics. In A. Smyth (Ed.), *Irish Women's Studies Reader* (pp. 230–244). Attic Press.
- Meintjes, S., Pillay, A., & Turshen, M. (2001). There is no aftermath for women. In S. Meintjes, A. Pillay, & M. Turshen (Eds.), *The aftermath: Women in post-conflict transformation* (pp. 3–18). Zed Books.
- Mitchell, D. (2018). Non-nationalist politics in a bi-national consociation: The case of the alliance party of Northern Ireland. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 24(3), 336–347.
- Morgan, V. (2003). The role of women in community development in Northern Ireland. In O. Hargie & D. Dickson (Eds.), *Researching the troubles: Social science perspectives on the Northern Ireland Conflict* (pp. 245–257). Mainstream Publishing.
- Morgan, V., & Fraser, G. (1994). *The company we keep: Women, community and organisations*. University of Ulster.
- Moxon-Browne, E. (1991). National identity in Northern Ireland. In P. Stringer & G. Robinson (Eds.), *Social attitudes in Northern Ireland: The first report* (pp. 23–30). Blackstaff Press.
- Murray, D. (1995). Culture, religion and violence in Northern Ireland. In S. Dunn (Ed.), *Facets of the conflict in Northern Ireland* (pp. 215–229). St. Martin's Press.
- Ní Aoláin, F., Haynes, D. F., & Cahn, N. (2011). *On the frontlines: Gender, war, and the post-conflict process*. Oxford University Press.
- Niens, U., Cairns, E., & Hewstone, M. (2003). Contact and conflict in Northern Ireland. In O. Hargie & D. Dickson (Eds.), *Researching the troubles: Social science perspectives on the Northern Ireland Conflict* (pp. 123–139). Mainstream Publishing.
- Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. (2017). *The 2017 Annual Statement. Human Rights in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.
- Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. (2017). *Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures 2017*. Northern Ireland: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.
- Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. (2022). *Census 2021. Population and household estimates for Northern Ireland: Statistical bulletin*. Northern Ireland: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.
- O'Dowd, L. (1998). Coercion, territoriality and the prospects for a negotiated settlement in Ireland. *Political Geography*, 17(2), 239–249.

- O'Rourke, C. (2012). Transitioning to What? Transitional justice and gendered citizenship in Chile and Colombia. In S. Buckley-Zistel & R. Stanley (Eds.), *Gender in transitional justice* (pp. 136–160). Palgrave Macmillan.
- O'Rourke, C. (2013). *Gender politics in transitional justice*. Routledge.
- Pankhurst, D. (2008). Introduction: Gendered war and peace. In D. Pankhurst (Ed.), *Gendered peace: Women's struggles for post-war justice and reconciliation* (pp. 1–30). Routledge.
- Patterson, H. (1996). Northern Ireland 1921–68. In A. Aughey & D. Morrow (Eds.), *Northern Ireland politics* (pp. 3–10). Longman.
- Pierson, R. R. (2000). Nations: Gendered, racialized, crossed with empire. In I. Blom, K. Hagemann, & C. Hall (Eds.), *Gendered nations: Nationalisms and gender order in the long nineteenth century* (pp. 41–61). Berg.
- Police Service of Northern Ireland. (2019). *Incidents and Crimes with a Hate Motivation Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: PSNI Statistics Branch.
- Prupp, O., & Öhlander, M. (2011). Observation. In L. Kaijser & M. Öhlander (Eds.), *Etnologiskt fältarbete* (pp. 113–145). Studentlitteratur.
- Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Elam, G., Tennant, R., & Rahim, N. (2014). Designing and selecting samples. In J. Ritchie, J. Lewis, C. McNaughton Nicholls, & R. Ormston (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers* (pp. 112–145). London: Sage.
- Rolston, B. (2006). Dealing with the past: Pro-state paramilitaries, truth and transition in Northern Ireland. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 28(3), 652–675.
- Rooney, E. (2000). Women in Northern Irish politics: difference matters. In C. Roulston & C. Davies (Eds.), *Gender, democracy and inclusion in Northern Ireland* (pp. 164–186). Palgrave.
- Rooney, E. (2012a) *Transitional Justice Grassroots Toolkit*. Belfast: Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University and Bridge of Hope, Ashton Community Trust.
- Rooney, E. (2012b) *Transitional Justice: Grassroots Engagement*. Belfast: Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University and Bridge of Hope, Ashton Community Trust.
- Rooney, E. (2013). *Transitional Justice Grassroots Programme: Executive Summary 2012–2013*. Belfast: Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University and Bridge of Hope, Ashton Community Trust.
- Rooney, E. (2014). *Transitional Justice Grassroots Toolkit: User's Guide*. Belfast: Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University and Bridge of Hope, Ashton Community Trust.
- Rooney, E. (2016). *Transitional Justice Grassroots Toolkit: Trainer's Manual*. Belfast: Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University and Bridge of Hope, Ashton Community Trust.

- Rooney, E., & Swaine, A. (2012). The 'Long Grass' of agreements: Promise, theory and practice. *International Criminal Law Review*, 12(3), 519–548.
- Ryan, L., & Ward, M. (2004). Introduction. In L. Ryan & M. Ward (Eds.), *Irish women and nationalism: Soldiers, new women and wicked hags* (pp. 1–13). Irish Academic Press.
- Sales, R. (1997). *Women divided: Gender, religion, and politics in Northern Ireland*. Routledge.
- Sharoni, S. (1998). Gendering conflict and peace in Israel/Palestine and the North of Ireland. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 27(4), 1061–1089.
- Shirlow, P., & Murtagh, B. (2006). *Belfast: Segregation, violence and the city*. Pluto Press.
- Side, K. (2009). Women's civil and political citizenship in the post-good friday agreement period in Northern Ireland. *Irish Political Studies*, 24(1), 67–87.
- Sjoberg, L. (2010). Introduction. In L. Sjoberg (Ed.), *Gender and International security: Feminist perspectives* (pp. 1–14). Routledge.
- Smyth, M., & Hamilton, J. (2003). The human costs of the troubles. In O. Hargie & D. Dickson (Eds.), *Researching the troubles: Social science perspectives on the Northern Ireland conflict* (pp. 15–36). Mainstream Publishing.
- Spencer, L., Ritchie, J., Ormston, R., O'Connor, W., & Barnard, M. (2014). Analysis: Principles and processes. In J. Ritchie, J. Lewis, C. McNaughton Nicholls, & R. Ormston (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers* (pp. 269–293). Sage.
- Taylor, L. K., Dautel, J., Maloku, E., & Tomovska Misoska, A. (2021). Children's outgroup giving in settings of intergroup conflict: The developmental role of ingroup symbol preference. *Developmental Psychology*, 57(8), 1350–1358.
- Tickner, J. A. (2006). Feminism meets international relations: Some methodological issues. In B. A. Ackerly, M. Stern, & J. True (Eds.), *Feminist methodologies for international relations* (pp. 19–41). Cambridge University Press.
- Ward, R. J. (2004). 'It's Not Just Tea and Buns': Women and pro-union politics in Northern Ireland. *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, 6(4), 494–506.
- Werbner, P., & Yuval-Davis, N. (1999). Women and the new discourse of citizenship. In N. Yuval-Davis & P. Werbner (Eds.), *Women, citizenship and difference* (pp. 1–38). Zed Books.
- Wibben, A. T. R. (2011). *Feminist security studies: A narrative approach*. Routledge.
- Wolf, D. L. (1996). Situating Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork. In D. L. Wolf (Ed.), *Feminist dilemmas in fieldwork* (pp. 1–55). Westview Press.

- Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland. (2019). *Northern Ireland Women's Manifesto: General Election 2019*. Belfast: Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland.
- Women's Resource and Development Agency. (2020). *Women's resource and development agency*. <https://wrda.net/>. Accessed 2020-07-06.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. Sage.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (1997). *Gender and nation*. Sage.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





## Theorising a Gender-Just Political Citizenship in Deeply Divided Transitional Societies

A gender-just political citizenship is one that recognises, validates and encourages public political participation of all genders. It is built on a broad understanding of politics—including both formal and informal political activity—and as such incorporates participation in different arenas. Intersectionality is key as people belong to many different collectivities, each of which mediates their membership in others. Each part of this definition is further explored and theorised throughout this chapter.

To explore gender-just political citizenship in ethno-nationally divided transitional societies, we need to understand how ethno-nationalism interacts with gender and citizenship. This chapter provides a theoretical discussion of the following ideas with a specific focus on deeply divided transitional societies: gendered political citizenship and ethno-nationalism; agonistic peace politics; and transversal politics and citizenship. Section 2.1 explores what political participation can entail and how it is gendered. Section 2.2 then explores agonistic peace and transversal politics, and their potential for creating space for inclusive dialogue and political activism. In 2.3, transversal politics is explored in terms of building a gender-just transversal citizenship. This chapter is then concluded in 2.4.

## 2.1 GENDERED POLITICAL CITIZENSHIP IN ETHNO-NATIONALLY DEEPLY DIVIDED TRANSITIONAL SOCIETIES

This section introduces theories on the intersections of gender, political citizenship and (ethno)-nationalism. First, it explores citizenship and its relationship to gender and political participation. Then, different types of nationalism are discussed in relation to both gender and political citizenship. Lastly, it looks at what happens to women's political citizenship in transitional ethno-nationalist societies.

### 2.1.1 *Citizenship, Political Participation and Gender*

Citizenship theories approach political participation in different ways. Citizenship can be viewed as membership and participation in a political community (*civic republicanism* and *communitarianism*) (Assiter, 1999; Benhabib, 2002) or as a status that imparts rights and duties (*liberalism*) (Heater, 2004; Lister, 2003). As such, citizenship is a way of defining the relationship between a state and individuals and groups. *Political* citizenship concerns the political rights and/or duties of citizens. Political rights, as defined by Marshall (1950, p. 11), entail “the right to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political authority or as an elector”. Voting is a central political right, and as such, how citizens are encouraged (or discouraged) to vote becomes important. In contrast to voting, running for office is a more exclusive practice, with access depending on one's gender, ethnicity and class, for example. When citizenship is equalled to participation in decision-making, citizens have the opportunity to realise themselves as political beings through running for office, as public servants, by taking part in the deliberation of laws, or as soldiers (Heater, 2004; Lee, 2017; Voet, 1998). When participation is seen as a duty that goes beyond voting, issues of access are heightened. Participation, such as running for office and taking part in the public political debate, requires a greater effort of the state to enable the engagement of a range of groups, not only (already) privileged citizens. Systems of oppression (regardless of their basis) tend to obstruct such participation.

Citizenship is not gender neutral. Even though the idea of citizenship has existed for almost three millennia, women have historically been largely excluded from it, as well as men from non-dominant groups

such as indigenous minorities, enslaved peoples, colonial subjects and the working-classes (Lister, 2003; Pettman, 1999; Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999). Citizenship thus has a bleak track record in terms of women's participation in political life. The demanding nature of political participation has specific implications for women (Lister, 2003). To fulfil this duty, citizens need time, material conditions and resources which are unevenly distributed between men and women, as well as among other groups (Lister, 2003; O'Rourke, 2012; Pettman, 1999). The political rights and duties of citizens are not equally distributed—they are based on gender, class, ethnicity and sexuality, among other things (Danielsen et al., 2016).

Part of the explanation for women's obstructed citizenship and oppression lies in the division of society into two spheres: the public, and the private; a divide which evolved during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Towns, 2010). Liberal citizenship theory is built on this divide, arguing that state intervention should be limited to the public sphere (Voet, 1998). Citizen rights cover people's existence in the public sphere, while their existence in the private sphere of the home and family—"the sphere in which women, not coincidentally, live most of their lives"—are ignored and neglected (O'Rourke, 2012, p. 138). In the public sphere the citizen is constituted as a political actor (Lister, 2003), while the private domain is constructed as politically irrelevant (Pateman, 1988; Yuval-Davis, 1997b). Participation in grassroots movements is by some viewed as "politically incomplete", despite the fact that most citizens participate in politics locally (Lister, 2003, p. 28). As such, participation outside formal politics, and as such deemed outside the public sphere, is often not considered as citizen participation. This is problematic in terms of gender as many women have turned to civil society to mitigate their exclusion from formal public sphere politics. Many feminists oppose the public/private divide, arguing that the political sphere should be broadened to include other institutions, such as the workplace, welfare institutions, and voluntary organisations (Lister, 2003).

A substantial challenge to the public/private divide came in 1970, when Carol Hanisch coined the phrase "the personal is political", based on the idea that "there are no strictly personal problems and therefore all so-called personal problems should be open to political debate and the 'private sphere' should be open to state intervention" (Voet, 1998, p. 24). As personal problems are political, they require collective action to reach solutions (Hanisch, 2000). Through this line of reasoning, feminists have been able to bring attention to familial issues in the public

sphere (Werbner, 1999). Despite the illusion that states are only interested in the public sphere, states intervene in the private sphere in many ways, and private sphere activities are continuously discussed and judged in public (see Luddy, 1995). State intervention in the private sphere is particularly prevalent in nationalist societies, where women are often elevated as reproducers of the nation and denied roles as equal citizens (see Sect. 2.1.2.2; McClintock, 2002; Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999). State policies such as enforced sterilisation, abortion bans or one-child policies are some examples. However, when it comes to issues such as domestic violence, on the other hand, it is often considered a “private” issue and state intervention has long been lacking. As such, what is considered “political” has historically been “steeped in male experience” (Lister, 2003, pp. 25–26).

In addition to the construct of the public/private divide, the (civic republican) idea of the male citizen as the ideal human has done much to exclude women from citizenship and increase their subordination (Steans, 1998). Traditionally masculine modes of participation have been privileged, especially through military service and the concept of the citizen-soldier (O’Rourke, 2012; Snyder, 1999). The idea is that the state protects its citizens in return for (male) citizens’ participation in the military defence of the state—fusing together military service, masculinity and citizenship (Snyder, 1999). Military service, especially in combat roles, is often reserved for men, and considered highly qualifying (sometimes even a prerequisite) for high political positions. As a result, women have long been barred from both symbolic and material benefits of citizenship (O’Rourke, 2012). This is something that a gender-just political citizenship seeks to overcome through its understanding of politics as inclusive of both public and private sphere issues and its encouragement of multi-sited participation.

### 2.1.2 *Nationalisms, Citizenship and Gender*

Citizenship is intrinsically linked to nationalism and the idea of the nation-state. As a political doctrine, nationalism includes the belief that nations have the right of self-determination, either as self-governing units within existing states or as states of their own (Ignatieff, 1993). Self-determination, especially in terms of state control, is implicitly connected to the power of regulating citizenship. In addition, the “nation-state”

stems from the (ethno-)nationalist idea that the boundaries of a geographical area should match the cultural boundaries of a specific (ethnic) group. Reality seldom, if ever, lives up to this idea of “one nation, one state”: while there are thousands of ethnic nations in the world, there are less than 200 sovereign states, and nation-states have never been ethnically homogenous (Connor, 1970; Lister, 2003; Yuval-Davis, 1997b). Despite this, citizenship and national identity are often conflated (Lister, 2003).<sup>1</sup> So, to understand citizenship, it is necessary to explore how it intersects with nationalism, especially in deeply divided ethno-nationalist societies.

Attachment to a nation can be regarded as everything from a feeling and an identity to an ideology and a social movement (Hearn, 2006). It is a project of power (Cockburn, 1998), a way of politically mobilising the shared commonality of a nation (Anand, 2010) and based on the idea that the nation is the source of legitimacy and sovereignty (Malcolm Anderson, 2000). Nationalism thus hinges on how “the nation” is defined and along what commonalities the nation includes/excludes people. Some argue for the historical continuance of nations—that they have evolved organically from pre-existing ethnic groupings (*primordialism*) or that they are modern versions of previous ethnic communities (*ethnosymbolism*)—while others view nations as a thoroughly modern phenomenon springing from particular societal developments such as the foundation of the modern (nation-)state system (*modernism*) (Hearn, 2006; Smith, 1995; Yuval-Davis, 1997b). Modernists tend to emphasise that nations are socially constructed “imagined political communities” (Benedict Anderson, 1991, 2006), while primordialists view nations as eternal and “a natural extension of family and kinship relations” (Yuval-Davis, 1997b, p. 15). Most nationalisms tend to place emphasis on either the nation’s ethnic or civic identity (Maxwell, 2010). While ethno-nationalism assimilates the nation with ethnicity, civic nationalism assimilates the nation with the state (Hearn, 2006). As such, in ethno-nationalism, the nation creates the state and in civic nationalism the state creates the nation. The following sections discuss these two nationalisms as well as their relationships to gender.

<sup>1</sup> Similarly, while an (ethnic) nation is a group with a shared identity, a state is the political community and institutions that govern the population within a specific territory.

### 2.1.2.1 *Ethno-Nationalism and Civic Nationalism*

In *ethno-nationalism*, the nation is defined in terms of ethnicity. Like nations, ethnicity can be defined in a myriad of ways. In this study it is viewed as socially constructed, being neither “natural” nor “given”. Ethnicity is more than common social traits such as language, religion and customs (Hearn, 2006). As such, ethnic communities should not be reduced to “monolithic collective actors” (Bosi & De Fazio, 2017, p. 13) or homogenous entities with common purposes, interests and agency (Roger Brubaker, 2002). When ethnic groups aspire to self-determination or autonomy, ethno-nationalism develops. Ethno-nationalism can thus be defined as “the advocacy of or support for the interest of a particular ethnic group, esp. with regard to its national independence or self-determination” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2014). Key to ethno-nationalism are claims to jurisdiction, self-government or self-determination. As such, ethno-nationalism cannot be equated with ethnic politics<sup>2</sup> or ethnic conflict<sup>3</sup> as they both lack “nationalist” (i.e., self-determination) aspirations. Armed ethno-national conflicts are characterised by the use of violence by ethnic groups formulating doctrines based on the right to self-rule (Nagle & Clancy, 2012).

Ethno-nationalism takes different forms for groups that are politically dominant or oppressed. Ethno-nationalist movements of minorities or oppressed groups challenge the state in which they live and demand political and/or cultural autonomy. Politically dominant groups, on the other hand, are likely to conflate the state (which they control) with their national belonging (Connor, 1970). In practice this means that such groups use ethno-nationalism in defence of “their” state and the status quo in which they hold power.<sup>4</sup> As states run by ethno-nationalist groups only grant full citizenship to those of the “correct” ethnicity, “Others” (including both men and women) remain second-class citizens or are entirely excluded from political rights. Women in the politically dominant

<sup>2</sup> When ethnic groups pursue equal representation and rights within a political system (Hearn, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> When ethnic politics turn violent, with one group “claim[ing] that its distinct ethnic identity is the reason why its members can not realise their interests” (Cordell and Wolff 2010, p. 5).

<sup>4</sup> States controlled by dominant groups can develop different types of ethnic rule: *Herrenvolk* democracy (see Smooha, 1997); ethnocracy (see Yiftachel, 2000); or ethnic democracy (see Lentin, 1999; Smooha, 1997).

ethnic group may, like men, benefit directly from exclusionary practices (Steans, 1998). The traditions and culture of the ethnic group will also influence how “acceptable” women’s participation is.

In *civic nationalism*, citizenship (rather than cultural identity) is used to determine the boundaries of the nation. As such, all individuals who agree to the politics of the state are part of the nation—regardless of their ethnicity, religion, gender or language (Ignatieff, 1993). The civic nation is constituted by a community of equals: “rights-bearing citizens united in a patriotic attachment to a shared set of political practices and values” (Ignatieff, 1993, pp. 3–4). In this sense, civic nationalist states are portrayed as democratic as everyone is included in citizenship (at least in theory). The logical conclusion of this is an extension of rights to all citizens, along with possibilities to participate in political life. Despite this inclusive aim, large groups of people have historically been excluded from both citizenship and the nation.

Many modern nations “theoretically include all the strata of the designated population in the sovereign nation” (Smith, 1995, p. 54). Key to civic nationalism today is thus the recognition that most societies are multi-ethnic and therefore must be held together by law rather than common roots (Ignatieff, 1993). In practice, multi-cultural citizenship means that rights are universal, while at the same time, minority groups can demand differential treatment in relation to culture, language and recognition (Lister, 2003). However, this is not without problems. There is a risk of homogenising and essentialising minority groups—risks of “freezing cultural differences and of treating cultural groups as [...] closed, ignoring, for instance, gender, sexuality, class and age differences and the fluid nature of the boundaries between collectivities” (Lister, 2003, p. 51).

A possible consequence of this is a transfer of power to “unelected ‘traditional’ communal male elders” within minority groups, particularly in societies where immigrants are excluded from full citizenship (Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999, p. 18, see also Charles & Hintjens, 1998). Another possible issue is that acceptance of multi-culturalism is only superficial, that it is “confined to the ‘private sphere’, rather than genuine acceptance and recognition of such diversity in the ‘public’” (Lister, 2003, p. 51). Formal equality does not automatically translate into political participation and representation (Castles, 1997). Even though such societies are characterised as civil, inclusive and liberal, few of them truly implement equality regardless of gender, ethnicity, class, etc. As Alison (2009, p. 223)

argues, there is still “much room for citizenship to function in exclusionary ways regarding women and minorities”. Despite potential risks, defining nationhood in terms of citizenship tends to be more inclusive than when the nation is equated with ethnicity.

### 2.1.2.2 *Nationalism and Gender*

Nationalisms depend on gender constructions to continuously create national identities (Yuval-Davis, 1997b). Despite this, many theories of nationalism have been gender-blind (see Anand, 2010; Blom, 2000; Malečková, 2008; Wenk, 2000). In general, nationalisms have tended to place women in symbolic roles as guardians of national culture and traditions (Ryan & Ward, 2004), and idealise men as warriors protecting the nation. These polar-opposite constructions of masculinity and femininity are integral to upholding and legitimising structures of violent ethno-national conflict. There is a range of ways in which gender, nation and citizenship intersect, explored below.

*Women as Mothers of the Nation* Motherhood has been crucial for the construction of nations (Anand, 2010; Kronsell, 2012; Thapar-Björkert & Shepherd, 2010). In ethno-nationalist societies based on genealogical origin, women’s roles as biological reproducers tend to be emphasised, and in societies based on shared cultural heritage, the emphasis is placed on their roles as social and cultural reproducers (Alison, 2009; Charles & Hintjens, 1998). Women’s roles as *biological reproducers* of the nation (through giving birth to new generations) has implications for autonomy and reproductive rights, as these can be overridden in the name of the nation’s survival (Yuval-Davis, 1997b). Population control policies can encourage (specific) women to have (more) children to ensure the survival of the nation (Cockburn, 1998), prevent certain women from having children or limit the number of children being born (Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999; Yuval-Davis, 1997b). Constructing women as reproducers thus opens possibilities for states to target women, mothers in particular, with maternal and child-rearing policies.

Women are also symbolically constructed as *cultural reproducers* of nations as “gender relations often come to be seen as constituting the ‘essence’ of cultures as ways of life to be passed from generation to generation” (Yuval-Davis, 1997b, p. 43). Women become the guardians of the nation’s traditions (Oikarinen, 1996), responsible for maintaining group identity (Jenichen, 2010) and are constructed as the symbolic bearers of group identity and honour (Yuval-Davis, 1997b, 1998). By behaving

and dressing “properly”, women come to embody the nation’s boundaries, and when the nation feels threatened, the control of such cultural codes for women tends to intensify (Steans, 1998; Yuval-Davis, 1997b). It therefore becomes important for nations to both protect and control women in times of conflict (Eitrem Holmgren, 2014). Women’s agency is thus constrained and obstructed by certain gender narratives dictating what action is “appropriate”.

Women are also constructed as *mothers of the nation*, or indeed, as the nation itself—nations are often symbolised by a female figure, usually a mother (Goldstein, 2001; Lorenz, 2008; Yuval-Davis, 1997b). Examples of this can be found all around the world, with nations referring to a “motherland”, such as Mother India or Mother Ireland. This symbolism has consequences when the nation is faced with violence. The idea of a national community becomes merged with that of a devoted, selfless mother which “triggers the response that one should ultimately be prepared to come to her defence or die for her” (Krause, 1996, p. 108). Allegories of rape are often used to characterise military conquering of land and attacks on the nation (Berger & Lorenz, 2008; Rogers Brubaker & Laitin, 1998). Additionally, mass rape and sexual violence (mostly directed at women) are “the most obviously gendered and sexualised” features of armed conflict, sometimes used strategically to destroy a specific culture (Cockburn, 2013, pp. 440–441).

*Militarised Masculinity and Women Warriors* As men are asked to fight and defend the feminised nation and “her” honour, nationalist violence legitimises itself through gendered terms (Lorenz, 2008) and men’s violent action is made to seem both moral and commendable (Wilcox, 2010). This nationalist-militaristic myth in which men fight for the sake of “womenandchildren” builds on the idea of men as aggressive and violent (Enloe, 1990). Militarised<sup>5</sup> masculinity, and the violence it embodies, is, as such, an integral part of aggressive ethno-national ideologies (Korac, 1999). Through the use of Othering, “enemy” nations are constructed as feminine or subordinately masculine, rendering them inferior and justifying violence against “them” (Peterson, 2010; Pierson, 2000; Tickner, 1992; Wilcox, 2010). As a gendered and racialised process, Othering is often used in nationalist conflicts to assert the identity of the nation

<sup>5</sup> Militarisation is “an ideology which values war highly and, in doing so, serves to legitimize [...] violence” by merging military values and patriarchal ideas to uphold military influence (Steans 1998, p. 113).

(Anand, 2010; Mayer, 2000; Wibben, 2011). Nationalist movements are often expressions of masculinised bodies (Anand, 2010) and make use of conservative ideas of gender difference to demarcate the nation from “Others” (Eitrem Holmgren, 2014).

The gendered processes of Othering and militarisation are dependent on men *and* women. Militaries rely on support from women in many different roles, ranging from prostitutes and military wives to nurses and mothers<sup>6</sup> (see Enloe, 2000). As Alison (2009, p. 95) argues, “women have just as often used the moral claims of motherhood to support war as they have to support peace”. Women also participate directly in military organisations and combat roles,<sup>7</sup> especially in liberatory nationalist movements, where women are more likely to participate as combatants compared with state militaries or politically dominant nationalist movements (Alison, 2009). There are both strategic and ideological reasons for this: it is a way of symbolically *showing* that everyone is involved in the struggle; and a way to *involve* as many people as possible as combatants when facing a larger or better equipped military (Alison, 2009). However, as Alison (2009, p. 111) argues: “Female combatants are often presented as a necessary but temporary heroic sacrifice [...] rather than as representing a fundamental shift in societal gender roles”. Women’s military service is sometimes even understood as an extension of maternal duties to protect and care for children (Alison, 2009).

*Women as Peacemakers* Women have a long history of peace activism, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom being a key example (Steans, 1998). Many anti-war women’s groups have

constructed anti-militarism not as a women-only issue but as an issue in which women, owing to their specific positioning in society, have a specific message to transmit, around which they should organize separately from men (Yuval-Davis, 1997b, p. 111).

<sup>6</sup> As Ruddick (1989, p. 219) argues: “everywhere that men fight, mothers support them”.

<sup>7</sup> This is an issue of debate: some argue that women’s inclusion in militaries may lead to gender equality; others argue that militaries tend to stay unchanged and, instead, female soldiers become militarised. Studies have also shown a high prevalence of sexual violence against women within military organisations (Cockburn 2013).

As such, women are often constructed as linked to peace, with a specific focus on motherhood. Some accounts construct women as inherently more peaceful than men and relate this to essentialised maternal qualities (Forcey, 1994). Others reject such claims, arguing that women's socially constructed maternal identities and experiences of motherhood, in addition to their exclusion from power, have resulted in the relationship between women and peace (Steans, 1998). Yuval-Davis (1997b, pp. 112–113) explains the specific positioning of women in peace movements with the following ideas: since women are (mostly) non-combatants, i.e., civilians, they are “a bit freer to protest against militarism and war”; and some women see their anti-militarism “as a spearhead in their fight against the patriarchal social system as a whole”. There are also feminists that altogether resist any connection between women and peace, arguing that the “connection” serves to reinforce the public/private divide by stereotyping women as “incapable of functioning in the public realm” (Steans, 1998, p. 119).

Ruddick (1989, p. 148), a proponent of feminist maternal peace politics, argues that

[maternal thinking] reveals a contradiction between mothering and war. Mothering begins in birth and promises life; military thinking justifies organized, deliberate deaths.

At the same time, Ruddick also claims that “a pure maternal peacefulness does not exist” and that “[a]lthough mothers are not intrinsically peaceful, maternal practice is a ‘natural resource’ for peace politics” (Ruddick, 1989, pp. 156–157). What is needed is the combination of feminist and maternal thinking: “feminism actualizes the peacefulness latent in maternal practice” through its inherent anti-militarism (Ruddick, 1989, pp. 242–243). Although Ruddick denies an essentialised view of women as inherently peaceful, she fails to recognise the differences among women's maternal experiences (Alison, 2009). She also emphasises the importance of motherhood over experiences related to other identities such as class or ethnicity. In contrast, constructions of motherhood are sometimes used in a consciously subversive way by women in peace activism (Steans, 1998). For instance, there is a maternal potential in working for peace to protect *all* children, including those of the Other. Alison (2009, p. 94) argues this point: “the experience of motherhood can only become a potential basis for peace when a mother's

‘preservative love’ is extended beyond her own children to the children of others, in particular to the children of her ‘enemies’”. This has potential to undermine militarised and gendered Othering.

The special relationship between women and peace has also been recognised by the United Nations (UN) in their Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. Thanks to the work of feminist activists, the UN Security Council passed resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) in 2000, marking the establishment of the WPS agenda and their first official recognition of women in conflict. 1325 recognises how women are affected by war and addresses the need of protection for women during and after conflict. It also encourages the participation of women in peace-building at all levels of decision-making. 1325 has since been followed by nine additional resolutions. Although the WPS agenda represents a positive step towards a gender-sensitive response, there has been a tendency to focus on the protection of women as victims of war and sexual violence, rather than as agents. Some argue that 1325 “is yet another feminist contribution to international law that has been welcomed for the limited purpose of contributing to ‘saving’ or ‘protecting’ Third World women” (Otto, 2006, p. 144). Another issue is “window-dressing”—simply “adding” women to peace negotiations or as leaders in high positions of power does not in itself provide substantive change (Brittain, 2003, p. 48).

### 2.1.3 *Women’s Political Citizenship in Transitional Ethno-Nationalist Societies*

So, both citizenship and nationalism have tended to construct men as rational beings with political agency and encourage their contributions to society through soldiering and political participation in the public sphere, while women are celebrated as symbolic and literal mothers of the nation, encouraging private sphere activity. While the nation is constructed as female, the state is male—strong, independent, forceful—with the ability to protect “his” woman, i.e., the nation. This binary construct is resilient even in the face of increased female political participation. Together, these gendered roles serve to restrict women’s full citizenship and political participation in the public sphere. Women’s public sphere subordination is a consequence of being symbolically constructed as belonging to the private sphere, primarily, but not solely, due to the gendered norm of

women as mothers. By “banishing” women to the private sphere, their political citizenship is obstructed (see Fig. 2.1).

This process is heightened in ethno-nationalist societies because of the prominent values placed on the gendered binary of men-as-protectors and women-as-mothers. By influencing each other, they build a cycle that self-reinforces the gendered understandings of nations and women’s positions as second-class citizens.

At the same time, nationalist struggles also tend to open up a “degree of fluidity” in social relations allowing women to create new spaces of agency and challenge existing gender relations (Steans, 1998, p. 66). This fluidity can allow women to participate as soldiers, or as political actors—places that have historically been reserved for men. As active participants in the struggle, women implicitly and explicitly challenge the cultural traditions which are otherwise used to legitimise their subordination (Steans, 1998) and can strategically use their participation to advance their societal positions (Sharoni, 1998). As such, gains in gender equality, for example, increased political participation, or socio-economic welfare,

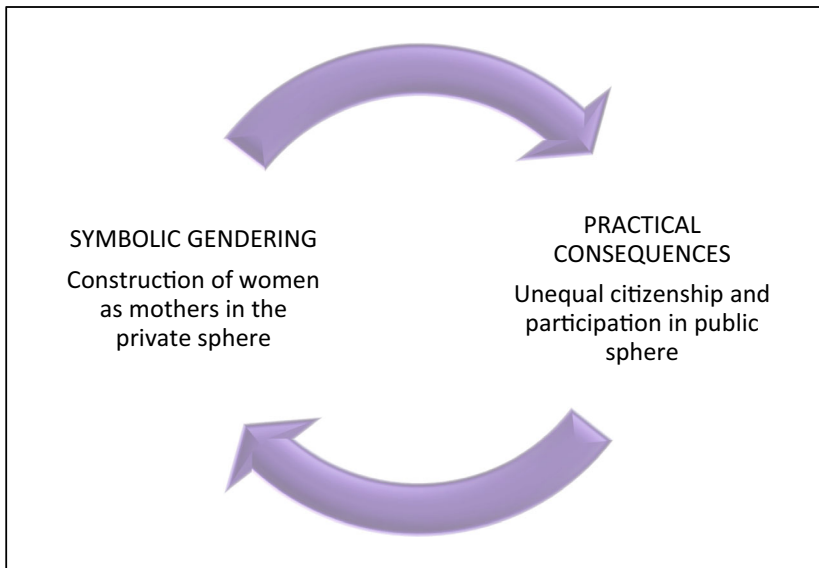


Fig. 2.1 Symbolic gendering and practical consequences

might be won during nationalist struggles. A key question is whether these advances are temporary and what consequences this has for women's citizenship.

During transitions from war to peace, space is created to problematise how citizenship is constituted. It also represents a moment when gender inequalities may be addressed, which, in turn, affects how attentive society is to gender issues in the long(er) run. As Enloe (1993, p. 2) argues: "Mornings after [armed conflict] are times for puzzling, for sorting things out, for trying to assess whether one is starting a new day or continuing an old routine". Transitions thus offer opportunities to renegotiate citizenship, the incorporation of citizens into the polity and possibilities to re-draw the public/private divide (O'Rourke, 2012), and as such, what is considered "political". It is therefore "a critical moment in the shifting terrain of gender power" (Meintjes, 2001, p. 64). Especially when gender issues have been part of the conflict agenda or when women's situations were given attention during the conflict, there is potential to renegotiate and improve women's rights, including their political participation (Pankhurst, 2008a).

However, this does not necessarily result in emancipatory politics for women. There is also a risk of reaffirming traditional gendered norms of political participation during transitions. As Brown and Ní Aoláin (2015, p. 135) argue, "transitional systems remain gendered to men's advantage and often function as a means to reassert elite male control over political systems in ways that definitively ouster women". As such, the transitional phase does not automatically imply a dissolution of the "broader gendered and sexual ideological contours of conflict" (Ashe, 2019, p. 6). Re-imagining citizenship can thus be difficult in societies that are dominated by an ideology which does not recognise women's potential or contributions (Pankhurst, 2008a). As such, "the morning after is always an ambiguous moment" (Enloe, 1993, p. 252). These two possible yet contradictory developments—renegotiating citizenship and backlash—are detailed in the following sections.

### *2.1.3.1 Renegotiating Gendered Citizenship*

In many contemporary wars the frontline blurs with the home-front (Pankhurst, 2008a; Theidon, 2012). This can lead to the private sphere becoming politicised as domestic spaces get a public value attached to them and acquire a political character. As such, there is a certain interweaving of the public and private when violence spills from one to

the other and the boundary between them becomes more flexible. This also impacts gender relations. Some roles women play during conflict transgress the traditional gender norms that existed pre-conflict, pushing the boundaries of what gendered behaviour is seen as acceptable. Women sometimes take on roles previously reserved for men (Sideris, 2001), such as becoming the breadwinner or participating in combat. As women get more public, politicised roles, ethno-nationalist gender norms can be challenged (Ashe, 2019). Women's involvement in activism during conflict may thus offer a "potential springboard for women's emancipation" (Sharoni, 1998, pp. 1063–1064), which can be utilised during transitions.

In transitional societies, new norms, laws, institutions and leaders emerge (Porter, 2007). There is an opportunity to "positively affirm a broad spectrum of women's and men's mobilization and political activity", and as such, broaden the concept of citizenship (O'Rourke, 2012, p. 139), as well as negotiate new systems of governance, including programmes to radically transform women's participation (Brown & Ní Aoláin, 2015). Achieving a gender-just transition entails ending the gendered inequalities and women's subordination, as well as securing women's access to and control of resources and agency (Goetz, 2007). As such, addressing the gendered inequalities at the heart of deep-rooted causes of conflict is a starting place for transforming gender relations (Rooney & Swaine, 2012). As Hudson (2010, p. 256) argues: "the success of [transitional] reconstruction can be seen as dependent on the inclusion of women and the pursuit of gender equity". Gender justice is thus "inevitably [...] tied to gender equality", the right to participate meaningfully, and promotion of equal rights (Porter, 2007, p. 110ff).

To guarantee such change it is important that women are involved in transitional decision-making (Porter, 2007). Increasing women's leadership, voice and influence is a key part of building gender justice (Dheeraja et al., 2015). As such, ensuring that women can substantially take part in decision-making that will affect the future, such as peace negotiations, legal and constitutional reforms, and electoral politics, is key. When there is a "critical mass of capable women who defend women's rights to other women and convince men of the need for equal rights" it is more likely that gender-equitable policies and laws are put in place (Porter, 2007, p. 113). This speaks to the importance of women's substantial participation in negotiations and transitional bodies. This is echoed by the UN: "Peace negotiations [...] [lend] legitimacy to those represented at the

peace table... Not only must women be at the negotiating table, issues of gender equality must be considered” (United Nations General Assembly, 2010, p. 7). By including gender as a thematic issue, conditions for “fostering a gender-equitable citizenship” are encouraged (Deiana, 2013, p. 400).

### 2.1.3.2 *Backlash Against Women’s Citizenship Rights*

As transitions are heavily influenced by pre-war power structures, women often experience a continuation of exclusionary patterns and possible backslide (Brown & Ní Aoláin, 2015; Ní Aoláin, 2012). Such *backlash*<sup>8</sup> results in context-specific difficulties for women in transitional societies and “seems to be very common across quite contrasting social, economic, and geographical contexts” (Pankhurst, 2008a, p. 3). Transitional societies tend to neither “defend the spaces women create during struggle nor acknowledge the ingenious ways in which women bear new and additional responsibilities” (Meintjes et al., 2001, p. 8). Characteristic for backlashes are thus attempts to call for, negotiate or coerce women “back” into the private sphere. Once peace is restored, women are urged to step aside and return to “their” domain, the home (Enloe, 1990). This tends to occur despite shifts in gender relations during conflict that grant women greater autonomy. Potential changes tend to be perceived “as a necessary but *temporary* aberration in a time of national crisis”, not as fundamental, lasting change (Alison, 2009, p. 116). The result is suppression of women’s power (Pierson, 2000) and their under-representation in new institutions (O’Rourke, 2012, 2013).

Backlash can be understood in terms of a wish to return to “normal” gender relations, i.e., a pre-conflict gender hierarchy in which women are often associated with the private sphere of the home. A return to pre-conflict gender relations is sometimes seen as evidence of peacebuilding, regardless if this undermines women’s rights (Pankhurst, 2008a). As such, women’s inequality may be reinforced if societies are “restored” back to pre-conflict structural and political exclusions and inequalities (Rooney & Swaine, 2012). Women’s needs often become systematically ignored and marginalised (Pankhurst, 2008a) and women’s activities tend to be confined to the margins of the transitional state. There are two central characteristics of post-war backlash (Pankhurst, 2008a):

<sup>8</sup> This concept demonstrates how women’s political and/or socio-economic gains sooner or later face a negative counterreaction (Pankhurst 2008b, p. 293).

- (1) A continuation and/or new forms of violence against women
- (2) Attacks on women's rights, including rights won during the conflict and the "squeezing out" of gender equality issues from mainstream political consciousness, especially in ethno-nationalist transitional societies.

The level of violence against women in transitional societies tends to be higher than pre-conflict levels and sometimes even higher than during the war (Chinkin, 2004; Pankhurst, 2008a; Sigsworth & Valji, 2012). It is common to see an increase in domestic abuse and violence against women in the aftermath of conflict (Buckley-Zistel & Zolkos, 2012; Pankhurst, 2008b). Additionally, domestic violence continues to be impacted by militarisation even after ceasefires and peace agreements, for example through the use of military weapons (Sharoni, 1998). As such, gendered violence is "committed in ways still connected to the conflict" (Chinkin, 2004). As men emerge from conflict, they can "feel threatened by [women's] survival and so retreat into trying to reassert their manhood in the only area where this seems possible—in intimate relationships" (Sideris, 2001, p. 52). Men's violence is used to re-establish control over women, resources and wealth (Meintjes et al., 2001). Transitions thus often represent a period when widespread (predominantly male) violence has ceased in the public sphere, while structural and physical violence continue in private (Porter, 2007). The continuation and/or increase in violence prevents women from fully participating in society (Carrillo, 2005) and keeps them from consolidating wartime gains (Meintjes et al., 2001). Despite this, gendered violence tends to be neglected in transitions. Instead of recognising the "continuities of gendered power relations" and considering violence against women as a continuum (Sigsworth & Valji, 2012, p. 117), transitional societies tend to focus on public, political violence. Everyday violence against women, particularly in "private", is thus marginalised and made invisible (Gready & Robins, 2014).

Additionally, women are often granted less freedom in the aftermath than during the struggle (Anand, 2010). Even in cases when women actively contributed to nationalist struggles (Ashe, 2006) and when women's emancipation is declared integral (Steans, 2006), they seldom gain long-term advances in gender equality. As such, "nationalist revolutions are certainly not watersheds for women" (Steans, 2006, p. 42). In transitional societies, an anti-women discourse brings about restrictions to women's social, economic, and political activity (Meintjes

et al., 2001; Pankhurst, 2008a). There is also a “tendency for transitions to be accompanied by the large-scale retreat of women from the public sphere of protest and politics to the retrenched (though) reorganised private sphere” (O’Rourke, 2012, p. 156). Not only are women under-represented, but their public participation also tends to decrease, and public spaces occupied by women during the conflict tend to be re-inhabited by men. Men are to a greater extent seen as the “natural” bearers of history and progress. This makes it easier for transitional societies to deny women their equal citizenship rights.

The backlash against gender equality can be understood in terms of the interpretive prerogative that is given to people in power, often combatants and those associated with the state, during transitions. This has material consequences for women’s citizenship. As Ashe (2019, p. 41) argues, peace processes “rarely [address] issues of gender or sexual inequality in the past, present or future society”, and such issues “can become framed as irrelevant to achieving peace”. As such, women’s marginalisation is perpetuated and becomes institutionalised in transitional political processes (Chinkin, 2004). This makes it difficult for women to claim their rights. The identity upon which the conflict is based, whether ethnicity and/or nationality, tends to take precedence over all other issues, including gender equality. Issues that are perceived to lie outside the grievances at the heart of the conflict (even though they are also gendered) are marginalised or ignored. This is especially the case when power-sharing, or consociationalism, is part of transitions to (re)build a democratic system of governance. As this type of government tends to emphasise one kind of social division (often ethno-nationalism), it overlooks opportunities to be more inclusive, often lacks gender analysis, and “fail[s] to prioritize the dismantling of gender power relations” (Byrne & McCulloch, 2012, p. 566ff). The key emphasis on the need to accommodate ethno-national identities, “makes power-sharing practice particularly vulnerable to the exclusion of women” (Byrne & McCulloch, 2012, p. 575). As Deiana (2016, p. 103) argues,

by entrenching ethno-nationalism as key political discourse it also inevitably reproduces elements of its gender order and fails to address gender as a salient category [...] consociational settlements produce an exclusionary notion of citizenship which is not only ethnicised, but also implicitly gendered with important implications for women’s lived experiences, agency and inclusion.

Consociationalism thus tends to “produce and reiterate profound gender exclusions” and “side-line gender dynamics of conflict and conflict transformation” (Deiana, 2016, p. 100). Even though there is a tendency for consociationalism to produce negative consequences for gender equality, power-sharing does not *inherently* prohibit more democratic structures and women’s inclusion (Byrne & McCulloch, 2012; Rouse, 2020). However, translating a commitment to gender equality into practice is difficult and women who challenge the backlash, organise and mobilise are “often perceived as a threat to the power and integrity of the ethno-national group” (Byrne & McCulloch, 2012, p. 566). Women who pursue feminist goals are also often “told by their male counterparts to side-line their gender concerns for the more pressing issue of ‘the national question’” (Gilmartin, 2017, p. 268), which “serves merely as a strategic tactic to defer [their] demands” (McClintock, 1993, p. 77).

## 2.2 AGONISTIC PEACE AND TRANSVERSAL POLITICS

This section explores agonistic peace and transversal politics as theories of peacebuilding in the aftermath of violent conflict. It sets the scene for an empirical analysis that explores how these theories are applied in practice in women’s cross-community activities in Northern Ireland (see Chapter 5). These theories share many characteristics, such as their focus on open-ended dialogue, reconciliation and recognising difference. However, they differ in respect to their views on building coalitions through consensus. While agonism questions the use of consensus, transversalism is used as a method to build coalitions across difference. Their foundations are introduced below, and their commonalities and differences are further discussed in Chapter 7.

### 2.2.1 *Agonistic Peace*

Agonistic peace theory is part of critical peace research characterised by a focus on grassroots peace initiatives, attention to power dynamics and problematisation of top-down understandings of peace (Strömbom & Bramsen, 2022). The main idea of agonistic peace, and agonistic democracy, is to transform *antagonistic* encounters between “enemies” into *agonistic* encounters between “adversaries”, in an attempt to build constructive relations (Mouffe, 1999; Shinko, 2008). While agonism aspires to end violence, it does not require the absence or suppression of

conflict. Rather, the aim is to transform conflict, not resolve it (Maddison, 2015); (non-violent) conflict can and should prevail in agonistic peace (Bramsen, 2022; Strömbom & Bramsen, 2022). Similarly to conflict transformation, agonistic peace stresses that conflicts are constitutive of social life and can be both destructive and constructive (Bramsen, 2022; Strömbom & Bramsen, 2022). Key aspects of agonism are thus the delegitimisation of violence and the politicisation of conflict as violent enemy relations are subsumed into respect among adversaries (Strömbom et al., 2022).

Agonistic peace theory builds on ideas of radical democracy, or “agonistic pluralism”, formulated by Chantal Mouffe. This type of democracy acknowledges the “ineradicable character” of antagonism, conflict and power dimensions in the formation of identities (Mouffe, 1999, p. 752). Power, Mouffe (1999) argues, constitutes identities and, as such, the key for democratic politics is transforming power relations to make them compatible with democratic values, rather than eliminating them. The idea is thus not to overcome an us/them distinction, but to establish it in a different, democratic way: the Other becomes an adversary rather than an enemy to be destroyed, “whose ideas we are going to struggle with but whose right to defend those ideas we will not put into question” (Mouffe, 1999, p. 755).

Instead of finding common ground, reaching consensus and building mutual understanding through dialogue, space is created for agonistic contestation with former enemies (Mouffe, 1999; Shinko, 2008; Strömbom & Bramsen, 2022). What is important, though, is that participants should share a devotion to the principles of democracy, while acknowledging a disagreement of their meaning and implementation (Mouffe, 1999). Dissensus, rather than consensus, is thus seen as a progressive source for politics (Strömbom et al., 2022). Proponents of agonism argue that suppressing antagonistic conflict and pushing to find common ground through dialogue risks reinforcing the status quo and silencing legitimate and dissident claims, which in turn can result in violence seeming legitimate (Bramsen, 2022; Strömbom & Bramsen, 2022). Agonistic politics is built on the idea that contestation is inevitable and indeed crucial for progressive societies (Strömbom et al., 2022). Non-violent conflict, dissensus and plurality should be at the core of the relationship between former enemies (Strömbom et al., 2022). However, agonism itself also carries the potential for violence (Shinko, 2022). We should also be wary of it being used to merely evaluate peacebuilding

rather than being intentionally practised and embodied by those engaged (Shinko, 2022).

In agonistic peace and democracy, building consensus is not desired. So, how are political decisions made? Within an agonistic democracy, “there is no obvious place for collective decision making” (Schaap, 2006, p. 270) and consensus is always established with some form of exclusion(s) (Mouffe, 1999). An important part of agonism is creating an inclusive political sphere where different narratives can be heard and are allowed to coexist and new identities can be constructed (Bramsen, 2022), i.e., room has to be made for dissent (Maddison, 2015). Dryzek proposes that deliberative and decisional moments of democracy should be uncoupled: deliberation belongs in the public sphere and decision-making belongs to the state (Schaap, 2006). As Schaap (2006, p. 270) argues:

Deliberation is safest in divided societies within the public sphere that is at a distance from the immediate struggle for control of state power, that is, when the connection between contestation in the public sphere and the contest for sovereign authority is loosened.

Agonistic dialogue is thus “not generally aimed at achieving substantive agreement” or making policy decisions, but at relational transformation (Maddison, 2015, p. 1017). It is as if agonists understand democracy as “an ethos that seeks to postpone the moment of decision in order to affirm the openness of political life” (Schaap, 2006, p. 270).

However, Mouffe (1999) argues that compromises and consensus are still possible in agonism, but they should be seen as temporary. Consensus is thus “partial, fragile and contingent” (Maddison, 2015, p. 1023). This entails a temporary stabilisation of power with some form of exclusion, a type of “conflictual consensus” (Mouffe, 1999, p. 756). Due to this, agonistic democracy has to be built on institutions through which dissent can be manifested in a politics which is in part collaborative and in part conflictual (Mouffe, 1999). As such, “it is unproductive to think of civic political encounters as either consensual or contestational” (Çelik & Göker, 2021, p. 32). However, by allowing parties to work towards their (separate) goals without aiming to compromise, political inertia might be favoured and there is a risk of identities and positions becoming cemented or reified (Schaap, 2006; Strömbom & Bramsen, 2022, p. 1240). Agonistic inclusion can thus end up “furthering

and re-embedding majoritarian values and norms of the existing power structures” (Shinko, 2022, p. 1403).

In terms of grassroots dialogues between citizens in deeply divided societies, the focus is not on policy or outcome, but on transforming relationships (Maddison, 2015). The goal is to sustain a dialogue both across and about difference, learn about each other’s conflict experiences and the power relations therein (Maddison, 2015). Participants are required to make an effort to understand each other despite deep disagreements and the discussion of sensitive issues (Çelik & Göker, 2021; Maddison, 2015). Respect and recognition are key parts of such dialogues, allowing “dissent to remain open by reconfirming the provisionality of all political decisions and judgements” (Shinko, 2008, p. 479). The idea is that smaller groups in divided societies bring their newfound understandings about the Other into society with the potential to contribute to democratic transformation over time (Maddison, 2015). However, a potential problem is how it “scales up into broader layers of society and against hegemonic structures”, and how it can “[emerge] with some sustainability and traction across time and the capacity to be carried into future encounters” (Shinko, 2022, p. 1401).

Strömbom and Bramsen (2022) identify a set of characteristics needed to make agonism a reality in regard to institutional dynamics and relational transformation. A challenge of agonistic politics is building institutions that encourage plurality, diverse political expression and non-violent participation. *Inclusion* is important so that all groups are represented in key institutions (Strömbom & Bramsen, 2022). It is also important that representative bodies are set up on national and municipal levels, as well as forums for discussion and negotiation at mid- and grassroots levels in order to channel input from social movements, non-governmental organisations and civil society into the peace process (Strömbom et al., 2022). *Dialogue* is also key, although not to create consensus. As Çelik and Göker (2021, p. 32) argue, “dialogue inhabits a dynamic interplay between consensus and contestation, closure and openness, association and divergence”. Parties should always listen to the other side with respect, find ways of disagreeing without demonising each other and practise “agonistic listening” (Maddison, 2015; Strömbom & Bramsen, 2022; Strömbom et al., 2022). There should be space to continue passionate and non-violent conflict, making the dialogue both open-ended and unfinished (Strömbom et al., 2022). Agonistic dialogues should occur frequently, be sustained over time and have a relational quality, meaning

that parties should engage even when they disagree with the content of direction of dialogue (Maddison, 2015; Strömbom et al., 2022). The aim should be to keep space open for dialogue where people can engage, despite differences, to transform relationships (Maddison, 2015). *Counter-hegemony* and resistance should also be encouraged to promote adversarial contestation (Strömbom & Bramsen, 2022). Peaceful activism should be allowed and space made for dissident voices to interact with the formal political establishment (Strömbom et al., 2022).

In terms of relational transformation and for *identities* to evolve, it is important to build arenas “where memories of the conflict and their meaning for current identity constructions can be brought up and juxtaposed” (Strömbom & Bramsen, 2022, p. 1244). This is based on a recognition that people need to come to terms with the conflict legacy to assure future stability (Strömbom & Bramsen, 2022). It is equally important to allow for the possibility of identity transformation in both the design of institutions and in dialogue, as such creating space to “change positions without losing face” (Strömbom & Bramsen, 2022, p. 1240). *Reconciliation* corresponds with ideas of conflict transformation aiming to keep space open for contestation and debate (Strömbom & Bramsen, 2022), space that allows for encounters based on respect. Such dialogical engagement across difference has the potential to transform the conflict towards mutual understanding (Maddison, 2015) and relationships of enmity into civic friendships (Schaap, 2006). Building the kind of respect needed is not straightforward as Schaap (2006, p. 269) argues: “it is not clear how (or why) citizens come to have the ‘agonistic respect’ for each other that would ensure that their conflict remains non-violent”.

Lastly, *recognition* builds on the idea that “difference can remain intact yet de-securitized” and is understood in an open-ended, plural way (Strömbom & Bramsen, 2022, p. 1245). In agonism, identity and difference are seen as co-constituted (Strömbom & Bramsen, 2022). Difference is inherent in all kinds of relationships. In antagonistic relations, difference is demonised and delegitimised, whereas in agonistic relations, difference should be recognised and legitimised as long as all parties abide by the rules and forms for disagreeing (Strömbom & Bramsen, 2022). Possibilities of “voicing different views of history as well as different views on root causes of conflict” should be enhanced (Strömbom et al., 2022, p. 700). As such, agonism requires “a certain level of openness to difference” (Strömbom et al., 2022, p. 692).

### 2.2.2 *Transversal Politics*

[A]ll feminist [...] politics should be viewed as a form of coalition politics in which the differences among women are recognized and given a voice [...] and the boundaries of this coalition should be set not in terms of ‘who’ we are but in terms of what we want to achieve. (Yuval-Davis, 1997b, p. 126)

This is the basis for transversalism,<sup>9</sup> a method of dialogical politics used to further equality in conflict-torn societies (Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999). It is simultaneously a political activity, a normative model of political activism and a peacebuilding dialogue across difference (Yuval-Davis, 2006). The concept, developed theoretically by Nira Yuval-Davis and Cynthia Cockburn (among others), entails “universality in diversity” (Byrne, 2009, pp. 59–60). It emphasises the inevitable reality of difference and the richness it brings to conversations, rather than viewing it as a problem to be overcome (Unterhalter, 1999), similar to agonism. Even though transversalism has been used frequently in feminist practice,<sup>10</sup> there is limited research about it, especially in terms of how it is practised (Eitrem Holmgren, 2014). Research has mainly concentrated on how transversal politics can be used to bridge divides. In addition to contributing to that scholarship, this book also links it to the enhancement of women’s public sphere participation through the concept of transversal citizenship (see Sect. 2.3). Transversal theory has the potential to re-interpret the foundations of women’s participation in deeply divided ethno-nationalist societies, and, as such, is suited to serve as a model on which to re-imagine women’s citizenship.

Transversal politics is based on three key theoretical foundations. *First*, knowledge is situated. Knowledge based on just one positioning is seen as “unfinished” and from each positioning the world is seen differently

<sup>9</sup> Transversal politics and transversalism are used synonymously in this book. Transversal dialogue is used to describe the practice of transversal politics in dialogical settings.

<sup>10</sup> Although transversalism does not require feminist politics and is not, in theory, a women-only project, the major studies concern women’s groups and are often combined with feminist theory and practice (Byrne, 2009, 2013; Fenster, 1998). The concept has been used by Italian feminist activists since at least the 1970s in bringing together women from different backgrounds in dialogue (Meskimmon, 2020; Yuval-Davis, 1998, 2006).

(Yuval-Davis, 2006). Transversalism can thus be understood as an “inter-sectional praxis which attempts to transcend any single subject position” (Byrne, 2013, p. 113). While transversalism is critical of a gender politics based on homogenising women and their positionings (Cockburn & Hunter, 1999; Yuval-Davis, 2006), it also incorporates a reaction to the paralysing relativism of postmodernism that leads to fragmentation and division (Al-Ali, 2000; Cockburn, 1998; Yuval-Davis, 1997b, 1999b). As such, it pays attention to how critical location is to knowledge and rejects any universal claims to objectivity or truth (Meskimmon, 2020). Transversalism does not grant any group “a priori privileged access to the ‘truth’”, while recognising the knowledge each positioning can offer (Yuval-Davis, 1997a, p. 204).

*Second*, differences must be embraced by notions of equality (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Recognition and respect of social differences, such as class, age, sexuality, political beliefs and ethno-national background are therefore key, and their complex intersections must be grasped (Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999; Yuval-Davis, 1997a). Differences should inform cooperation between participants who inhabit different positions in different communities and within the same community (Yuval-Davis, 1997b). There is no assumption that all members of a specific community or group are equally positioned or homogenous (Yuval-Davis, 1997a). Differences, rather than being erased or assimilated, are met with recognition and respect (Yuval-Davis, 1997a), similar to agonism. However, recognising and respecting differences without reifying identities as “perpetual, closed and unchanging” is difficult (Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999, p. 9). Transversal politics thus requires a “sensitive open-ended method by which members of the group articulate the complexities of their multiple identifications and are heard and acknowledged by others” (Meskimmon, 2020, p. 124).

*Third*, positionings such as class, sexuality and gender cannot be automatically conflated with values (Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999). In other words, transversalism differentiates between identity, positioning and values (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Material political realities determine the boundaries of groups, not essentialist notions of difference (Yuval-Davis, 1997a, 1997b). Transversal participants are encouraged to see themselves as advocates working to promote a common cause, rather than as representatives of their collectivities (Yuval-Davis, 1997b, 2006, 2011). Key is the notion that groups, across differential positionings and identities, can

share common value systems (Yuval-Davis, 1997b).<sup>11</sup> Some positionings among participants can form the basis of shared understandings and be used, through dialogue, to create solidarities (Meskimmon, 2020).

Transversal dialogue, and its boundaries, are thus “determined by the message, rather than the messenger”, bringing together people who “in their different rooting, share [compatible] values and goals” (Yuval-Davis, 1997b, pp. 129–130). As such, it enables participants to negotiate a common political position (Yuval-Davis, 2006). By taking difference seriously and learning to trust, a process is begun “whereby the possibility of common ground can be explored” (Porter, 2007, p. 65). This process can lead to recognition among participants that “what they *share* with those they classified as ‘the enemy’ may be greater than what divides them, at least in terms of common aspirations for liveable housing, welfare, education, health...” (Porter, 2007, p. 65). Transversalism is thus characterised by what participants want to achieve, rather than who they are (Jenichen, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 1997b).

To take situated knowledge seriously and incorporate true recognition and respect of social differences, a method of rooting and shifting is used. *Rooting* entails bringing reflective knowledge of one’s identity and positioning to the dialogue (Yuval-Davis, 1997b). While it is important to be rooted in one’s memberships and identities, it is key that this process does not make participants incapable of movement (Cockburn, 1998). *Shifting* represents this movement. Participants put themselves in the situation of those with whom they are in dialogue with (Yuval-Davis, 2006). It is important to not abandon one’s sources of belonging or de-centre oneself (Cockburn, 1998; Sum, 2000), while at the same time empathically imagining and positioning oneself in the position of the Other (Yuval-Davis, 2011). As such, rooting and shifting is a dynamic process in which “participants are mutually reconstructing themselves and the others engaged with them” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 286). In fact, agonistic listening with its focus on recognising the other and relational transformation can be said to be a key part of rooting and shifting (see Chapter 5).

Transversalism is not always possible due to the fact that “conflicting interests of people who are situated in specific positionings

<sup>11</sup> In mathematics, a transversal is a straight line that intersects with two or more other lines (Banerjee, 2019). In transversalism, participants’ value systems intersect, allowing for common political goals to be negotiated.

are *not* always reconcilable” (Yuval-Davis, 1997b, p. 130). Ethno-nationalisms continue to be politically relevant, especially for members of non-hegemonic communities, including women (Byrne, 2013). Women continue to “organize within separate ethnonational communities alongside and sometimes instead of transversal engagements” and for some, ethno-national identity politics underpin their feminist resistance politics (Byrne, 2013, p. 107). Additionally, the relationships between participants in transversal politics are often not symmetrical and some will feel more at home in their ethno-national collectivities, while others will be more critical of them (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Even in transversal spaces, it is difficult to negotiate power asymmetries (Byrne, 2013).

The key is using empathic, agonistic listening and self-reflexivity to embrace difference and find common goals to work towards if, or when, participants share value systems. As such, transversalism will not be successful in all groups. It requires high levels of empathy, understanding and imagination of its participants, despite being positioned on different sides of a divide. Some divisions are “so strongly embedded that they are not able to be overcome” (Meskimmon, 2020, p. 124). Furthermore, commonality does not always lead to agreement (Porter, 2007) and even if people share similar values, “it is naïve to think that they can automatically succeed in shifting” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 285). For instance, participants may identify common problems, but not agree on their causes or how to solve them.

Just like agonism, transversalism is not a quick fix. To be successful, it requires several challenging circumstances to be met: (1) there must be a flexibility and willingness to root and shift among the participants; (2) participants must share compatible goals and values; and (3) they must recognise, respect and embrace the differences of each other (Eitrem Holmgren, 2014). Its “intersectional praxis and [...] attention to reflexivity, empathy and mutual respect help women identify ways to build cross-community alliances” (Byrne, 2013, p. 113), making it a key feature of feminist activism (Byrne, 2009). And, as Yuval-Davis (1997b, p. 132) argues, “[t]he transversal pathway might be full of thorns, but at least it leads in the right direction”.

### 2.3 GENDER-JUST CITIZENSHIP THROUGH TRANSVERSAL POLITICS

Given the many obstacles to women's equal political citizenship, especially in deeply divided ethno-national societies, how can we use the theory of transversalism to imagine a gender-just citizenship? Such a citizenship should recognise, validate and encourage the public political participation of all genders. It should also acknowledge the intersectional nature of identities and consider people's membership in different collectivities. Additionally, it should be built on a broad understanding of politics and incorporate multi-sited participation in different political arenas.

As discussed in the previous section, transversalism is based on three theoretical foundations: recognising situated knowledge; embracing difference; and not conflating values with identities. With the help of these ideas, political citizenship can be conceptualised in a more gender-just manner. The strength of transversal citizenship lies in its potential to accommodate intersectional identities, encourage multi-sited participation and facilitate coalitions across difference. Transversal citizenship is understood as multi-layered in several ways. First, it takes into account people's membership in collectivities in different layers—local, ethnic, national, etc.—and how these affect each other (Yuval-Davis, 2001). Second, it encourages participation in many different political arenas and layers of society, such as grassroots activism (Deiana, 2018). As transversalism allows for coalitions to be built around shared values and goals and establishes common ground for joint political action, participation becomes a crucial part of citizenship. As Roulston (2000, p. 42) argues:

A transversal politics of coalitions has clear implications for the vision of citizenship to provide the basis for any new models of democracy. With its emphasis on dialogue across difference and the search for commonalities, it allows for the expression of allegiance to identities and communities, but avoids fixing people for ever in particular positions.

If translated into citizenship politics, transversalism can thus help break the cycle of symbolic gendering of women as mothers in the private sphere leading to unequal citizenship and participation in the public sphere, as illustrated in Fig. 2.2 (cf. Fig. 2.1).

Transversalism facilitates private sphere concerns to be translated into public sphere activism. This is done by building coalitions on common

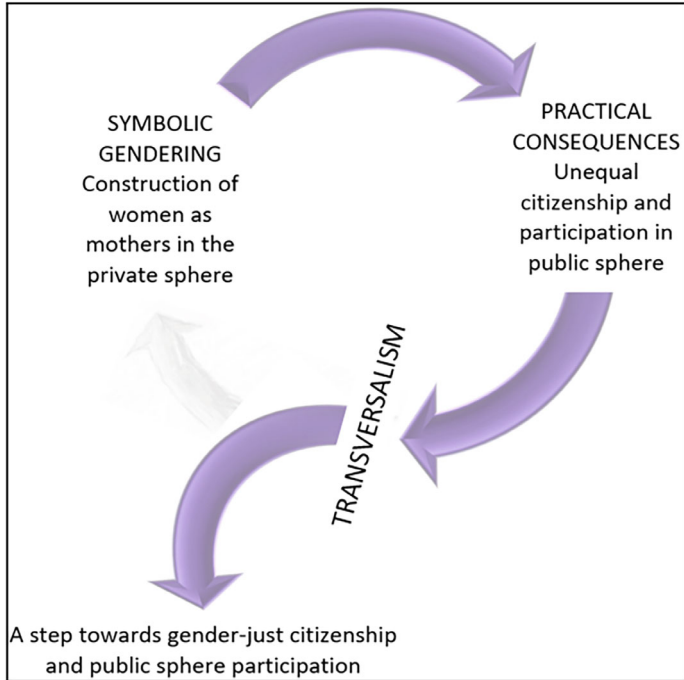


Fig. 2.2 Breaking ethno-national gendering through transversalism

values and shared goals. As such, the public/private divide is challenged. Encompassing difference and working together for a shared goal can enable long-term cross-community relationships in deeply divided societies, while at the same time challenging exclusionary and gendered notions of citizenship and political participation. Transversal politics thus represents a step towards gender-just citizenship and public participation. The following sections explore transversal citizenship's tenets: intersectionality (2.3.1); multi-sited participation (2.3.2); and coalitions across difference (2.3.3).

### 2.3.1 *Intersectionality and Multi-Layered Membership*

In addition to regulating the relationship between individuals and the state, citizenship also describes the relationship between individuals within

a society (Lister, 2003). Therefore, it is crucial to understand “discrepancies in the positioning” of citizens within and between political communities (Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999, pp. 4–5). This is particularly important in deeply divided societies, when ethno-national difference has been politicised and has become a lens through which all matters are filtered, including citizenship. When using transversalism to imagine a gender-just citizenship, the idea of a multi-tier citizenship takes form, in which intersectional analysis is key. As such, it is important to consider women’s belongings in various social categories, such as their ethnicity, class, sexuality and ability (Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999). Citizenship should therefore be constructed in multiple layers “capable of theorising people’s membership of a variety of collectivities” (Unterhalter, 1999, pp. 106–107). Yuval-Davis (1999a, pp. 122, 131) argues that,

one’s citizenship in collectivities in the different layers—local, ethnic, national, state, cross- or trans-state and supra-state—is affected and often at least partly constructed by the relationships and positionings of each layer [...] People’s membership in a state, their rights and responsibilities, are mediated by their membership in other collectivities [...] Therefore, their positioning in that respect, as well as in terms of their class, gender, sexuality, stage in the life cycle, ability, etc., have to be acknowledged in any citizenship project that in principle, at least, would be inclusionary and democratic.

Multi-tier citizenship thus expands the notion of citizenship beyond the nation-state so that it recognises situated knowledge, as well as the importance of dialogue between people in different positionings (Yuval-Davis, 1999a, 1999b, 2011). From this perspective, citizenship “entails both a sense of (often overlapping and multiple) belongings and a set of lived practices that are constantly reconfigured by broader social and cultural dynamics” (Deiana, 2016, p. 100). This conceptualisation allows an exploration of different groups’ access to citizenship and their relationship to the state (Lentin, 1999).

As such, one’s citizenship—rights and responsibilities—in different layers of society affects and is affected by one’s belongings in other layers (Yuval-Davis, 2001, 2007). At the same time, citizenship is mediated by location *within* each layer or group, informed by intersecting social divisions such as gender and class (Yuval-Davis, 2007). It is necessary

to recognise this to build a democratic citizenship that enables inclusive participation. Therefore, key to promoting a multi-tier citizenship is the idea of “incorporating notions of difference into democracy” (Yuval-Davis, 1999a, p. 131). Just like in transversal dialogue, notions of difference should encompass—rather than replace— notions of non-hierarchical equality (Yuval-Davis, 1999a).

In transversal citizenship politics, therefore, difference encompasses equality and perceived unity and homogeneity are replaced by dialogues that give recognition to the specific positionings of those who participate in them. (Yuval-Davis, 1999a, pp. 131–132)

It is therefore built on the acceptance that “equality *and* difference are compatible” (Porter, 2000, p. 148). As such, transversal citizenship recognises that individuals are different but embraces those differences with equality.

Transversal citizenship is particularly valuable in deeply divided consociational societies as it values societal plurality and views communities as heterogeneous collectivities (Murtagh, 2008), ideas that challenge ethno-national divides. It allows a simultaneous focus on diverse individuals *and* groups. It does not grant priority to one facet of identity but celebrates plurality and recognises that “embodied citizens have plural allegiances” (Deiana, 2018, p. 23), the boundaries of which are “shifting, contested and porous” (Yuval-Davis, 2018, p. 164) and “constantly reconfigured and negotiated” (Deiana, 2018, p. 24). This model sees citizenship as relational and dialogical, as well as embedded in associational and cultural life (Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999). As such, instead of reinforcing ethno-national difference, the dialogical politics of transversalism “look for ways to transcend, if not to transform [the ethno-national conflict] as well as society in general” (Yuval-Davis, 2018, p. 163).

### *2.3.2 Multi-Sited Citizenship Participation: Challenging the Public/Private Divide Through Grassroots Activism in Transitional Societies*

In transversal citizenship, participation is key as it facilitates people working together as active citizens. It thus entails maximising spaces for participation where different voices can be expressed (Porter, 2000). It is

also “enacted through a demand for expanding what constitutes the political realm, for instance through questioning the gender inequality perpetrated by the public/private divide” (Deiana, 2013, p. 400). Remaking citizenship for women thus entails “opportunities for engagement in multiple sites” (Deiana, 2016, p. 100). When political participation is defined broadly, engagement in many arenas can be included and community participation can be recognised as acts of citizenship, allowing people to identify as politically active without being engaged in formal politics. Transversal citizenship can facilitate this as it “advocates a bottom-up approach to democracy; with civil society at its foundation”, in contrast to elite-driven top-down consociationalism (Murtagh, 2008, p. 26). Historically, women have most often been politically effective at the local level (Tickner, 1992). Grassroots spaces are therefore, to a greater degree than higher levels, populated by women. The community-level political arena can thus provide valuable insights in terms of women’s political activities and public participation.

Since gender rarely tends to inform political analyses among actors in “big-P” politics (i.e., politicians, religious leaders, political institutions, etc.) and since women are often excluded from such formal politics (Byrne, 2009), it is important to reflect on how gender equality, especially related to citizenship, can be guaranteed in transitional societies. As O’Rourke (2012, p. 137) argues:

[Transitional justice devices] implicitly privilege (recognize and validate) certain forms of political activity, and deny or devalue other forms [...]  
The selective validation of political activities of women and men work to differentially incorporate men and women into citizenship.

Deeply divided ethno-national societies tend to close avenues for increased participation, especially for women, by inhibiting cross-community alliances and limiting participation to the formal political system. Additionally, by privileging the ethno-national divide, formal political discourse is restricted to certain issues, which also limits the possibility for diverse and inclusive participation. Transversal, multi-sited citizenship can challenge such structures. The following sections address two issues in relation to this: how the public/private divide can be re-imagined to benefit women’s political participation (2.3.2.1); and women’s grassroots activities for gender-just citizenship in transitional societies (2.3.2.2).

However, as Eriksson (2009, p. 307) argues, “‘community’ is not an inherently peaceful place but can be characterised by violence-supporting norms and values”. Local communities and civil society are not free from ethno-nationalist identities, norms, and ideas. The strength of grassroots activism, its close connection to local communities, is also its potential weakness as organisers can have their own agendas (Racioppi & O’Sullivan See, 2007). It would be strange in deeply divided societies, where “virtually all political and social issues align on the dominant ethnonational [...] cleavage” (Nagle, 2017, p. 185), if local communities were free from such cleavages. Naturally, they are not. Social movements can “play a key role in advancing sectarian interests, fomenting inter-communal antagonism, and even spawning collective violence” (Nagle, 2017, p. 185). They can be mobilised to prevent or reverse change or to confirm old identities and alliances (Ruane & Todd, 2017).

### 2.3.2.1 *Rethinking the Public/Private Divide*

Beard (2018, p. 83) asks, “if women are not perceived to be fully within the structures of power, surely it is power that we need to redefine rather than women?”. A key issue when re-defining the power inherent in citizenship in a gender-just way is how to deal with the public/private divide. While some argue for erasing it, others argue for widening the public sphere to incorporate new areas of activity (such as grassroots activities) and new issues (such as reproductive rights). Some also argue for several parallel public spheres. Phillips (1991, p. 7) argues that, if

people are no longer defined through their nature as women or men [...] the distinction between public and private spheres would have lost its gendered quality. [...] In such a context, the notion of the citizen could begin to assume its full meaning, and people could participate as equals.

In such a setting, the public/private divide would not inherently result in negative outcomes for women’s participation. However, a consequence of denying any substantive divide between the spheres is that “there are no specific spaces or places which occupy the ‘public sphere’” (Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999, pp. 25–26). This would mean that the private sphere would become redundant, which could be problematic. Even if the public/private divide is not gendered to the detriment of women, there will still be some decisions which remain personal—“no matter how thoroughly democratized public debate and decision-making may become,

there are matters we will want to reserve to ourselves” (Phillips, 1991, p. 119).

In contrast to erasing the divide, the public sphere can be widened by increasingly recognising and giving credit to women’s (political) grassroots activities. Rather than asking women to follow male norms and definitions of political behaviour and activities, the public sphere should be widened to include the work women already do, and to recognise that—contrary to the public/private divide’s idea of what is political—their work is indeed political. Women’s grassroots activities presuppose a broader notion of what politics and political participation entail, one that challenges the narrow definition of the public sphere in traditional citizenship. As such, a broadened public sphere should not just include formal politics, which only involves a very small minority, but also encompass

the ‘reservoir of citizenship’: the myriad of voluntary associations of civil society, most particularly the kinds of campaigning and community groups in which women are most likely to be active. (Lister, 2003, p. 30)

Fraser (1990, p. 70) argues that “the ideal of participatory parity is better achieved by a multiplicity of publics than by a single public”. Structural inequalities lead to deliberative processes that benefit dominant groups, a problem which is exacerbated when there is only one, comprehensive public sphere (Fraser, 1990). Fraser thus emphasises the importance of diverse backgrounds and interests when building “a democratic order that permits diverse groups to wage the battle for public opinion” (Schlesinger, 2002, p. 37). It is important for members of subordinated groups to create their own deliberative spaces to discuss objectives, needs and strategies (Fraser, 1990). A plurality of competing counterpublics is used to contest the “official” public’s exclusionary gender and class norms, “elaborating alternative styles of political behavior and alternative norms of public speech” (Fraser, 1990, p. 61). Counterpublics are thus both “spaces of withdrawal and regroupment” and “training grounds for agitational activities” (Fraser, 1990, p. 68).

### 2.3.2.2 *Community-Based Grassroots Activities in Transitional Societies*

The tendency to marginalise grassroots work has specific implications for women’s participation. Engagement in voluntary organisations, for example, can offer participants a way of “negotiating an identity with the

state that, once duly recognized, legitimates the relevant agents as citizens and ensures their representation within national institutions” (Kastoryano, 2002, pp. 124–125). The grassroots space can as such offer an arena for political training and politicisation. Community activism is also the “pre-political base for social movements and it has the power to effect real long-term changes in mainstream politics” (Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999, p. 30). By giving such work legitimacy in terms of citizenship, it elevates it, bringing it attention and opens new avenues of funding and cooperation. The potential of women’s community participation to inspire and guide reform of the public sphere, its organisation and leadership should be taken seriously. It can also serve as a source of broadening the idea of what an act of citizenship is.

Local level collective action has several benefits. It helps strengthen social capital which is important for building effective public policy (Lister, 2003). It also has positive effects on the individuals involved. The self-esteem of individuals, especially women, is often boosted as they “come to see themselves as political actors and effective citizens” (Parry et al. 1992 in Lister, 2003, p. 32). Taking part in formal political life, on the other hand, tends to be alienating rather than empowering for many women (Lister, 2003). Participation in local level politics can also mitigate the negative aspects of participation *as a duty*. If citizen participation is defined as an obligation, it “runs the danger of casting out from the body of citizens all those unable or unwilling to match up to its demanding requirements”, which is especially problematic for women (Lister, 2003, p. 34). If participation takes place at community level, rather than nationally, the obstacles can be eased by holding meetings at home or close by, which could make meetings shorter (no commute) and facilitate child minding arrangements. This is not to say that participation should be compulsory. Rather, conditions should enable and encourage participation not only for men in formal politics, but for all citizens on many levels.

Through a form of active, radical, collectivist citizenship, women (often through community groups), work together to improve their own lives and that of their communities (Lister, 2003), both during and after conflict. So, the issue is not a lack of women’s activities and participation, but rather a lack of recognition and resources. The work women undertake, “which frequently dramatically change pre-conflict gender relations”, is often marginalised or ignored (Chinkin, 2004, p. 7). Byrne

(2009, p. 9) argues that “the significant development of women’s cross-community groups in divided societies and the sustained role that such groups play in advocating for peace and justice” are often not taken seriously in ethno-national conflict literature. As such, “it is not unusual for women to receive little recognition for the crucial role they play in reconstruction and reconciliation” (Sideris, 2001, p. 54). This has consequences for women’s citizenship as their activities are seldom “seen as building political or leadership expertise” (Chinkin, 2004, p. 7).

Another issue related to grassroots activities is the lack of resources to sustain organisations and in channelling the work into other levels/sites. As such, it is not enough to solely explore constructions and definitions of public, political participation, it is also necessary to understand its material aspects. Economic structures causing dependence and inequality, as well as institutionalised patterns of discrimination, are obstacles to participatory parity, and as such, “justice today requires *both* redistribution [of material resources] *and* recognition” (Fraser, 2003, pp. 9, 36ff). Ensuring participatory parity, i.e., the ability of all members of a society to participate in social life, thus requires both material resources and inclusive value patterns, especially in terms of gender (Fraser, 2003).

### 2.3.3 *Citizenship Coalitions and Solidarity Across Difference*

The third facet of transversal citizenship is its focus on building coalitions across difference. Critical to this approach is a differentiation between identity and positioning, i.e., not conflating membership in a specific group with a specific set of values (Yuval-Davis, 2001). In the aftermath of violent conflict, “differences between women often reassert themselves” and “new divisions can occur [...] [making] it very difficult for them to articulate common needs” (Pankhurst, 2008a, p. 6). As Ashe (2019, pp. 25–26) argues, some women in such societies “[reject] the idea that peace is more important than securing what they, and the ethno-nationalist group with which they identify, define as justice. [...] [accusing] other strands of feminism of prioritising gender inequality above all other forms of oppression”. At the same time, women “intent on developing shared spaces where open and respectful dialogue can take place, excel in the acceptance of diversity and constructing creative ways of inclusion”, bridging traditional divides to unite on matters of commonality (Porter, 2007, p. 30).

As discussed previously, identity formation is central in ethno-nationalism, as well as citizenship. Identities can be mobilised for both emancipatory and exclusionary aims, to challenge or reinforce the status quo. This is also the case in community-based work. Therefore, an understanding of the uses of women's identities in this setting is crucial. Different facets of femininity can be used strategically when building such bridges: identities reinforcing or challenging the status quo (Carter, 2008).

While traditionally feminine identities (mother, wife, widow, victim) provide a strong catalyst for political organization and recognition in formal discourse, they position women in terms of an "other" [...] which becomes engaging in its reinforcement of status quo power relations. Rather, women's politicization of identities that challenge embedded hierarchies offers the best chance for reconstructing gendered identities and redistributing socio-political power during post-conflict moments of change. (Carter, 2008)

Due to this, it is important to explore how women in deeply divided societies from different ethno-nationalist backgrounds deal with difference (without side-lining it) and on what grounds they may build solidarity across the divide—which is done below.

In Sect. 2.3.1, the importance of an intersectional perspective in transversal citizenship was discussed. Following below is an exploration of how maternal politics can be used by women to build solidarity across divides. In contrast to intersectional transversalism, which focuses on a myriad of identity markers, maternal politics focuses on women's identities as mothers first and foremost. Political motherhood is based on the idea that women, "through activities which they have natural aptitudes to perform", have the citizenly role of bridging the male public sphere and the female private sphere (Heater, 2004, p. 128). By stressing "their superior 'maternal' qualities of caring, responsibility and compassion as key constituents of citizenship" women can overcome their private sphere banishment (Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999, p. 7).

This is a way to re-imagine citizenship to "encompass 'feminine' values" (Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999, p. 7). By privileging maternal values of caring and selflessness, maternal citizenship can supposedly bring women into the citizenry, challenging the public/private divide by recognising "private experiences of motherhood" as political (O'Rourke, 2012,

p. 140). Elshtain, a proponent of maternal citizenship, argues for an inclusive, non-violent vision of citizenship that translates the concerns and values of the private sphere into the public, with a particular focus on protecting children (Elshtain, 1993; Voet, 1998). This argument is criticised by Dietz who argues that not only is the mother-child relationship not useful as a model for democratic citizenship, it is particularly inappropriate (Dietz, 1985). Many of the virtues of citizenship—collectivity, inclusiveness and generality—stand in direct opposition to maternal virtues, such as particularity, exclusiveness and intimacy (Dietz, 1985). Dietz (1985, p. 20) also argues that Elshtain’s ideas reinforce “a one-dimensional view of women”.

Schrimer (1989) also discusses the intersections of citizenship and motherhood, but in a slightly different form. She does so in regard to “motherist” movements in Latin America and has developed the term political motherhood based on two ideas: that “maternal” qualities are anchored in democratic values; and that it involves “a process of unfolding consciousness, as women progressively move into the public sphere” (Werbner, 1999, p. 221). Political motherhood is both overt and transformative: it represents “a move into the public domain which challenges the confinement of women to domesticity [...] as such it necessarily transforms the social order without undermining it” (Werbner, 1999, p. 231). New human qualities are introduced into the public sphere and are simultaneously defined as equally important to legitimise the political system (Werbner, 1999). Schrimer’s theory is not one of essentialised gender identities—the idea is that both maternal and paternal qualities, both femininity and masculinity, “objectify the ideal of citizenship” (Werbner, 1999, p. 227).

However, the privileging of maternity seldom results in a gender-equitable share of power in practice (Lister, 2003). O’Rourke (2012, pp. 140–141) summarises this critique:

there is an easy slippage from political motherhood to compulsory maternity that can effectively undermine any claim to equal citizenship. [...] Furthermore, maternal feminism rests on a flawed assumption of women’s superiority as (potential) mothers, a notion that also undermines any commitment to political equality. Women perform a variety of public and private roles, and to collapse women’s political consciousness into motherhood neglects and undermines a range of women’s political activities.

As such, maternal citizenship does not necessarily offer a challenge to the status quo, but can be used to reinforce it, as well as the public/private divide.

Despite their obvious differences, maternal and transversal politics have some things in common in terms of participation. They both define political participation broadly, pushing the boundary of the public/private divide. They also both encourage collective action as a basis for political participation, specifically at the grassroots level, and emphasise the positive effects for women of such activities. However, political motherhood and transversalism differ when it comes to who participates. Participation in maternal politics hinges on one identity for women—motherhood. Coalitions are built around this identity and, as such, participation is restricted to those who share a maternal responsibility. This can present an essentialised and homogenised view of what women are. Political motherhood is based on a (perhaps) more common-sense and immediate identity for some women, enabling mobilisation of large numbers without the requirement of a feminist “awakening” or attempts to challenge an ethno-national emphasis of women as mothers. However, it runs the risk of reifying and essentialising women as mothers, which in the long run can strengthen the public/private divide. At the same time, the activism, though based on a traditional female role, is actively placed in the public sphere, and as such partly challenges the public/private divide.

In transversal politics, on the other hand, intersectionality is key, based on the idea that women (and men) have many facets of identity that affect their lives, and therefore, does not discriminate on basis of a specific one. As such, it is not built on the idea that women are inherently peaceful and therefore prone to cooperate. The focus lies on a willingness to listen with empathy, of sharing compatible goals with the other participants, and to recognise and respect each other’s differences. Participation in transversal politics can take place both in the private and public spheres. It tends to bring traditionally private issues into the public sphere. Transversalism can be difficult to achieve, requiring a lot of participants as differences are not glossed over or ignored, but rather brought into the open. This can make mobilisation difficult. Nevertheless, the strength of transversalism lies in embracing difference and working together for a shared goal. This can enable deep, long-term relationships, while at the same time challenge exclusionary and male-centred notions of political citizenship. To establish political change, transversal political alliances need to find a way “to be translated into a political work in which structural changes can take place

via formal representative processes” (Yuval-Davis, 2018, pp. 164–165). Even if they possess sufficient civic space to operate, transversal alliances might not be afforded the sufficient “*political space* in which to develop and endure” (Murtagh, 2008, p. 22).

## 2.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored how theories of citizenship, nationalism and gender address political citizen participation. Gender norms inform the understanding and practice of nationalist movements as well as states’ interests in including women as full citizens. Ethnic and civic nationalisms have different relationships to gender norms and citizenship. Women’s participation in political life is thus greatly informed by which of these nationalisms is upheld, i.e., whether the focus is on belonging to a specific ethnic group, or to a broader, more inclusive civic community. However, even in civic nationalist states, women have historically been excluded from the citizenry. To some extent, this is still the case, as gaining formal legal rights might not necessarily guarantee access to them, and the right to participate in politics does not necessarily include realistic possibilities to do so.

The norm of the rational male citizen, along with the importance of military service, and the highly gendered public/private divide have created obstacles for women’s political participation. Not only is the divide found in both liberal and civic republican citizenship theories, but it also shares many similarities with the gender constructions evident in armed conflict and nationalism, dividing men and women into separate and opposite spaces. Transitional societies represent a window of opportunity to renegotiate citizenship, including the gendered public/private divide, and as such what should be considered “political”. Despite the possibility for change, these societies often experience a gender equality backlash, negatively impacting women’s political participation. Backlash results in upholding the public/private divide, even though its borders tend to become more porous during violent conflict. The gains made by women as norms for appropriate social relations shift during war are thus seldom secured in the transitional phase. Going back to “normal” signifies, to a great extent, a reconstruction of gender relations as they were imagined pre-conflict. The consequences of defining public participation according to the gendered public/private divide—as something narrow, specific and largely male—is that women are left out or ignored. Studying

how these two contradicting developments occur in transitional societies is key to gain a deeper understanding of women's lives as citizens in the aftermath of war.

It is therefore of importance to analyse how women navigate the opportunities and obstacles of a transitional society. Community-level activities come to play a key role in this process, as this arena is, to a greater degree than formal political life, inhabited by women. Even though this area tends to be overlooked as a public sphere arena for participation, it can offer insights into how participation can be re-imagined to include women's activities more readily. Women's cross-community grassroots cooperation can help us identify the context and factors that enable a move towards women's full and equal political participation. At the same time, the community level, as part of a larger public sphere, should not be the only space for women's participation, nor should it exclude men. It is important that women do not become "trapped" in community-level participation and that higher levels of political life continue to be reserved for men. This book does not wish to perpetuate the idea that women somehow "belong" to the grassroots, but also acknowledges the fact that this is indeed the space where many women are active and, therefore needs to be recognised and given legitimacy. Neither does this study wish to assign the responsibility to promote gender-just citizenship solely to women. However, women's experiences are valuable, and lessons can be learned from women's groups and organisations on how to make societies more gender-just.

Widening our understanding of what public, political participation entails and what arenas the public sphere includes can encourage and validate women's participation. However, this is not the only necessary condition for a change in the pattern of citizen participation. While re-defining the public sphere is necessary to credit to women's public, political participation, women should not be burdened with an additional arena of labour without changes being made in the private sphere. As such, gender equality reforms in the private sphere must go hand in hand with public sphere reforms; corresponding material changes are needed for the conceptual widening of participation to matter and make a difference. Participation is costly, more so for women with caring responsibilities in the private sphere. Their participation therefore needs to be enabled through a private *and* public sphere imbued with equality.

This chapter has also theorised peacebuilding through agonism and transversalism. Both emphasise the importance of inclusive dialogue to

transform, rather than end, conflict and build reconciliation. They criticise liberal peacebuilding's top-down focus and its aim to eradicate conflict. Agonistic peace aims to transform enemies into adversaries through relational transformation, counter-hegemony and recognition of difference. Similarly, transversalism aims for relational transformation with the addition of building coalitions across difference through rooting and shifting and the importance of situated knowledge. They differ in terms of their focus on making political progress through consensus politics. While transversalism takes it as a prerequisite for making collective decisions, agonism is more sceptical towards its use, arguing that consensus can never be anything but temporary and partial. Transversalism bases its consensus on a recognition of difference: difference is embraced, not glossed over to make common (political) decisions.

A gender-just transversal citizenship is based on intersectionality and recognition of difference, multi-sited political participation and building coalitions on shared values across difference. In contexts where "exclusionary community identities have been constructed in the male image", such as in Northern Ireland's ethno-nationalist groups, there are specific benefits for women participating in transversal politics (Yuval-Davis, 1997b, p. 130). Transversalism can offer an arena in which to develop a political consciousness that is not limited to a construct of women belonging to the private sphere. It also encourages self-reflection and articulating a critical stance towards exclusionary politics. As such, transversalism enables women to transform difference into a resource on which to build alliances and political action across women's many positionings. It opens up "spaces where mutual respect permits profound disagreement without blocking the urgency to make workable decisions that are mutually acceptable" (Porter, 2000, p. 159). When difference is not addressed, temporary, tactical coalitions can sometimes be created. However, such coalitions are limited in that there is a specific set of issues that can be discussed, while others are strategically avoided.

## REFERENCES

- Al-Ali, N. (2000). Review Article. Nationalisms, national identities and nation states: Gendered perspectives. *Nations and Nationalism*, 6(4), 631–638.
- Alison, M. H. (2009). *Women and political violence: Female combatants in ethno-national conflict*. Routledge.

- Anand, D. (2010). Nationalism. In L. J. Shepherd (Ed.), *Gender matters in global politics. A feminist introduction to international relations* (pp. 280–291). Routledge.
- Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso.
- Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso.
- Anderson, M. (2000). *States and nationalism in Europe Since 1945*. Routledge.
- Ashe, F. (2006). Gendering the Holy Cross school dispute: Women and nationalism in Northern Ireland. *Political Studies*, 54(1), 147–164.
- Ashe, F. (2019). *Gender, nationalism and conflict transformation: New themes and old problems in Northern Ireland Politics*. Routledge.
- Assiter, A. (1999). Citizenship revisited. In N. Yuval-Davis & P. Werbner (Eds.), *Women, citizenship and difference* (pp. 41–53). Zed.
- Banerjee, M. (2019). Transversal histories and transcultural afterlives: Indianized renditions of Jean Bodin in global intellectual history. In L. Abu-er-rub, C. Brosius, S. Meurer, D. Panagiotopoulos, & S. Richter (Eds.), *Engaging transculturality: Concepts, key terms, case studies* (pp. 155–169). Routledge.
- Beard, M. (2018). *Women and power: A manifesto*. Profile Books.
- Benhabib, S. (2002). Citizens, residents, and aliens in a changing world: Political membership in the global era. In U. Hedetoft & M. Hjort (Eds.), *The post-national self: Belonging and identity* (pp. 85–119). University of Minnesota Press.
- Berger, S., & Lorenz, C. (2008). Conclusion: Picking up the threads. In S. Berger & C. Lorenz (Eds.), *The contested nation: Ethnicity, class, religion, and gender in national histories* (pp. 543–552). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Blom, I. (2000). Gender and nation in international comparison. In I. Blom, K. Hagemann, & C. Hall (Eds.), *Gendered nations. Nationalisms and gender order in the long nineteenth century* (pp. 3–26). Berg.
- Bosi, L., & De Fazio, G. (2017). Contextualizing the troubles. Investigating deeply divided societies through social movements research. In L. Bosi & G. De Fazio (Eds.), *The troubles in Northern Ireland and theories of social movements* (pp. 11–32). Amsterdam University Press.
- Bramsen, I. (2022). Agonistic interaction in practice: Laughing, dissensus and hegemony in the Northern Ireland Assembly. *Third World Quarterly*, 43(6), 1324–1342.
- Brittain, V. (2003). The impact of war on women. *Race and Class*, 44(4), 41–51.
- Brown, K., & Ní Aoláin, F. (2015). Through the looking glass: Transitional justice futures through the lens of nationalism, feminism and transformative change. *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 9(1), 127–149.
- Brubaker, R. (2002). Ethnicity without groups. *European Journal of Sociology*, 44(2), 163–189.

- Brubaker, R., & Laitin, D. D. (1998). Ethnic and nationalist violence. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24(1), 423–452.
- Buckley-Zistel, S., & Zolkos, M. (2012). Introduction. In S. Buckley-Zistel & R. Stanley (Eds.), *Gender in transitional justice* (pp. 1–33). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Byrne, S. (2009). *Beyond the ethnonational divide: Identity politics and women in Northern Ireland and Israel/Palestine*. Queen's University Kingston.
- Byrne, S. (2013). Troubled engagement in ethnicized conflict: Negotiating difference among feminist activists in Israel/Palestine and Northern Ireland. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 16(1), 106–126.
- Byrne, S., & McCulloch, A. (2012). Gender, representation and power-sharing in post-conflict institutions. *International Peacekeeping*, 19(5), 565–580.
- Carrillo, R. (2005). *Violence against women: An obstacle to development*. Social Scientists' Association.
- Carter, K. (2008). *Catalysts and Cages: the push-pull dynamics of re-constructing gendered identities in women's peace-building projects*. (Paper presented at the Canadian Political Science Association Annual Conference, University of British Columbia).
- Castles, S. (1997). Multicultural Citizenship: The Australian Experience. In V. Bader (Ed.), *Citizenship and exclusion* (pp. 113–138). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Çelik, A. B. L., & Göker, Z. G. L. (2021). Dialogue in polarized societies: women's encounters with multiple others. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 64, 31–54.
- Charles, N., & Hintjens, H. (1998). Gender, ethnicity and cultural identity: Women's 'places.' In N. Charles & H. Hintjens (Eds.), *Gender, Ethnicity and political ideologies* (pp. 1–26). Routledge.
- Chinkin, C. (2004). *Peace processes, post-conflict security and women's human rights: The international context considered*. Available at: [https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/1325\\_peaceprocessespostconflictsecurity\\_chinkin\\_2004\\_0.pdf](https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/1325_peaceprocessespostconflictsecurity_chinkin_2004_0.pdf) (Accessed: 2020-10-12).
- Cockburn, C. (1998). *The space between us: Negotiating gender and national identities in conflict*. Zed.
- Cockburn, C. (2013). War and security, women and gender: An overview of the issues. *Gender & Development*, 21(3), 433–452.
- Cockburn, C., & Hunter, L. (1999). Introduction: Transversal politics and translating practices. *Soundings*, 12, 88–93.
- Connor, W. (1970). Ethnic nationalism as a political force. *World Affairs*, 133(2), 91–97.
- Cordell, K., & Wolff, S. (2010). *Ethnic conflict: Causes—Consequences—Responses*. Polity Press.
- Danielsen, H., Jegerstedt, K., Muriaas, R. L., & Ytre-Arne, B. (2016). Gendered citizenship: The politics of representation. In H. Danielsen, K. Jegerstedt,

- R. Muriaas, & B. Ytre-Arne (Eds.), *Gendered citizenship and the politics of representation* (pp. 1–13). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Deiana, M.-A. (2013). Women's citizenship in Northern Ireland after the 1998 Agreement. *Irish Political Studies*, 28(3), 399–412.
- Deiana, M.-A. (2016). To settle for a gendered peace? Spaces for feminist grassroots mobilization in Northern Ireland and Bosnia–Herzegovina. *Citizenship Studies*, 20(1), 99–114.
- Deiana, M.-A. (2018). *Gender and citizenship: Promises of peace in post-dayton Bosnia–Herzegovina*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dheeraja, C., Madhuri, N. V., & Rao, K. H. (2015). Towards Achieving gender justice—the case of guaranteed rural wage employment in India. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Rural Development*, 25(2), 33–52.
- Dietz, M. G. (1985). Citizenship with a feminist face: The problem with maternal thinking. *Political Theory*, 13(1), 19–37.
- Eitrem Holmgren, L. (2014). “Where There is Dialogue, There is Hope”: Nation, gender and transversal dialogue in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Department of Political Science, Lund University.
- Elshtain, J. B. (1993). *Public man, private woman: Women in social and political thought*. Princeton University Press.
- Enloe, C. (1990). *Kvinnor, giv akt!: militariseringen av kvinnors liv* (trans: K. Hertell, & A. von Wright-Grönberg). Göteborg: Pax. Does Khaki Become You?
- Enloe, C. (1993). *The morning after: Sexual politics at the end of the Cold War*. University of California Press.
- Enloe, C. (2000). *Maneuvers: The international politics of militarizing women's lives*. University of California Press.
- Eriksson, A. (2009). A bottom-up approach to transformative justice in Northern Ireland. *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 3(3), 301–320.
- Fenster, T. (1998). Culture, human rights and planning (as control) for minority women in Israel. In T. Fenster (Ed.), *Gender, planning and human rights* (pp. 39–54). Routledge.
- Forcey, L. R. (1994). Feminist perspective on mothering and peace. In E. N. Glenn, G. Chang, & L. R. Forcey (Eds.), *Mothering: Ideology, experience and agency* (pp. 355–375). Routledge.
- Fraser, N. (1990). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. *Social Text*, (25/26), 56–80.
- Fraser, N. (2003). Social justice in the age of identity politics: Redistribution, recognition, and participation. In N. Fraser & A. Honneth (Eds.), *Redistribution or recognition? A political–philosophical exchange* (pp. 7–109). Verso.

- Gilmartin, N. (2017). Feminism, nationalism and the re-ordering of post-war political strategies: The case of the Sinn Féin Women's Department. *Irish Political Studies*, 32(2), 268–292.
- Goetz, A. M. (2007). Gender Justice, Citizenship and Entitlements: Core Concepts, Central Debates and New Directions for Research. In M. Mukhopadhyay, & N. Singh (Eds.), *Gender justice, citizenship and development* (pp. 15–57). Ottawa and New Delhi: Zubaan, an imprint of Kali for Women and the International Development Research Centre.
- Goldstein, J. S. (2001). *War and Gender: How gender shapes the war system and vice versa*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gready, P., & Robins, S. (2014). From transitional to transformative justice: A new agenda for practice. *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 8(3), 339–361.
- Hanisch, C. (2000). The personal is political. In B. A. Crow (Ed.), *Radical feminism: A documentary reader* (pp. 113–116). New York University Press.
- Hearn, J. (2006). *Rethinking nationalism: A critical introduction*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Heater, D. (2004). *A brief history of citizenship*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Hudson, H. (2010). Peace building through a gender lens and the challenges of implementation in rwanda and Cote d'Ivoire. In L. Sjoberg (Ed.), *Gender and international security: Feminist perspectives* (pp. 256–279). Routledge.
- Ignatieff, M. (1993). *Blood and belonging: Journeys into the new nationalism*. BBC Books.
- Jenichen, A. (2010). Women and peace in a divided society: Peace-building potentials of feminist struggles and reform processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In R. M. Chandler, L. Wang, & L. K. Fuller (Eds.), *Women war, and violence: Personal perspectives and global activism* (pp. 137–154). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kastoryano, R. (2002). Citizenship and belonging: Beyond blood and soil. In U. Hedetoft & M. Hjort (Eds.), *The postnational self: Belonging and identity* (pp. 120–136). University of Minnesota Press.
- Korac, M. (1999). Refugee women in Serbia: Their experiences with war, nationalism and state building. In N. Yuval-Davis & P. Werbner (Eds.), *Women, citizenship and difference* (pp. 192–204). Zed.
- Krause, J. (1996). Gendered identities in international relations. In J. Krause & N. Renwick (Eds.), *Identities in international relations* (pp. 99–117). Macmillan.
- Kronsell, A. (2012). *Gender, sex and the postnational defense militarism and peacekeeping*. Oxford University Press.
- Lee, S. (2017). Common Good *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/common-good> (Accessed: 2020-09-10).

- Lentin, R. (1999). Constitutionally excluded: Citizenship and (some) Irish Women. In N. Yuval-Davis & P. Werbner (Eds.), *Women, citizenship and difference* (pp. 130–144). Zed.
- Lister, R. (2003). *Citizenship: Feminist perspectives*. New York University Press.
- Lorenz, C. (2008). Representations of identity: ethnicity, race, class, gender and religion. An introduction to conceptual history. In S. Berger & C. Lorenz (Eds.), *The contested nation: Ethnicity, class, religion and gender in national histories* (pp. 24–59). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Luddy, M. (1995). *Women in Ireland, 1800–1918: A documentary history*. Cork University Press.
- Maddison, S. (2015). Relational transformation and agonistic dialogue in divided societies. *Political Studies*, 63, 1014–1030. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12149>
- Malečková, J. (2008). Where are women in national histories? In S. Berger & C. Lorenz (Eds.), *The contested nation: Ethnicity, class, religion and gender in national histories* (pp. 171–199). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Marshall, T. H. (1950). *Citizenship and social class and other essays*. Cambridge University Press.
- Maxwell, A. (2010). Typologies and phases in nationalism studies: Hroch’s A–B–C schema as a basis for comparative terminology. *Nationalities Papers*, 38(6), 865–880.
- Mayer, T. (2000). Gender ironies of nationalism: Setting the stage. In T. Mayer (Ed.), *Gender ironies of nationalism: Sexing the nation* (pp. 1–22). Routledge.
- McClintock, A. (1993). Family feuds: Gender, nationalism and the family. *Feminist Review*, 44(1), 61–80.
- McClintock, A. (2002). “No Longer in a Future Heaven”: Gender, race, and nationalism. In A. McClintock, A. Mufti, & E. Shohat (Eds.), *Dangerous liaisons: Gender, nation, and postcolonial perspectives* (pp. 89–112). University of Minnesota Press.
- Meintjes, S. (2001). War and post-war shifts in gender relations. In S. Meintjes, A. Pillay, & M. Turshen (Eds.), *The aftermath: Women in post-conflict transformation* (pp. 63–77). Zed Books.
- Meintjes, S., Pillay, A., & Turshen, M. (2001). There is no aftermath for women. In S. Meintjes, A. Pillay, & M. Turshen (Eds.), *The aftermath: Women in post-conflict transformation* (pp. 3–18). Zed Books.
- Meskimmon, M. (2020). *Transnational feminisms, transversal politics and art: Entanglements and intersections*. Routledge.
- Mouffe, C. (1999). Deliberative democracy or agonistic pluralism? *Social Research*, 66(3), 745–758.
- Murtagh, C. (2008). A transient transition: The cultural and institutional obstacles impeding the Northern Ireland women’s coalition in its progression from

- informal to formal politics. *Irish Political Studies*, 23(1), 21–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07907180701767948>
- Nagle, J. M. (2017). One community, many faces?: Non-sectarian social movements and peacebuilding in Northern Ireland and Lebanon. In L. Bosi & G. De Fazio (Eds.), *The troubles in Northern Ireland and theories of social movements* (pp. 185–202). Amsterdam University Press.
- Nagle, J. M., & Clancy, M.-A.C. (2012). Constructing a shared public identity in ethnationally divided societies: Comparing consociational and transformationist perspectives. *Nations and Nationalism*, 18(1), 78–97.
- Ní Aoláin, F. (2012). Gendered under-enforcement in the transitional justice context. In S. Buckley-Zistel & R. Stanley (Eds.), *Gender in transitional justice* (pp. 59–87). Palgrave Macmillan.
- O’Rourke, C. (2012). Transitioning to what? Transitional justice and gendered citizenship in Chile and Colombia. In S. Buckley-Zistel & R. Stanley (Eds.), *Gender in transitional justice* (pp. 136–160). Palgrave Macmillan.
- O’Rourke, C. (2013). *Gender politics in transitional justice*. Routledge.
- Oikarinen, S. (1996). Gender, nationality and war: Irish and Finnish Women and the Struggle for Independence in the Beginning of this Century. In Nordiske kvinnehistorikermøte (Ed.), *Kjønn, makt, samfunn i Norden i et historisk perspektiv: konferensrapport fra det 5. nordiske kvinnehistorikermøte, Klækken 08. – 11.08.96 (5: 1996: Klækken)* (pp. 206–221). Dragvoll: Senter for kvinneforskning.
- Otto, D. (2006). A sign of ‘weakness’? Disrupting gender certainties in the implementation of security council resolution 1325. *Michigan Journal of Gender & Law*, 13(1), 113–176.
- Oxford English Dictionary. (2014). *Ethnonationalism*’ 3rd Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford University Press.
- Pankhurst, D. (2008a). Introduction: Gendered war and peace. In D. Pankhurst (Ed.), *Gendered peace: Women’s struggles for post-war justice and reconciliation* (pp. 1–30). Routledge.
- Pankhurst, D. (2008b). Post-War backlash violence against women: What can “masculinity” explain? In D. Pankhurst (Ed.), *Gendered peace: Women’s struggles for post-war justice and reconciliation* (pp. 293–320). Routledge.
- Pateman, C. (1988). *The sexual contract*. Polity Press.
- Peterson, S. V. (2010). Gendered identities, ideologies, and practices in the context of war and militarism. In L. Sjoberg & S. Via (Eds.), *Gender, war, and militarism: Feminist perspectives* (pp. 17–29). Praeger.
- Pettman, J. J. (1999). Globalisation and the gendered politics of citizenship. In N. Yuval-Davis & P. Werbner (Eds.), *Women, citizenship and difference* (pp. 207–220). Zed.
- Phillips, A. (1991). *Engendering democracy*. Polity Press.

- Pierson, R. R. (2000). Nations: Gendered, racialized, crossed with empire. In I. Blom, K. Hagemann, & C. Hall (Eds.), *Gendered nations: Nationalisms and gender order in the long nineteenth century* (pp. 41–61). Berg.
- Porter, E. (2000). Participatory democracy and the challenge of dialogue across difference. In C. Roulston & C. Davies (Eds.), *Gender, democracy and inclusion in Northern Ireland* (pp. 141–163). Palgrave.
- Porter, E. (2007). *Peacebuilding: Women in international perspective*. Routledge.
- Racioppi, L., & O’Sullivan Sec, K. (2007). A grassroots peace-building and third-party intervention: The European Union’s special support programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. *Peace and Change*, 32(3), 361–390.
- Rooney, E., & Swaine, A. (2012). The ‘Long Grass’ of agreements: Promise, theory and practice. *International Criminal Law Review*, 12(3), 519–548.
- Roulston, C. (2000). Democracy and the challenge of gender: New visions, new processes. In C. Roulston & C. Davies (Eds.), *Gender, democracy and inclusion in Northern Ireland* (pp. 24–46). Palgrave.
- Rouse, M. (2020). *Gender, decision-making and the Northern Ireland senior civil service: A feminist institutional analysis of elite bureaucracy in transition*. Ulster University.
- Ruane, J., & Todd, J. (2017). Afterword: Social movements, long-term processes, and ethnic division in Northern Ireland. In L. Bosi & G. De Fazio (Eds.), *The troubles in Northern Ireland and theories of social movements* (pp. 223–238). Amsterdam University Press.
- Ruddick, S. (1989). *Maternal thinking: Towards a politics of peace*. Beacon Press.
- Ryan, L., & Ward, M. (2004). Introduction. In L. Ryan & M. Ward (Eds.), *Irish women and nationalism: Soldiers, new women and wicked bags* (pp. 1–13). Irish Academic Press.
- Schaap, A. (2006). Agonism in divided societies. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 32(2), 255–277. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453706061095>
- Schlesinger, P. (2002). Media and belonging: The changing shape of political communication in the European Union. In U. Hedetoft & M. Hjort (Eds.), *The postnational self: Belonging and identity* (pp. 35–52). University of Minnesota Press.
- Schirmer, J. G. (1989). ‘Those Who Die for Life Cannot Be Called Dead’: Women and human rights protest in Latin America. *Feminist Review*, 32(1), 3–29.
- Sharoni, S. (1998). Gendering conflict and peace in Israel/Palestine and the North of Ireland. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 27(4), 1061–1089.
- Shinko, R. E. (2008). Agonistic peace: A postmodern reading. *Millennium*, 36(3), 473–491.

- Shinko, R. E. (2022). A critical (re)reading of the analytical significance of agonistic peace. *Third World Quarterly*, 43(6), 1399–1407. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2022.2042681>
- Sideris, T. (2001). Problems of identity, solidarity and reconciliation. In S. Meintjes, A. Pillay, & M. Turshen (Eds.), *The aftermath: Women in post-conflict transformation* (pp. 46–62). Zed Books.
- Sigsworth, R., & Valji, N. (2012). Continuities of violence against women and the limitations of transitional justice: The case of South Africa. In S. Buckley-Zistel & R. Stanley (Eds.), *Gender in transitional justice* (pp. 115–135). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Smith, A. D. (1995). *Nations and nationalism in a global era*. Polity.
- Smooha, S. (1997). Ethnic democracy: Israel as an archetype. *Israel Studies* *Bloomington*, 2(2), 198–241.
- Snyder, C. R. (1999). *Citizen-soldiers and manly warriors: Military service and gender in the civic republican tradition*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Stears, J. (1998). *Gender and international relations: An introduction*. Polity Press.
- Stears, J. (2006). *Gender and international relations: Issues, debates and future directions*. Polity Press.
- Strömbom, L., & Bramsen, I. (2022). Agonistic peace: Advancing knowledge on institutional dynamics and relational transformation. *Third World Quarterly*, 43(6), 1237–1250.
- Strömbom, L., Bramsen, I., & Stein, A. L. (2022). Agonistic peace agreements? Analytical tools and dilemmas. *Review of International Studies*, 48(4), 689–704.
- Sum, N.-L. (2000). From politics of identity to politics of complexity: A possible research agenda for feminist politics/movements across time and space. In S. Ahmed, J. Kilby, C. Lury, M. McNeil, & B. Skeggs (Eds.), *Transformations: Thinking through feminism* (pp. 131–144). Routledge.
- Thapar-Björkert, S., & Shepherd, L. J. (2010). Religion. In L. J. Shepherd (Ed.), *Gender matters in global politics: A feminist introduction to international relations* (pp. 265–279). Routledge.
- Theidon, K. (2012). *Intimate enemies: Violence and reconciliation in Peru*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Tickner, J. A. (1992). *Gender in international relations: Feminist perspectives on achieving global security*. Columbia University Press.
- Towns, A. E. (2010). *Women and states: Norms and hierarchies in international society*. Cambridge University Press.
- United Nations General Assembly. (2010). ‘Women’s Participation in Peacebuilding: Report of the Secretary-General, A/65/354-S/2010/466’. 7 September 2010. New York: United Nations, A/65/354-S/2010/466.

- Unterhalter, E. (1999). Citizenship, difference and education: Reflections inspired by the South African Transition. In N. Yuval-Davis & P. Werbner (Eds.), *Women, citizenship and difference* (pp. 100–117). Zed.
- Voet, R. (1998). *Feminism and citizenship*. Sage.
- Wenk, S. (2000). Gendered representations of the nation's past and future. In I. Blom, K. Hagemann, & C. Hall (Eds.), *Gendered nations. Nationalisms and gender order in the long nineteenth century* (pp. 63–77). Berg.
- Werbner, P. (1999). Political motherhood and the feminisation of citizenship: Women's activism and the transformation of the public sphere. In N. Yuval-Davis & P. Werbner (Eds.), *Women, citizenship and difference* (pp. 221–245). Zed Books.
- Werbner, P., & Yuval-Davis, N. (1999). Women and the new discourse of citizenship. In N. Yuval-Davis & P. Werbner (Eds.), *Women, citizenship and difference* (pp. 1–38). Zed Books.
- Wibben, A. T. R. (2011). *Feminist security studies: A narrative approach*. Routledge.
- Wilcox, L. (2010). Gendering the cult of the offensive. In L. Sjöberg (Ed.), *Gender and international security: Feminist perspectives* (pp. 61–82). Routledge.
- Yiftachel, O. (2000). 'Ethnocracy' and its discontents: Minorities, protests, and the Israeli polity. *Critical Inquiry*, 26(4), 725–756.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (1997a). Ethnicity, gender relations and multiculturalism. In P. Werbner & T. Modood (Eds.), *Debating cultural hybridity: Multi-cultural identities and the politics of anti-racism* (pp. 191–208). Zed Books.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (1997b). *Gender and nation*. Sage.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (1998). Beyond differences: Women, empowerment and coalitions politics. In N. Charles & H. Hintjens (Eds.), *Gender, ethnicity and political ideologies* (pp. 168–189). Routledge.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (1999a). The 'multi-layered citizen.' *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 1(1), 119–136.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (1999b). What is 'Transversal Politics'? *Soundings*, 12, 94–98.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (2001). Some reflections on the questions of citizenship and anti-racism. In F. Anthias & C. Lloyd (Eds.), *Rethinking anti-racisms: From theory to practice* (pp. 44–59). Routledge.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). Human/women's rights and feminist transversal politics. In M. M. Ferree & A. M. Tripp (Eds.), *Global feminism: Transnational women's activism, organizing, and human rights* (pp. 275–295). New York University Press.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (2007). Intersectionality, citizenship and contemporary politics of belonging. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 10(4), 561–574.

- Yuval-Davis, N. (2011). *The politics of belonging: Intersectional contestations*. SAGE.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (2018). Recognition, intersectionality and transversal politics. In Y. Meital & P. M. Rayman (Eds.), *Recognition as key for reconciliation: Israel, Palestine and beyond* (pp. 157–167). Koninklijke Brill NV.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





## Women's Public Participation and Political Activism During the Troubles

This chapter analyses women's activism and public citizen participation in pre-Good Friday/Belfast Agreement (GFA) Northern Ireland (NI). To understand and appreciate the developments of women's activism and gendered forms of citizenship since the end of the Troubles, one needs to understand what came before. Contemporary women's activism and public, political participation builds on, organises in opposition to, or manages different aspects of NI society, such as an ethno-nationalist centred political system, a tradition of women's community activism, and conservative notions of gender and citizenship. Therefore, it is key to understand the history of women's activism and political participation. The goal of this chapter is thus to provide an analysis of the foundations of women's activism with examples to illustrate major trends, rather than a comprehensive historical outline or an exhaustive list of all organisations in which women participate.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As such, women's participation in trade unions is only mentioned briefly and religious activities are not covered.

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The NI state, established through partition in 1920,<sup>2</sup> was one dominated by Unionism, as two-thirds of its population were Protestant, and mostly Unionist (Fitzduff, 2002). Since its establishment, very few women have held positions of power in formal politics and women were long “systematically excluded from ‘full’ citizenship” (Kaufman & Williams, 2007, p. 168). Only nine women were elected to Stormont in 1921–1972,<sup>3</sup> most of them representing the dominant Unionist party, and only one became a minister (Kaufman & Williams, 2007; McCoy, 2000; Miller et al., 1996). Until the mid-1990s, only three women had been elected as Westminster Members of Parliament (MPs) to represent NI<sup>4</sup> (Sales, 1997) and in 2000 there were no female NI MPs at all, nor any female Members of the European Parliament (McCoy, 2000). At that time, only 13 per cent of Members of the Legislative Assembly of NI (MLAs) were women and about 15 per cent of local councillors (Ashe, 2019; McCoy, 2000; Morgan & Fraser, 1995).

Not only has female participation been limited in formal politics, but there has also been a lack of attention to gender inequalities. The Stormont parliament, with autonomy over domestic matters, has been dominated by strongly religious men who have refused reforms deemed offensive to religious sentiments, such as the 1967 Abortion Act and easing divorce restrictions (Roulston, 1989). Being part of the United Kingdom (UK) did not necessarily mean that NI shared the benefits—not

<sup>2</sup> The six north-eastern counties (i.e., those with a Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist majority) were split from the 26 southern counties through the Government of Ireland Act in December 1920. Due to the ongoing Irish War of Independence, the Act was never implemented in the south. Instead, a peace treaty, signed in December 1921, established the Irish Free State as a Dominion of the British Empire seceding from the United Kingdom (see Hennessey 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Dehra Parker (Unionist) 1921–29, 1933–60; Julia McMordie (Unionist) 1921–25; Margaret Waring (Unionist) 1929–33; Irene Calvert (Independent) 1945–53; Anne Dickson (Unionist) 1969–72; Eileen Hickey (Independent) 1949–58; Dinah McNabb (Unionist) 1953–69; Elizabeth Maconachie (Unionist) 1953–69; and Sheelagh Murnaghan (Liberal) 1961–69.

<sup>4</sup> Bernadette Devlin McAliskey (Unity, Independent Socialist) 1969–1974; Patricia McLaughlin (Ulster Unionist Party) 1955–1964; and Patricia Ford (Ulster Unionist Party) 1953–1955.

until 1972 when direct rule from London was introduced,<sup>5</sup> did opportunities open up to implement reforms previously blocked in Stormont (Roulston, 1989). This led to several pieces of legislation being extended to NI by Great Britain's (GB) Labour governments, such as the Equal Pay Act (1970), Sex Discrimination Act (1976), and more liberal divorce laws (Hill, 2020).

The political system mirrored the patriarchal and conservative structure of the Protestant and Catholic churches and managed to block women from entering “at all but the most micro-level” (Kaufman & Williams, 2007, p. 165). Adding to an already bleak lack of female representatives and inattention to gender inequality is the fact that a majority of male politicians in NI have tended to have strongly anti-feminist views and that few female politicians have been feminists or prioritised gender issues (Sales, 1997). Women have had to develop and explore different forms of political action in response to the one-dimensional, male-centred and ethno-nationally focused formal political system (Mulholland & Patel, 1999). Women's low levels of participation in the “big-P” politics of formal, electoral political life has thus been supplemented by greater participation in communities around “bread and butter issues” and “small-p” politics (McIntyre, 2004; McWilliams, 1995; Persic, 2004).

NI has a rich history of women's activism, which at times has been violent, but most often not. Women have been active in informal grassroots politics at a community level and in the formal political system, although less often so. It has sometimes centred on feminist demands of equal participation and gender equality but was more often a direct response to the violence, inequalities and poverty of their communities during the Troubles—activism that was frequently framed as maternal. To understand the range of women's activism in pre-Agreement NI, four categories have been developed (see Fig. 3.1):

- (1) *Ethno-nationalist activism*—women's involvement in Nationalism/Republicanism and Unionism/Loyalism (discussed in 3.3)
- (2) *Maternal activism*—women's community organising, “family feminism” and peace activism (discussed in 3.4)

<sup>5</sup> In 1972, British Prime Minister Edward Heath suspended Stormont and NI was governed through Direct Rule by a Secretary of State, several ministers and the NI Office.

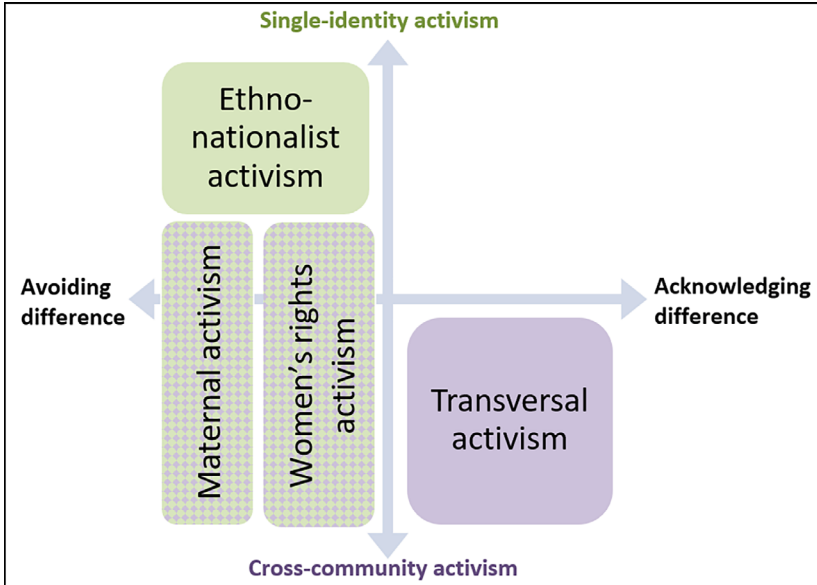


Fig. 3.1 Categories of women's activism during the Troubles

- (3) *Women's rights activism*—women's activism for civil rights, women's rights and feminist reform (discussed in 3.5)
- (4) *Transversal activism*—women's intersectional feminist activism for rights, equality and gender-just peace (discussed in 3.6)

In Fig. 3.1, one axis of the figure shows whether the activism was conducted in *single-identity* or *cross-community* groups, while the other axis represents how different forms of women's activism have tended to *deal with difference*. In NI, women's activism has been performed on an entirely single-identity basis (ethno-nationalist activism), on a single-identity and cross-community basis depending on circumstances (maternal and women's rights activism), and on a purely cross-communal basis (transversal activism). The four types of activism also differ in terms of how differences (mostly focusing on women's ethno-national belongings) are dealt with—if they are (strategically) avoided and buried, or openly acknowledged and discussed. This analysis shows that the majority

of women's activism in Troubles-era NI was built on a strategic avoidance of women's ethno-national difference, instead focusing on a shared goal to work towards. Nevertheless, there have also been instances of transversal activism in which difference is openly acknowledged and dealt with, as the analysis will illustrate. The following sections discuss each of these forms of activism in turn, giving examples to illustrate their attributes and overall trends. First, a short introduction to the Troubles is given.

### 3.2 THE TROUBLES

Between 1921 and 1972 Northern Ireland can be classified as an ethnic democracy (cf. Smooha, 1997) in which the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist (PUL) majority dominated the system politically, socially and economically. It was centrally a Protestant state, with the Unionist Party holding power for over 50 years (Fitzduff, 2002), "an explicitly sectarian invention to guarantee a Protestant and [U]nionist majority in perpetuity" (McVeigh, 2019, p. 14). The state was "inherently unstable", filled with violence and intolerance (Aretxaga, 1997, p. 30) and discrimination of the Catholic population was ubiquitous, most importantly in the areas of work, housing, and electoral politics (Cockburn, 1998; Fitzduff, 2002). As Cockburn argues: "Ulster Protestants used their predominance as capitalists, property-owners and administrators in the public sector to assure that what opportunities there were went to Protestants" (Cockburn, 1998, p. 53).

To end sectarian discrimination (mostly Catholic/Nationalist/Republican (CNR)) people organised into a civil rights movement in the mid-1960s. In 1967, the NI Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was established to demand guarantees for citizen freedoms, protect individuals' rights, highlight abuses of power and inform the public of their rights (Hennessey, 1997). The movement was seen as a threat to the PUL community and the state and was met by an uncompromising security response (Boyce, 1995; Kilmurray, 2017). The protests were about rights—not taking a stance on partition (Arthur, 1996), with issues of political and economic injustice at the root of the struggle (Morrow, 1996). As such, the civil rights movement was not ethno-nationalist in nature—it pursued equal rights for citizens within the existing state system. However, at various points in the last century and depending on the group, the CNR community's struggle against discrimination has

included both “ethnic politics” (pursuing equal rights and representation *within* a political system) and “ethno-national politics” (pursuing aspirations of self-determination). Ethnic politics in campaigns for Catholic equality existed alongside ethno-national aspirations with the goal of a United Ireland.

Peaceful civil rights marches were followed by unrest and rioting, as well as confrontations between demonstrators and the largely Protestant Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) (Hennessey, 1997; Ranstorp & Brun, 2013), signalling a prelude for the violence to come. A civil rights march in Derry on 5 October 1968 is often dated as the start of the Troubles, receiving worldwide attention as marchers were injured by the RUC, spurring thousands to join subsequent protests (Guelke, 2012; Ó Docharthaigh, 2017). The RUC’s inability to contain the spreading violence led to the NI government requesting the deployment of British troops on 12 August 1969 (Guelke, 2012). Paramilitary groups were formed and/or re-activated in defence of their respective communities. The conflict came to largely consist of two main dimensions: the British State and its security forces against Republican paramilitary groups; and pro-British Loyalist paramilitaries against Republican groups (Dawson, 2010).

Between 1966 and 2006, 3,720 people were killed, the majority of which (2,087) were civilians (McKittrick et al., 2007).<sup>6</sup> Additionally, between 1968 and 1994, 36,000 people were injured, there were 33,000 shootings and 16,000 explosions, and 22,000 people were charged with terrorist offences or detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (Rooney, 1995). Approximately 294,000 houses were raided by the British Army and the RUC in 1973–1988, predominantly in CNR districts (McIntyre, 2004). Over 90 per cent of conflict-related deaths were men (Rooney, 2002; Rooney & Swaine, 2012; Smyth & Hamilton, 2003).

### 3.3 WOMEN’S ETHNO-NATIONAL ACTIVISM

In this section, gender identities and women’s activism within the two main ethno-nationalist movements, Nationalism/Republicanism and Unionism/Loyalism, are discussed. Women participate in these movements on a (nationalist) single-identity basis, and therefore there is no

<sup>6</sup> When the loss of life is scaled up to the UK population of 62 million, this would be equivalent to 155,000 deaths (Rooney & Swaine 2012).

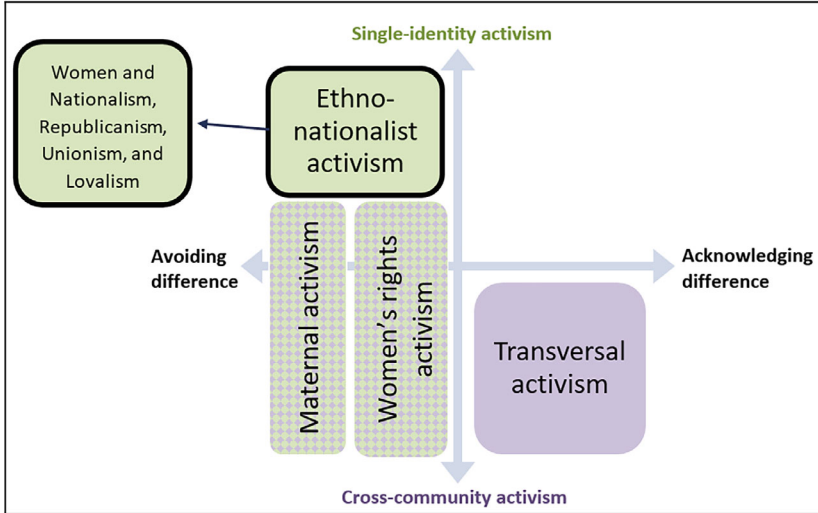


Fig. 3.2 Women's ethno-nationalist activism during the Troubles

perceived need to deal with difference among women from different nationalist communities (see Fig. 3.2). Although the traditions differ in some respects, they share a tendency of historically viewing women as auxiliaries and encouraging women's participation in supportive roles. Despite this, women joined armed groups in both communities and participated actively in the conflict, though more so in Nationalist/Republican groups, which is discussed in the following sections.

### 3.3.1 *Nationalism and Republicanism*

During the Troubles, women in CNR districts experienced a range of violence. House searches, arrests and the daily threat of violence, injury and death for family members became part of everyday life (Hammond Callaghan, 2002). The private domestic sphere was repeatedly invaded by public violence and became politicised as the frontline was effectively moved into the streets, kitchens and bedrooms of the CNR community. Women directly confronted the British military, and organised support services to maintain their communities, such as making sure bins were

collected and organising “hen patrols”<sup>7</sup> (Hackett, 2004). Such experiences and the resistance that developed as a reaction politicised many CNR women, extending their domestic roles into the public sphere.

Women in working-class CNR neighbourhoods were not only politicised in terms of their membership in the CNR community, but they were also politicised *as women* due to the sexualised violence they experienced and witnessed. Security force house-raids were sexualised, and sexual intimidation, threats and slurs were used by soldiers patrolling the streets and as a means of intimidation during interrogations (O’Keefe, 2017a; b; Sales, 1997). It was an attempt to break the political agency of women and became so commonplace that women considered it normal (O’Keefe, 2017b). It was a clear way of signalling that women belonged in the private sphere and that not even the private sphere signified a safe space.

The politicisation of CNR women as a result of gender-based state violence is one factor that shaped the development of Republican feminism (O’Keefe, 2017a). The feminism of Republican women was grounded in an analysis of the British occupation as “the main source of women’s oppression”, or, as Irish Republican Army (IRA) volunteer Mairéad Farrell put it: “we can only end our oppression as women if we end the oppression of our nation” (O’Keefe, 2017a, p. 167). Republican feminism was also shaped by their marginalisation within the broader women’s movement (O’Keefe, 2017a). A core issue of Republican feminism, the prison struggles, was a contentious issue that caused fragmentation in the women’s movement (see 3.3.1.2 and 3.5.2). Therefore, CNR women developed links with feminists abroad, including in GB, and received international support in their struggle (Sales, 1997).

There is also a significant historical connection between feminism and Nationalism/Republicanism that celebrates feminist figures (Hackett, 2004; O’Keefe, 2017a; Ryan, 2004), which has led to a normalisation of “the presence of women and feminist ideas” (Sales, 1997). Despite this, women have long been marginalised and women’s rights have often been treated as secondary to the national struggle (Cannavan, 2004; McIntyre, 2004; O’Keefe, 2017a; Sales, 1997). As English (2006, p. 102) argues: apart from a few noteworthy heroines, Nationalist Ireland was

<sup>7</sup> “Hen patrols” were groups of women who confronted army patrols by banging bin lids, following them around and quacking to alert the community to their presence (Hackett 2004; Sharoni 1998).

“for good or ill emphatically run by the boys”. Nonetheless, women have tirelessly struggled for equality in the movement. Some of this work has been done within political parties (3.3.1.1), while some in paramilitary groups (3.3.1.2).

### 3.3.1.1 *Women in Nationalist Politics*

Sinn Féin (SF) was the first NI party to develop specific women’s policies and implement quotas for women (Sales, 1997). Relatively high numbers of women participated in a range of roles, despite it being an unquestionably male-dominated organisation (Gilmartin, 2017). In 2000, SF had 5 female MLAs, out of a total of its 18 (McCoy, 2000). In 1979, the SF Women’s Department was established, suggesting that women “were successfully carving out feminist spaces within the [R]epublican movement, despite some formidable barriers” (Gilmartin, 2017, p. 269). It was an effort on the part of Republican women to make sure that they had a voice and access to political spaces (Gilmartin, 2017). The Women’s Department had an overt feminist outlook and advocated around issues such as contraception, domestic violence and lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer (LGBTQ) rights (Gilmartin, 2017; O’Keefe, 2017a). It recognised both formal politics and grassroots activism as important sites of political struggle.

Like SF, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) has quotas for women in policy-making bodies and a women’s section (McCoy, 2000). The party guarantees women a 40 per cent representation on its executive committee (Roulston, 1996). Despite this, there has been a tendency to adhere to a traditional division of labour where women mainly perform supportive roles (Sales, 1997). In the mid-1990s, SDLP scored highest among the five main parties in NI by nominating 13 per cent of women at the top of their constituency nominations (Fearon, 1999). In 2000, the party had 3 women among its 24 MLAs (Sales, 1997).

On International Women’s Day 1994 a group of CNR women, Clár na mBan (Women’s Agenda), organised a peace conference gathering women from across the island (McWilliams, 1995; Sales, 1997; Margaret Ward, 1995). They “called for the voices of women to be heard in the male dominated peace process” (Rooney, 2002, p. 40). Republican feminists expressed concerns about (once again) being asked to bury their demands to the benefit of ethno-nationalist issues (Clara Connolly, 1995;

Margaret Ward, 2004) and wanted to make sure that women's needs and participation were not ignored (Gilmartin, 2017).

### 3.3.1.2 *Women in Republican Paramilitaries*

Historically, thousands of women have been mobilised by the Republican movement (Ryan, 2004). The all-female group, Cumann na mBan (the Irishwomen's Council), was established in 1914 as an auxiliary to the Irish Volunteers, the precursor to the IRA (Alison, 2009; English, 2006; Steel, 2004; Urquhart, 2000). Initially during the Troubles, paramilitary participation was gendered: men were recruited into IRA ranks while women participated through Cumann branches attached to IRA companies, mainly in supportive roles (Alison, 2009; Gilmartin, 2017; Morgan & Fraser, 1995; O'Keefe, 2017a). In the early 1970s,<sup>8</sup> the rules restricting women's direct participation changed as a result of women's demands and a need to replenish IRA ranks (Alison, 2009; Gilmartin, 2017; Talbot, 2004). By the late 1970s, the IRA had understood the strategic importance of including women and women's combat roles expanded, accompanied by an increase in female prisoners (Talbot, 2004).

Women constituted approximately 20 per cent of Republican political prisoners (Shirlow et al., 2005) and participated actively in the protests for recognition in the 1970/80s.<sup>9</sup> They refused to carry out prison work, initiated a campaign of non-cooperation, joined the "no-wash" protest<sup>10</sup> and participated in several hunger strikes<sup>11</sup> (Ashe, 2019; Corcoran, 2004; Morgan & Fraser, 1995; Talbot, 2004). The punishment they received

<sup>8</sup> In 1969 the IRA split into the Official and Provisional IRA. The Official IRA announced a ceasefire in 1972, and the "Provisionals" became the only Republican paramilitary organisation until 1975 when the Irish National Liberation Army was formed.

<sup>9</sup> In 1976, the British Government ended the Special-Category status for Troubles-related offences that had previously provided prisoners with privileges such as not having to do prison work and wearing their own clothes. Republican prisoners protested by refusing to wear prison uniforms, wearing only a blanket ("Blanket Protest"), refused to wash, leave their cells, or use toilet facilities ("Dirty Protest") and ultimately hunger strikes in 1980 and 1981, leading to the death of 10 strikers. Concessions were won, but the special status was never reinstated.

<sup>10</sup> As prisoners were locked in their cells 23 hours a day without bathroom facilities, they smeared their excrement and menstrual blood on the walls of their cells.

<sup>11</sup> Despite participating in previous hunger strikes, Republican women were ordered by IRA leadership not to join the 1981 strike as they feared that their participation "would be regarded negatively by supporters as using the 'poor wee girls' to extol sympathy" (O'Keefe 2017b, p. 75).

came to be “characterised by often contradictory drives to regulate and discipline them as ‘women’ and as political prisoners” (Corcoran, 2004, p. 131). Forced, mass strip-searching became routine despite the practice being regarded as sexual assault (Alison, 2009; Corcoran, 2004; Leonard, 1993; O’Keefe, 2017a). Initially, the issue did not receive much public attention, but things changed when the 1984 “Stop the Strip Searches Campaign” was established, framing strip-searching as a humanitarian and, later on, a feminist, issue (Talbot, 2004).

For many, the prison experience was key for their politicisation as feminists and as Republicans. The prison struggles also politicised women not in prison to campaign around issues of prison conditions (O’Keefe, 2017a). An example is the Relatives’ Action Committee, set up in 1976 to support the prison protests, in which women were particularly active (Hackett, 2004; McWilliams, 1995). Another example is the feminist group Women Against Imperialism (WAI, est. 1978) which led pickets outside Armagh Prison and highlighted the living conditions of female prisoners (O’Keefe, 2017a), framing it as a feminist issue. WAI also challenged gender inequality within the Republican movement, gave talks on domestic violence, and helped end the IRA practice of tarring and feathering<sup>12</sup> (Hackett, 2004).

At this time, the women’s movement in NI was operating on a “lowest common denominator politics”, emphasising universality and bridge-building rather than difference (O’Keefe, 2017a). This meant that “a ‘check you label at the door’ policy was adopted [...] as general policy for the largest group—the Northern Ireland Women’s Rights Movement” (O’Keefe, 2017a, p. 174). Focus was placed on issues shared by most women, silencing issues related to oppression experienced because of being Republican, gay or working-class (O’Keefe, 2017a). As such, the state violence that CNR women faced was not up for discussion in the women’s movement and campaigning for Republican prisoners’ rights became a particularly contentious issue (O’Keefe, 2017a). As a result, Republican feminists organised on their own, looking for support from outside NI. WAI made links with the international women’s movement—women from Britain, Europe, the United States of America (USA) and New Zealand joined WAI pickets, and brought international attention to the struggle (Hackett, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> This was a punishment for “fraternising” with British soldiers where women would be tied to a lamp post in public and tarred and feathered (O’Keefe 2017a).

### 3.3.2 *Unionism and Loyalism*

The relationship between women and Unionism/Loyalism has developed differently to that of the Nationalism/Republicanism. Women have been active within Unionism/Loyalism, but in general, their politicisation occurred later. Also, women in PUL communities have largely been excluded from international support (Sales, 1997). In the PUL community, feminism tends to be associated with Republicanism, which adds another layer of difficulty in the struggle for equal rights as women. As such, Unionist/Loyalist women have experienced more conflict than Nationalist/Republican women when advocating for their rights within their own community.

The violence experienced by the PUL community came mostly from paramilitaries rather than the state, in the forms of sectarian violence against Protestants and violence against the security forces which were overwhelmingly drawn from the PUL community (Alison, 2009). The violence, regardless if directed against civilians, paramilitaries or security forces, was as such perceived as attacks on the PUL community as a whole (Alison, 2009). Movements emerging from such settings (i.e., settings with the aim to contain a revolutionary movement that is trying to disrupt the status quo) are likely to be more conservative, also in terms of women's roles, than their opposition (Alison, 2009). A key issue in the relationship between women, feminism and Unionism/Loyalism, is therefore the placement of the movement in relation to the state (both the NI state and the British state). Criticising and challenging the state (i.e., "their" Unionist state) and its institutions, such as the police force, is perceived as disturbing the status quo and betraying "their own" (Sales, 1997). This has made it difficult for women to present critique in terms of women's rights and gender equality issues (Sales, 1997).

Activism based on criticising and reforming the state might not initially be appealing to women traditionally identified with that state, concerned for its preservation (Morgan, 2003). The movement's posture is thus defensive in nature, and this partly explains why PUL women did not explore their relationship to feminism until the start of the 1990s (Cockburn, 1998). As Unionism/Loyalism has aimed to uphold the status quo, it has not had a great ideological, strategic or symbolic need for women's involvement (Alison, 2004, 2009; Rachel Ward, 2006), nor the very public female (and feminist) role models found in the CNR community. The space for women to participate in Unionism/Loyalism has thus

been limited (Sharoni, 1998). Sales (1997, p. 63) reiterates this, arguing that “there are no heroines in this world”. Even though some progress has been made for women’s participation in Unionist politics (see next section), there is still quite limited space for feminist expression.

### 3.3.2.1 *Women in Unionist Politics*

Women’s participation in Unionism/Loyalism has consisted largely of ancillary work. To support the Protestant, patriarchal, all-male Orange Order (est. 1795), the Association of Loyal Orangewomen was established in the mid-1800s as a subordinate space for women (Racioppi & See, 2000). The Unionist Party has been heavily linked with the Order to gain popular support: during Unionist rule at Stormont (1921–72), “there was little distinction between Orangeism and [U]nionism” as all Prime Ministers, most cabinet members, all senators and the majority of NI MPs were Orangemen (Racioppi & See, 2000, p. 7). This connection between the party and the order has entrenched a traditional gendered division of labour (Sales, 1997). As such, a strong distinction between public and private domains of society has tended to be upheld, and neither the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) nor the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) have made the inclusion of women a priority (Roulston, 1996).

The Ulster Women’s Unionist Council (UWUC), established in 1911 as the women’s section of the Unionist Party, “helped to popularise female involvement in [U]nionist politics” by convincing women that the ultimate way of protecting the home was through the union with Britain and emphasising the importance of women’s domestic responsibilities (Urquhart, 2000, pp. 57–58). The UWUC did not have a feminist perspective, prioritised Unionist issues over women’s rights and maintained a characteristic conservatism (Urquhart, 2000). Despite providing an NI-wide structure for women’s activism, the UWUC did not develop an independent agenda or produce policy on women’s issues (Sales, 1997; Urquhart, 2000), their main role has been that of “vote getter” (Gilmartin, 2017). However, in 1995, a “women’s issues committee” was established in the UUP to advise on policy (McCoy, 2000; Sales, 1997). Despite this, at the end of the 1990s, the UUP scored the lowest among the five main NI parties in terms of nominating women at the top of their lists: they had merely nominated one per cent (Fearon, 1999) and only 2 of their 28 MLAs were women (McCoy, 2000). This was the case despite the fact that forty-two per cent of UUP members were women (McCoy, 2000).

Just like the UUP, the DUP's record of putting women forwards for election has been poor: in 2000, only 1 of their 20 MLAs was a woman (McCoy, 2000). The party has no policy on women's political participation (Racioppi & O'Sullivan See, 2001). In 1987, the DUP appointed a spokesperson for women's issues, Rhonda Paisley, who wrote that "a token woman suits most aspects of Unionism [...] the majority of men [...] are still determined to keep a woman in her place" (cited in Sales, 1997, p. 178). While she tried to broaden the roles for women, she was succeeded by Iris Robinson who portrayed herself as "a simple housewife without any particular skills who deeply loves her country" (cited in Sales, 1997, p. 66). The participation in DUP politics by Paisley and Robinson also demonstrates another facet of women's participation in Unionist politics—the tendency of women having (male) relatives in political office<sup>13</sup> (Sales, 1997).

The smaller Unionist parties, like the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), have tried to involve more women and develop more radical socio-economic agendas (Sales, 1997). In 1996, no female councillors had been elected, but the party's executive committee included four women, including prominent feminist activist Irene Murphy (Sales, 1997). The party established a Women's Commission to increase women's political participation, but as of the start of the 2000s, continued to be male-dominated (Racioppi & O'Sullivan See, 2001).

### 3.3.2.2 *Women in Loyalist Paramilitaries*

A crucial issue when studying PUL women's paramilitary participation is the general lack of evidence. Other than a few key pieces of work (see for example Alison, 2009; McEvoy, 2009) little academic attention has been paid to the area. Getting access to the group partly explains the gap, reflecting a suspicion of 'outsiders' among the Loyalist community and a feeling of Republicans being favoured (Alison, 2009). Identifying female paramilitaries can also explain the lack of research. Alison (2009) argues that former female participants in Loyalist paramilitaries are less likely to admit their involvement compared to their CNR counterparts due to negative attitudes and stigma in the PUL community towards women's involvement.

<sup>13</sup> Rhonda's father was the late DUP founder Ian Paisley and Iris's husband is ex-DUP leader Peter Robinson.

The number of women in Loyalist paramilitaries is also quite low. Despite relatively small numbers, women did join state organisations, such as the RUC, the Ulster Defence Regiment and the British military, as well as paramilitary organisations, such as the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) (Alison, 2009). The UDA had up to two dozen active female units (McEvoy, 2009) as well as a women's branch that was disbanded in 1974 (Alison, 2009; Sales, 1997). The UVF did not have any equivalent units and women accounted for (at most) 2 per cent of its membership (McEvoy, 2009).

On the whole, women have been less active in *military* roles in Loyalist groups compared to Republican ones (Alison, 2004, 2009). In general, there was “a clear gendered division of labour in [L]oyalist paramilitaries, with women being involved in support roles [...] very few women took directly combative roles” (Alison, 2009, p. 203). As the PUL and CNR groups tend to construct themselves in opposition to each other, Alison (2009, p. 228) argues that:

part of the [L]oyalist resistance to women's full participation in paramilitaries was due to the fact that women were known to be fully active in [R]epublican paramilitaries. [...] Thus, women's involvement as combatants may have been seen by [L]oyalists as being too radical, too revolutionary, too much against the grain of prevailing gender relations, too feminist—and *too [R]epublican*.

Also in contrast to CNR women, most Loyalist women “*did not push* for access to [combatant] roles; most were content to have ‘done my wee bit’” (Alison, 2009, p. 228).

Especially in the early years of the conflict, defending one's family was a primary motivator for PUL women becoming involved in paramilitarism, often facilitated through male family connections (Alison, 2009). The perceived threat the Sunningdale (1973)<sup>14</sup> and Anglo-Irish (1985)<sup>15</sup> agreements posed to the PUL community also motivated some women

<sup>14</sup> The Sunningdale Agreement was signed in 1973 by British Prime Minister (PM) Edward Heath, Irish Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave and representatives from the UUP, SDLP and Alliance. The agreement made provisions for power-sharing in NI.

<sup>15</sup> The Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed in 1985 by British PM Margaret Thatcher and Irish Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald, establishing an Inter-Governmental Conference between the UK and ROI. It was followed by 100 000 strong Unionist protests and all Unionist MPs resigned under the slogan “Ulster Says No”.

to join paramilitaries, and many to join the strikes by working-class Loyalists (McEvoy, 2009). Women, like the majority of working-class Loyalists, found the agreements to be “problematic and objectionable [...] compromises that served to reward Republicans for violence against the British state” (McEvoy, 2009, p. 270). As such, PUL women “went to substantial lengths in order to prevent their passage and/or interrupt their implementation”—and acted in opposition to the stereotype of women wanting peaceful settlements (McEvoy, 2009, p. 269). In addition to this, some PUL women were critical of not being included in the negotiations and felt that Loyalists were being abandoned by the British state, which served as further motivation to join paramilitaries (McEvoy, 2009).

In the 1990s peace process, combatant women from the PUL community were largely excluded, including by the British government and paramilitary groups (McEvoy, 2009). As such, the recognition of the contributions of politically violent women to the defence of NI was routinely denied (McEvoy, 2009). In terms of feminist identities, Alison (2009, p. 230) found that “the majority of loyalist women were less willing to call themselves feminists, even if they mentioned ideas of believing in women’s equality”. She explains this in part by the perception of feminism as “hating men”, and partly by the tendency to link feminism with the CNR community. As such, experiences of paramilitary membership were most likely not a catalyst for developing a feminist perspective among Loyalist women (Alison, 2009).<sup>16</sup>

### 3.4 MATERNAL POLITICS, COMMUNITY ORGANISING AND WOMEN’S ACTIVISM

This section discusses maternal politics in women’s community activism during the Troubles, performed on a single-identity and cross-communal basis. The cross-community activism was grounded in strategic avoidance of difference among participating women, instead placing the focus on shared issues such as poverty, welfare and peace (see Fig. 3.3).

The following sections analyse a range of women’s activism where maternal identities have been key. The community activism that blossomed during the Troubles among women’s groups is detailed, including

<sup>16</sup> Alison (2009, p. 229) contextualises this: “I would be hesitant to state this too categorically given the extremely limited number of ‘active’ [L]oyalist women I managed to interview”.

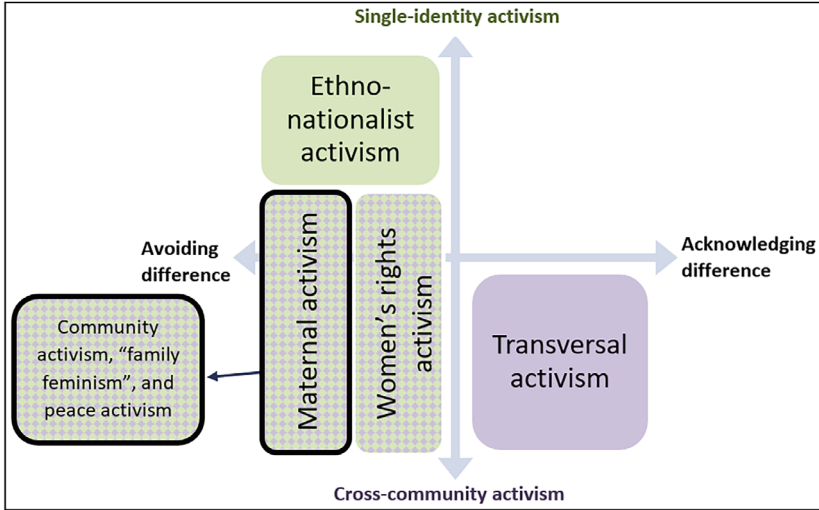


Fig. 3.3 Women's maternal activism during the Troubles

its relationship to feminism. Women's activism for peace during the 1970s is also discussed, linking it to the use of maternal tropes. The section is then concluded with a discussion of the feminist potential of maternal community activism.

### 3.4.1 *Community Development Activism, Maternal Politicisation and Family Feminism*

The Troubles' blurred the boundaries between private and public, challenging constructions of masculinity and femininity (Ryan, 2004) and resulted in some fluidity in gender relations (Sharoni, 1998). The blurring of the spheres was especially evident in CNR areas which bore the brunt of state violence, where the private sphere became "a site of political resistance and refuge" (Rooney, 2000, p. 171). Women's activities also helped destabilise the private/public divide and the potential for women's empowerment as active players became apparent as gender roles were challenged (Ryan, 2004). At the start, women's

activism tended to be behind-the-scenes, confined to their own communities. For instance, the Falls Road Curfew<sup>17</sup> was broken by over 3,000 CNR women who supplied the area with rations (McWilliams, 1995; Sharoni, 1998) and PUL women participated in direct action during the Ulster Workers' Strike<sup>18</sup> (Morgan, 2003). As the conflict grew, women's groups started working together cross-communally, recognising shared issues (Kaufman & Williams, 2007). Much of this work was done between working-class neighbourhoods, which were most affected by the violence, poverty and political neglect (Cockburn, 1998). For example, the "Mothers of Belfast"<sup>19</sup> united PUL and CNR women in protest, at least to start out with (McIntyre, 2004; McWilliams, 1995). Despite the eventual divide, women "learned the tactics and strategies of combined community pressure" which they then put to use in later struggles (McWilliams, 1995, p. 23).

Many women turned to grassroots activism and community politics during the Troubles. Some of the most militant and successful housing campaigns were dominated by women, as well as anti-poverty campaigns (Evason, 1991). Groups varied from mother-and-toddler groups to local women's centres, often providing services that the state failed to supply due to social cutbacks and the conflict (Morgan, 2003; Rooney, 1995; Sales, 1997). Improving living conditions for their communities was thus prioritised over changing the macro-level structure and the political system as larger political issues tended to divide rather than unite (Kaufman & Williams, 2007). Women's community work did thus not represent a "conscious attempt to move beyond the confines of the private sphere" (Sharoni, 1998, p. 1067).

While the breakdown of the public/private divide led to many women becoming politicised, this did not necessarily lead to a feminist understanding of women's subordination (Persic, 2004). On the contrary, demands were often presented in maternal terms: "the needs of children, the family and the community have generally been at the centre,

<sup>17</sup> The British Army declared a curfew on the mainly Catholic Falls Road in 1970, preventing food vans from entering the area.

<sup>18</sup> In 1974 a general worker's strike was organised by the Loyalist Ulster Workers' Council against the new NI executive. The strike led to the NI Assembly being prorogued and direct rule from London being re-introduced.

<sup>19</sup> The group was formed in response to the government's decision to abolish free milk to school children in 1971 (McWilliams 1995; Miller et al., 1996).

as distinct from the needs of women” (Evason, 1991, p. 49). This was evidenced by the Opsahl Commission: “many of the women’s groups which submitted evidence [...] did not talk about women’s issues as such but about the general needs of their communities and, in particular, those of young people” (Opsahl & Pollak, 1993, pp. 86–87). Persic (2004, p. 174) uses the concept of “activist mothering” to explain this, as it allows women “to affirm their positions as mothers”, interpret their participation “as an extension of their caring role” and community activism as an opportunity to “[provide] a better future for their children”. “Family feminism” connected with women through their lived experience and allowed for issues such as childcare and poverty to be prioritised (Kilmurray, 2017).

As such, the strong community development movement “strenuously resisted” a connection with feminism, which was associated with middle-class, career women with educational and monetary advantages (McWilliams, 1995; Rooney, 1995; Roulston, 1996). The lack of identification with feminism can also be understood as a strategic decision. Many women’s centres are dependent on their communities for support, and openly raising feminist issues such as reproductive rights, could be problematic in a socially conservative setting (Sales, 1997). Another key issue is feminism’s association with Republicanism, especially felt in the Protestant community (as discussed previously). Despite a lack of feminist identification, women worked together to forge solidarity networks that would come to form the basis of future peace groups (Byrne, 2009).

Without necessarily calling themselves feminist and without developing an agreed political or feminist agenda, these groups have set about organizing to meet their own needs and to combat problems of poverty, isolation, and the effects of deprivation (Rooney, 1995, p. 45).

Utilising maternal politics has thus not lessened the impact of their work (Persic, 2004). As Yuval-Davis (2006, p. 289) argues, sometimes “focusing on [...] specific issues rather than on the overall construction of gender relations [...] can be pragmatically effective”. What started out as women organising in their communities to provide for basic needs, demanding equality, and social justice, was later linked to peace and justice, further discussed in the next section.

### 3.4.2 *Maternal Peace Activism*

As Rooney (2002, p. 42) argues, there has been a tendency to construct women in NI as “essentially civilized and peace loving, as having more in common with each other than with what divides them”. Women are seen as not being implicated in the politics of ethno-nationalism—a construction based on the myth that they are “not involved in discredited politics; or at least not ‘involved’ through [...] agency or consent” (Rooney, 2006, p. 360). Due to the idea that women are somehow placed “outside” ethno-nationalist conflict, they were encouraged by institutions such as the state, media, and Churches to “stop the war”:

The calls [on women] to “stop the violence” relied upon simplistic, essentialist concepts of femaleness; as much as they relied upon simplistic constructions of the political conflict (as if women could simply stop the war—as if the war required no political resolution) (Rooney, 2003, p. 154).

Many of the early peace groups initiated by women in 1970s NI represent this type of essentialist construction of women’s peacefulness. For instance, in 1970, the cross-community Women Together (For Peace) was formed by several hundred women in response to sectarian riots in Belfast (Byrne, 2009; Cochrane & Dunn, 2002; Roulston & Davies, 2000). The leadership cultivated an image drawing on gender tropes of essentially peaceful, “non-political” women and attempted to “harness” women’s traditional roles in the home to end the violence of paramilitaries” (Hammond Callaghan, 2006, p. 35). As such, the gender-based participation in the group did not stem from feminist ideology but rather as an opportunity for women to voice their fears (Cochrane & Dunn, 2002).

In 1972, the Derry Peace Women (DPW) was founded in a CNR district following the murder of a teenager and the execution of a man on army leave (Byrne, 2009; Hammond Callaghan, 2002, 2006). The group marched to IRA headquarters calling for a ceasefire (Byrne, 2009), emphasising “their position as women and mothers as a primary driving force behind their call” (Hammond Callaghan, 2002, p. 39). The women formed a “Women for Peace Committee” based on a maternal, Nationalist response to the killing and IRA’s military strategies (Hammond Callaghan, 2002). DPW first received support from all directions: Protestant women, politicians, the Catholic Church, the media and sections of the British establishment; but were soon subjected to threats, intimidation

and attacks by Republicans, being branded as “traitors” and “informers” (Hammond Callaghan, 2002). As such, DPW became isolated and the anti-violence stance became difficult to defend in a community perceived to be under military siege (Hammond Callaghan, 2002).

In 1976, a peace movement was created by Catholic Mairead Corrigan and Protestant Betty Williams following the death of three young children (Mairead’s sister’s children) (Aretxaga, 1997; Bryan, 2012; Smithey, 2017). Within days of the deaths, the two women had created a petition protesting paramilitary violence, collecting over 6000 signatures. They organised marches in NI and England (McWilliams, 1995), spreading quickly among both CNR and PUL women, holding rallies of 20,000 Catholic and Protestant women (Fairweather et al., 1984; Smithey, 2017). This meant that, for a while, they were able to offer “a serious threat to the growing hegemony of the paramilitaries, particularly the IRA” (Bryan, 2012, p. 339). The basis of the organisation was the idea that “women could talk to each other where men had failed” (Sales, 1997, p. 195). Many women who joined the group “claim[ed] legitimacy to speak in the public sphere as mothers protecting the family and expressing their natural inclination towards peace” (Ashe, 2019, p. 49). The group was initially called Peace Women or the Women’s Peace Movement (Aretxaga, 1997), but later came to be called the Peace People (McWilliams, 1995). Despite being rewarded the Nobel Peace Prize (Roulston & Davies, 2000), the campaign was short-lived and began to “disintegrate because of internal dissent and external criticism” (McWilliams, 1995, p. 28). Women’s groups criticised the campaign for talking about peace without considering justice issues (McWilliams, 1995) and for failing to oppose state *and* paramilitary violence (Evason, 1991).

### 3.4.3 *Feminist Potential of Maternal Community Activism*

One of the recurring themes of women’s activism during the Troubles was its location: the grassroots level. The perception of women’s competence to deal with social issues (Kaufman & Williams, 2007), and consequently, the perceived lack of competence in dealing with formal big-P politics, contributed to women’s activism being located at community level. As discussed previously, many women responded to their situation as wives and mothers—something that was endorsed and encouraged by other parts of NI society. Both the Catholic and Protestant churches, as well as the political system, “have conspired to keep women out of the

realm of mainstream politics, while also reinforcing maternal imagery” (Kaufman & Williams, 2007, p. 178). Women’s participation was often portrayed in gender-specific ways as distinguished from men and as situated in the domestic sphere (Ryan, 2004). Their activity was often interpreted as either “an extension of a domestic role without broader transformative implications or as cooptation in a male-led war” (Aretxaga, 1997, p. 9).

This risked women becoming essentialised, and, maybe even more importantly, that the public/private divide of political life is reified. This could lead to a continuation and even support for a patriarchal society in which women are subjugated, oppressed and excluded. At the same time, framing women’s activism as an extension of traditional femininity and motherhood can also provide women with the space to become political actors in the public arena (Ashe, 2019). In NI, this allowed women to develop skills, reach out across the divide to other women and affect change (Kaufman & Williams, 2007).

Some argue that women’s groups, such as the ones in NI, utilise “strategic essentialism” when appealing to maternal tropes. This is when “woman” is used in an essential manner by women who are well aware that success hinges on it and that it can yield results (Byrne, 2009). Avoiding describing oneself as “feminist” can be a strategic move in order to further one’s agenda. In a traditional society like NI, this seems like a plausible theory, at least at first sight. Byrne (2009), however, did not find any evidence of strategic essentialism in her work in NI. What she found instead was “a discernible split between those women who are actively using a feminist analysis and those women involved in peace movements who do not” (Byrne, 2009, p. 90–91). Feminism, especially when interpreted as middle-class, was difficult to identify with for many working-class women:

It was never so easy for women whose men were involved in armed conflict, whose young were in prison and who had few sources of support other than ‘the family’, to stand clear and condemn male power (Cockburn, 1998, p. 61).

So, the tendency to define women’s activism as maternal rather than (big-P) political or feminist seemed straightforward to women themselves (although not all) and society at large due to the traditional nature of NI. However, it is also true that a feminist movement existed in NI in which

the participants did see their activism in a feminist light, further discussed in the next section. While women's activism tended to be initiated with an appeal to essentialised maternal characteristics within single-identity groups, "the impact of feminist thought, and alliance-based politics would serve to radicalize these movements" (Byrne, 2009, p. 93).

### 3.5 WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVISM FOR CITIZEN EQUALITY

This section analyses women's activism for political and civil rights and equality, as well as activism to reform their place in society and their roles as citizens. Women's activism for equal rights was often, but not always, performed on a cross-communal basis, based on the premise of (strategically) avoiding ethno-national difference among participants (see Fig. 3.4). In the following section, the civil rights activism of the 1960s that grew into a women's rights movement in the 1970s is detailed and analysed. Then, the feminist activism of the 1980s and 1990s is discussed and analysed. The section is concluded with a discussion of the ethno-national and political conflicts that appeared within the women's movement, and how women's organisations attempt to build feminist solidarity.

#### 3.5.1 *Activism for Civil Rights, Women's Rights and Feminist Reform*

During the 1960s' civil rights movement working-class women, mainly Catholic, became activists, motivated by issues like housing discrimination and internment<sup>20</sup> (Porter, 1998; Rooney, 1995). As such, women laid the groundwork for NICRA (Byrne, 2009), despite the irony of how women, alongside men, demanded "one man, one vote" (Rooney, 1995). The civil rights movement thus became a "backdrop against which many women activists cut their political teeth" (McWilliams, 1993, p. 89). Unfortunately, as Rooney (1995, p. 41) argues, "by the time the housing campaigns sparked civil rights marches and media attention, the women

<sup>20</sup> "Terrorist suspects" were interned without trial between 9 August 1971 and 5 December 1975. Of the 1,981 detainees, 1,874 were from the CNR community.

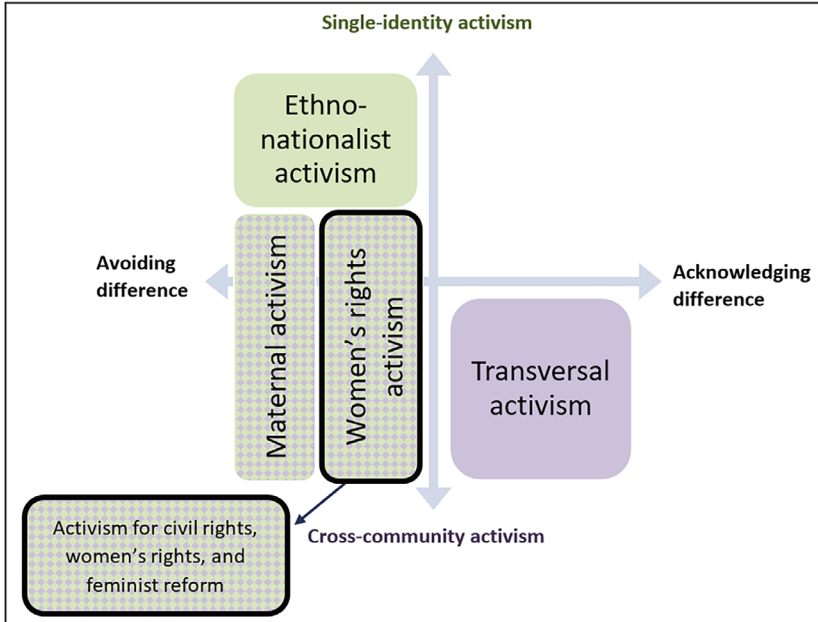


Fig. 3.4 Women's rights activism during the Troubles

of these early struggles were invisible". Due to the civil rights movement's focus on inequalities between Catholics and Protestants, it did not prioritise women's rights or gender inequalities (Byrne, 2009; Sales, 1997). Therefore, women began to organise separately and established the Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement (NIWRM)<sup>21</sup> in 1975 (Byrne, 2009; Fearon, 1999). It was a network of autonomous feminist groups with a shared focus on the subordination and oppression of women and attracted members from both ethno-national communities (Byrne, 2009; Evason, 1991; Fearon, 1999; McWilliams, 1993).

The NI women's movement developed later than in many European countries, due to the conservatism of the Churches and the state, the absence of a liberal democracy and the ongoing conflict (Evason, 1991;

<sup>21</sup> NIWRM wrote a Woman's Charter listing the demands of the movement, such as equality in education and employment, maternity leave, childcare facilities and better family planning services (Evason, 1991).

Fearon, 1999; Glencross, 2011; Kaufman & Williams, 2007; McWilliams, 1995; Morgan & Fraser, 1994; Piecuch, 2017). Many women who would likely have organised women's groups were engaged in the struggle for civil rights (Roulston, 1989). Thus, in the 1960s, it seemed like the second feminist wave had "missed" NI as no organised groups appeared (Roulston, 1989). When a women's movement did emerge in the 1970s, it differed from other countries: working-class women were at the heart of the movement (Kaufman & Williams, 2007; Porter, 1998) and, to a greater extent than elsewhere, it was dominated by older women and women with (younger) children (Evason, 1991).

The NI women's movement was affected by and also influenced international social justice movements (Hill, 2020), such as the women's movements in GB, the US and ROI (Piecuch, 2017). However, the relationship between local and international groups was not straightforward. Especially among women's groups in GB and Republic of Ireland (ROI), there was "a degree of uneasiness" in relation to NI, given their governments' involvement in the conflict (Glencross, 2011, p. 19). The links between the movements in the north and south of Ireland were constrained and, in many respects, represented different trajectories (Linda Connolly, 2002). Groups in ROI and GB were often more comfortable acting as intermediaries between countries like Germany and the US, and women in NI, rather than through direct involvement (Glencross, 2011). When direct involvement did take place, some groups tended to support campaigns focusing on peace, women and children (e.g., Peace People), and stayed away from anything deemed too "political" (e.g., the prison protests) (Glencross, 2011). The UK branch of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom approached the conflict with caution and confusion, focusing on facilitating US contacts (Glencross, 2011). Through pressure from international members they (unwillingly) articulated a position, eventually demanding British withdrawal (Glencross, 2011).

While women were making advances in GB (some of which were extended to NI, see 3.1), the situation was different in ROI. The women's movement in Ireland declined from 1922 to 1969, leading ROI to commonly be evaluated as "hostile to women's rights" (Glencross, 2011, p. 68). Contraceptives were illegal in ROI but legal in NI, prompting women from ROI to travel to Belfast on the 1971 "Contraceptive Train", smuggling contraceptives to Dublin (Glencross, 2011). This, together with the ambivalent nature of contact between the women's movement

in GB and ROI and groups in NI, shows that although they learned from each other, advances in one jurisdiction did not necessarily lead to advances in another.

In NI, organisations like Women’s Information Group (WIG, est. 1980) and Women’s Resource and Development Agency (WRDA, est. 1983, previously the Women’s Education Project) were established (McWilliams, 1995), as well as a range of women’s centres<sup>22</sup>. The centres focused on meeting socio-economic needs, particularly in working-class areas (Byrne, 2009), providing support, training, education and advice for women and campaigned on issues which affect women (Morgan, 2003). Through the establishment of such organisations, the women’s movement “translated itself” into a women’s sector as infrastructure was built and increased funding became available in the 1990s (Kilmurray, 2017). At the end of the 1990s, there were almost 1500 women’s organisations in NI, of which about 425 could be described as activist community development groups (Morgan, 2003).

A period of feminist activism followed the establishment of NIWRM and, unlike earlier activism, identification and mobilisation on the basis of feminism was prevalent. In 1993, the feminist, cross-community project Women into Politics (WIP) was established to encourage women’s direct involvement in all levels of politics (Kaufman & Williams, 2007). WIP offered cross-communal workshops on how to engage with politics, develop political skills and become active in party politics (Cockburn, 1998; McCoy, 2000) and provided political education for women (Rooney, 2002). The aim was also to enable political discussion between women from different sides of the divide who shared common concerns and experiences (Sales, 1997). The Northern Ireland Women’s European Platform (NIWEP, est. 1988) added a European dimension by providing a lobbying mechanism in Dublin, London and Brussels (McWilliams, 1995). The organisation, now known as the Women’s Platform, works for gender equality and acts as the NI coordination to the European Women’s Lobby (Women’s Platform, 2024). In the run-up to the peace process, NIWEP lobbied parties to gender-proof their candidate lists and supported the creation of Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition (NIWC)

<sup>22</sup> Downtown (est. 1980), Derry (est. 1981), Falls (est. 1982), Ballybeen (est. 1983), Ardoyne (est. 1984), Greenway (est. 1985), Shankill (est. 1987), Ormeau (est. 1987), Windsor (est. 1990), Chrysalis (est. 1990), Footprints (est. 1991).

by exploring how an all-woman intervention could take shape (Ashe, 2019; Fearon, 1999).

Despite the wide range of women's organisations and feminist activism that developed from the 1960s and on, this was not without its complications. In cross-community groups, the sometimes-differing concerns of PUL and CNR activists became central (Morgan & Fraser, 1994). This issue is discussed in the next section which focuses on how the women's movement dealt with difference and tried to build solidarity across the ethno-national divide.

### 3.5.2 *Feminist Solidarity? Dealing with Difference*

Women's rights activists and feminists in NI have continuously had to ask themselves:

whose personal is more political? [...] who decides what counts as bona fide female experience on which to base explanation, analysis, and action? [...] The personal experience of one woman may be the oppression, through denial, of another (Rooney, 1995, p. 46).

The women's movement in NI, especially, has had to relate to this. While some groups have attempted to openly deal with difference (see Sect. 3.6), others have been built on suppression and denial of difference "checking your (ethno-national) politics at the door", so to speak. In the words of a women's centre administrator: "We don't talk about politics here. We only talk about women's issues" (Sales, 1997, p. 169). In NI, "politics" is often understood as a synonym for taking sides in the ethno-national conflict (Glencross, 2011), a reason why it is often avoided in cross-community settings. The strategic avoidance of inter-sectional identities, putting aside differences and working with practical issues have been the basis of much of women's cross-community work in NI (Sales, 1997). As such, many groups practise "lowest common denominator politics" (O'Keefe, 2017a, p. 174). The political (or ethno-nationalist) affiliations of members within some groups were either never talked about "in the day-to-day running of the organisation, or, if known, may be deliberately ignored to avoid confrontation" (McWilliams, 1993, p. 93). A politics of avoidance facilitated women's cross-community cooperation, but also made it "easier to marginalise feminist, and trade union, issues from mainstream political debate" (Sales, 1997, p. 170).

Organisations such as NIWRM and WIG used this tactic in their work (McIntyre, 2004; O’Keefe, 2017b). In WIG, discussion of ethno-national politics, religion and conflict-related issues was intentionally avoided, and focus was placed on the immediate needs of families and communities, rather than trying to change social policy<sup>23</sup> (McIntyre, 2004). Contested constitutional questions also constituted the ever-present conflict within the NIWRM. To appeal to a majority of women, the NIWRM avoided taking a position on the national question and avoided discussing it, which proved difficult (Roulston, 1996; Sales, 1997). Some saw this as a de facto Unionist position (Roulston, 1996), despite the fact that only a small number of PUL women were involved in NIWRM (Racioppi & O’Sullivan See, 2001).

At the centre of the conflict was the question of how revolutionary and reformist the agenda should be (McWilliams, 1995). Some argued for a broader feminist agenda, while others argued that women’s liberation required national liberation, focusing on (anti-imperialist) issues central to Nationalist politics and the British military presence (Kilmurray, 2017; McWilliams, 1995; Roulston, 1996). Some argue that the dominance of CNR women in the movement silenced the voices of PUL women (McWilliams, 1995), while others argue that they were unjustly blamed for the under-development of the women’s movement and the divisions that occurred (O’Keefe, 2017a). Such discussions led to several founded attempts to build a broad-based women’s movement (Byrne, 2013; Cockburn, 1998; Fearon, 1999). As Fearon (1999, p. 3) argues, “united activity had been the exception, not the norm”.

As such, there were disagreements over how to prioritise between feminist, socialist and nationalist concerns and what the main cause of women’s oppression in NI was (Evason, 1991). In the late 1970s, the campaigns on behalf of female Republican prisoners came to the forefront of the discussions in the movement, clearly exposing differing views (Evason, 1991; McWilliams, 1995; Roulston, 1996; Sales, 1997). CNR women asked for support (some say demanded), but members of the broader movement viewed their campaign as essentially Republican and refused to support it (Alison, 2009; Evason, 1991; Leonard, 1993; Rooney, 1995). This refusal also stemmed from a fear of alienating Unionist women (Rooney, 1995). Instead, the NIWRM “tried to shift the

<sup>23</sup> WIG organised monthly cross-community meetings, alternating between CNR and PUL areas, to address pressing needs of communities (Cockburn 1998; McIntyre 2004).

focus by developing general policies on the human rights of women prisoners” (Roulston, 1996, p. 143). Nationalist/Republican feminists within the movement saw this as a betrayal (Roulston, 1996).

Women’s organisations chose different ways of dealing with these issues. Derry Women’s Aid (est. 1975), for example, believed that the subjugation of women was common in both communities (McWilliams, 1995) and single-issue groups like this were preferred by some women over the much broader NIWRM (Kilmurray, 2017). WAI, on the other hand, worked from a Nationalist feminist perspective (as discussed in 3.3.1.2). The Socialist Women’s Group (est. 1975) also campaigned against British imperialism and withdrew from the NIWRM (Kilmurray, 2017; Sales, 1997). Radical feminists were critical of men being able to join the NIWRM and increasingly organised separately (Kilmurray, 2017).

A key issue in this debate has thus been the relationship of women to the NI state (Rooney, 1995). Pushing for legislation regarding issues such as domestic violence, while positive from a women’s rights perspective, also implies an extension of the legislative reach of a contested state (Rooney, 1995). As the legitimacy of the state itself is questioned in NI, campaigning for state reform has been interpreted by some Republican feminists as showing support for British governmental presence and, as such, they argue that the feminist struggle should be contained within the framework of Nationalist politics (Rooney, 1995). There have also been obstacles for Protestant working-class women participating in the movement, especially “the difficulty of challenging the state with which they identified, and which was under threat” (Evason, 1991, p. 11). As such, the perception that any campaign that criticised the state, or was concerned with rights, has to be allied to Republicanism, has been part of the PUL narrative (Evason, 1991; Rooney, 1995). By the early 1990s, this issue had been greatly reduced despite the inability of feminism to be reconciled with doctrines of dominance and ascendancy that have been prevalent in Unionism (Evason, 1991).

So, even though women have at times and in relation to specific issues managed to bridge the divisions in NI, longer term unity seemed improbable without dealing with the national question and sectarianism (Alison, 2009; Sales, 1997). As such, the movement for women’s rights in NI had “not arrived at a position where feminist interests provide for cohesive unity” (Ryan & Ward, 2004, p. 6) and “no agreed gender equality agenda emerged” (Ashe, 2019, p. 45). The next section discusses

attempts by women’s groups to acknowledge and deal with difference to build feminist solidarity through transversal politics.

### 3.6 TRANSVERSAL POLITICS AND INTERSECTIONAL ACTIVISM

Some women’s groups have remained united by acknowledging differences while “pursuing innovative ways of working across the traditional political boundaries” (McWilliams, 1995, p. 33). Such work is an example of transversal politics, where participants organise meaningful political action while rooting and shifting. This section discusses transversal politics within women’s activism for equality and rights (3.6.1) and for gender-just peace (3.6.2). Transversal activism is performed on a cross-communal basis with a conscious effort to acknowledge and deal with difference while also working towards a shared goal (see Fig. 3.5).

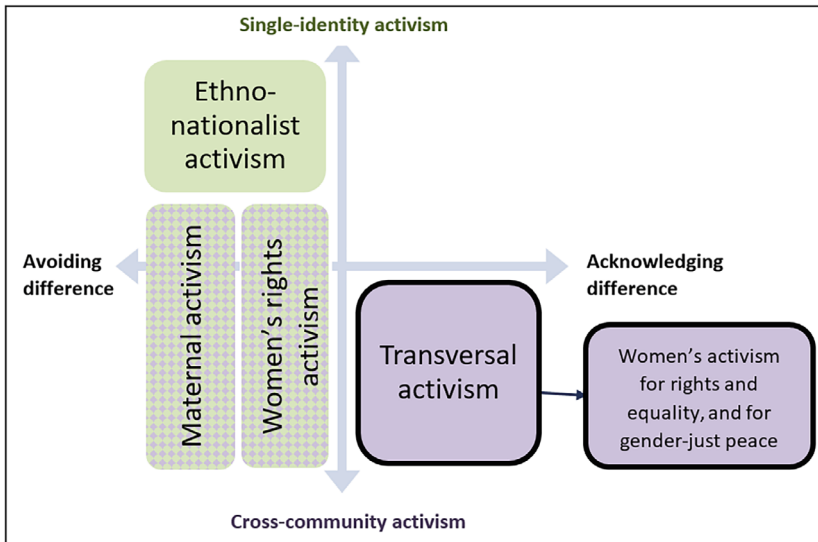


Fig. 3.5 Women’s transversal activism during the Troubles

### 3.6.1 *Women's Activism for Rights and Equality*

An example of a feminist organisation that practised transversal politics is the Women's Support Network (WSN) (Byrne, 2009; Kilmurray, 2017). WSN is a cross-community umbrella organisation established in 1989 by several women's centres and organisations (Kilmurray, 2017; McWilliams, 1995; Mulholland & Patel, 1999). In contrast to previous groups, it was "more consciously cross-community and politically motivated" and allowed its members to "remain true to their own identity while simultaneously being open to respect those from different identities" (Byrne, 2009, p. 94–95). The WSN identified its role as a "collective feminist voice" of organized working-class women" (Cockburn, 1998, p. 77) and works for issues such as equal political representation (Byrne, 2013). As one Network member argued: "We weren't coming together simply to get resources, we were actually coming together to challenge the status quo" (cited in Mulholland & Patel, 1999, p. 128). Regarding the Network's feminist identity, members have had to make up their own minds about identifying as feminists as well as sustain "a bridge back to a community-based women's centre or project which has its own internal divisions and balance of opinion" (Cockburn, 1998, p. 92).

The WSN is an organisation that actively affirms and values difference (Cockburn, 1998). Democratic decision-making procedures are used to help participants "value their differences while seeking common ground" (Byrne, 2013, p. 111). WSN has, as such, found a way to deal constructively with the differences of its members, such as varied ethno-national backgrounds, political beliefs, and relationships to feminism (Cockburn, 1998). Difference is neither erased nor collapsed into heterogeneity or pretended homogeneity: "difficult differences 'don't have to be left outside the door in order for us to work together'" (Cockburn, 1998, p. 224). The Network also uses a process of "elective and selective speech and silence" regarding controversial or divisive issues which means that timing is important, not ignoring political issues (Cockburn, 1998, p. 83ff). This is something they continuously work on as it remains difficult to openly express, explore and work through political differences (Cockburn, 1998). At the same time, some argue that differences between members still lay buried and that silence has the potential to destabilise the Network's work (Cockburn, 1998).

The Network works on the basis of “non-closure of identity”, i.e., recognising that identities are not essentialised and avoiding preconceived ideas or predictions of what might flow from certain identities, such as coming from a CNR or PUL background (Cockburn, 1998, p. 225). In other words, members “avoid ascribing thoughts or motivations or qualities to others on the basis of their ethnic or national label [...] [People are judged] by what they do, not what they are” (Cockburn, 1998, p. 225). Through this type of perspective, an us-versus-them perspective is challenged (Byrne, 2009). Acknowledging injustices and asymmetries in power among participants is also an important part of the work done by the WSN (Cockburn, 1998). Their cross-community cooperation has required a long road of single-identity work within the respective communities as preparation (Cockburn, 1998). WSN members also found that building and maintaining bridges *within* community identities, such as the gaps between radical and moderate groups in Nationalism/Republicanism or Unionism/Loyalism, was often harder work than dealing with the differences between them (Cockburn, 1998). Nonetheless, women, through the WSN, created new political spaces “in which to reflect on their experiences of marginalization and continued to radicalize as deeply political agents” (Byrne, 2009, p. 107).

### 3.6.2 *Women’s Activism for Gender-Just Peace*

In the lead-up to the 1990s peace negotiations, women expressed concerns about the lack of transparency and women’s involvement in the process<sup>24</sup>. Despite women (from both communities) lobbying political parties to include female participants in the negotiations, the appeal was largely ignored (Porter, 2007). Feminists were concerned about the invisibility of women (Aretxaga, 1997) and argued for the importance of gender (in)equality to be put on the agenda (Roulston, 1996). Ironically, the “peace makers” (read: women) were not being included in the peace (Sales, 1997)<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> In 1996, all-party peace talks were initiated following an election process and a peace agreement was signed on Good Friday in 1998.

<sup>25</sup> Mo Mowlam, the UK Secretary of State for NI, was one of few prominent women in the negotiations. As Fearon (1999, p. 117) states, she was “the nuts and bolts behind the whole thing. She had guts and she simply would not and did not give up”.

To remedy the exclusion of women from the peace process, an all-women cross-community party, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition was established in 1996, unifying PUL and CNR women, as well as women who did not identify with either tradition (Fearon, 1999; Porter, 2007; Sales, 1997; Margaret Ward, 2004). Only weeks after being established, the party was successful in having two members elected to participate in the official multi-party peace negotiations and the Forum for Political Dialogue and Understanding<sup>26</sup> (Byrne, 2009, 2013; Kaufman & Williams, 2007; Porter, 2007).

The aim of the NIWC was to promote a women's agenda, uniting on issues such as childcare and employment opportunities (Sales, 1997). As such, the group did not take a position on the constitutional future of NI (Margaret Ward, 2004). They emphasised the role of women in politics as well as a range of other gender issues (Kaufman & Williams, 2007), guided by the principles of equality, human rights and inclusion (Byrne, 2013; Fearon, 1999; Porter, 2007). In their perspective, the political problems between the ethno-nationalist communities only constituted part of what needed to be addressed—broader issues also needed to be solved, specifically those affecting women (Kaufman & Williams, 2007). They also argued for the importance of pursuing gender justice (Ashe, 2019). A priority was to increase women's participation in politics, arguing that every citizen has the right to stand in elections (Fearon, 1999). Their work was based on the realisation that, as women, “their citizenship was conditional, not just on religion [...] but on their class background and sex” (Fearon & McWilliams, 2000, p. 131). As such, the Coalition aimed to facilitate and develop a gender-just participatory democracy, representing women as political agents of change (Fearon, 1999; Kilmurray, 2017). They worked for the “right to active citizenship” and the “development of structures and opportunities that would facilitate extended political activity [...] throughout local communities and civil society” (Fearon, 1999, p. 87).

The members of the Coalition drew on what they had learned in community organisations, trade unions and the civil rights movement

<sup>26</sup> This forum ran parallel to the peace talks to “consider and examine issues relevant to promoting dialogue and understanding” (Forum for Political Dialogue and Understanding, 1998). NIWC members nicknamed it “the Forum of Monologue, Abuse and Misunderstanding”, based on its inefficiency and the amount of abuse they faced (Kilmurray, 2017, p. 228).

(Kilmurray, 2017). As such, a crucial aspect of their success was that it “was able to build on the efforts of generations of women who had worked hard both within their own communities and across the community divides to make [NI] better for all people” (Kaufman & Williams, 2007, p. 158). The decision to call themselves a “coalition” rather than a “party” emphasised the inclusion of women with different political allegiances and community backgrounds (Kilmurray, 2017). This was also mirrored in the deliberate decision to have the group be co-led by two women, Pearl Sagar and Monica McWilliams, one from each ethno-national community (Kilmurray, 2017).

The NIWC practised transversal politics in the sense that “they agreed that participants should bring their ‘identity baggage’ and acknowledge their differences upfront” (Porter, 2007, p. 40). As such, the focus was not to overcome national identities, but rather to allow people to express them (Byrne, 2009). They also practised rooting and shifting through their political positions by adopting “a fluid approach that placed a premium on dialogue and shifting position to accommodate different standpoints” (Ashe, 2019, p. 54). Within the Coalition, the participants “remained rooted in their religious and national communities, they also developed a common agenda that prioritized different approaches to peace and justice than those prioritized by men” (Byrne, 2013, p. 115–116). By fighting for “inclusion on the basis of recognition of inequalities rather than recognition of essentialist gender identities or differences” the Coalition recognised “women’s identities as multi-layered and plural” (Ashe, 2019, p. 54).

Some question the transversal characteristics of the Coalition. In NI media, the NIWC was stereotypically presented as building on essentialist female qualities such as caring and compromise, rather than subverting them (Breen, 2002). O’Keefe (2017a, p. 175) criticises their refusal to “take a position on state violence” and characterises their work as being anchored in the idea that “encouraging communities to get along would resolve the political and structural issues”. Nonetheless, the Coalition aimed to create an inclusive peace process, so that those not participating directly would still feel included (Byrne, 2009). This inclusive approach was part of their success, encouraging women to participate (Kaufman & Williams, 2007). By holding monthly consultation meetings with constituents, they worked to include the community (Byrne, 2009; Fearon, 1999).

The NIWC brought a unique perspective to the negotiations. While the major parties insisted on focusing on ethno-national issues, the NIWC pushed a broader social agenda “informed by two decades of activism and dialogue in the [NI] feminist peace movement” (Byrne, 2009, p. 125). Issues like victims’ rights, the need for a civic forum<sup>27</sup>, and reconciliation were put on the agenda thanks to the NIWC (Porter, 2007). The Coalition thus brought a range of issues to the talks: domestic violence; policing; reintegration of political prisoners; sexual harassment; mixed housing; integrated education; and children’s issues (Fearon, 1999; Kaufman & Williams, 2007; Porter, 2007). They also brought attention to the under-representation of women in politics (Ashe, 2012). As such, the NIWC’s input was significant and led to a peace agreement with equality commitments beyond the sectarian divide. They also fought to have:

‘the right of women to full and equal political participation’ included in the draft Agreement. In terms of equality and human rights, the *Women’s Coalition* is credited with ensuring that the Belfast Agreement included a first-class equality agenda (Byrne, 2009, p. 127).

A key issue for the Coalition was thus to push for women’s equal access to and participation in all new decision-making bodies. However, the inclusion of women’s right to full and equal political participation in the GFA did not guarantee its implementation as “the NIWC was not successful in terms of inserting mechanisms to promote increases in women’s formal political representation into the final settlement between the parties” (Ashe, 2019, p. 77).

Despite disrupting patriarchal politics, the NIWC came to serve as a buffer between the bigger PUL and CNR parties during the negotiations (McEvoy, 2010). They also came to act as watchdogs, protecting and policing the Rules of Procedures (Fearon, 1999), which made it more difficult for them to advance their own agenda (McEvoy, 2010). It was difficult for NIWC members to be taken seriously as they were seen as participants there to “assist the men in the tough business of politics” (Byrne, 2009, p. 126). The Coalition faced criticism from different

<sup>27</sup> The Civic Forum was a central focus of their equality agenda. Created through the GFA, the Forum fell out of use quite quickly, see Chapter 6 for further discussion.

directions. It was not welcomed by established political parties, with reactions ranging “from patronising to downright hostile” (Kilmurray, 2017, p. 228). NIWC members were constantly patronised, interrupted, heckled and belittled—often in a sexualised, misogynistic tone (Fearon, 1999). Peter Robinson (DUP) argued that the women of the NIWC “[hadn’t] been at the forefront of the battle when shots were being fired [...] They are not representative of the decent Ulster women that I speak to” (Kilmurray, 2017, p. 228). DUP members heckled them by saying that they “should go home to ‘breed for Ulster’” to which NIWC co-leader Pearl Sagar responded with a chorus of “Stand by your man” (Kilmurray, 2017, p. 230). Another time, NIWC members were “subjected to mooing noises by DUP members” (Ashe, 2019, p. 56). Seamus Mallon (SDLP) worried that women would not be “tough enough” to participate in the negotiations (Fearon, 1999, p. 17).

The autonomy of NIWC was constantly challenged and undermined through efforts by other politicians that “[clearly exposed] the gender dynamics of the peace process and the hostility to women not committed to traditional forms of ethno-nationalist politics in the public sphere” (Ashe, 2019, p. 55–56). The NIWC slogan, “Say Goodbye to Dinosaurs”, seems an apt choice considering the ancient ideas about gender that their fellow (usually male) politicians exhibited. However, women also levelled criticism against NIWC. Women in other political parties felt threatened, arguing that NIWC was undermining their work and that they would now have to fight other women for the same vote (Fearon, 1999). The NIWC was also framed as “irrational, open to manipulation by sinister interests and therefore foolish” by women in other parties (Ashe, 2019, p. 55). Republican women criticised the party’s non-stance on the constitutional question and argued that the NIWC would not be able to represent the views of all their voters due to this (Fearon, 1999; Margaret Ward, 2004). They feared, along with other women, that the NIWC’s non-stance on the constitutional issue would separate them from the political discussions of the talks (Sales, 1997). The group was also criticised for lacking a feminist agenda by not taking a stand on abortion rights (Breen, 2002).

### 3.7 CONCLUSION

As argued in this chapter, women have played important, varied roles as political activists in NI, even though very few women have held positions of power in the public sphere and were largely constructed as part of the private sphere. The Troubles saw a flurry of community engagement by women, in everything from peace organisations and cross-community grassroots work to ethno-nationalist campaigns and paramilitary violence. Women's political activism blossomed. Thanks in part to this tradition of activism, the peace process saw a feminist, cross-community, all-woman party participate in negotiations, campaigning for justice, gender equality and human rights. In other settings, women themselves, as well as society at large, have tended to interpret their activism as an extension of a maternal identity. Part of this was due to the fact that NI is a traditionally conservative society strongly influenced by the Catholic and Protestant churches. Another reason can be found in the motivation for women to become active: as a reaction to what was happening around them, often experiences of violence, loss and incarceration that directly impacted their families and communities. This politicised women, who turned to the wide range of communally based political mobilisation detailed in this chapter.

International second wave feminism and the women's movements in GB and ROI did, to some degree, influence NI from the 1970s and on. However, due to second wave feminism coinciding with the Troubles, "mainstream feminism [in NI] was restricted from making significant advances until the conflict subsided" (Piecuch, 2017, p. 37). As NI was largely governed through direct rule during the Troubles, legislative advances in women's rights mostly came through London. As such, some advances won by women in GB were extended to NI through direct rule (e.g., equal pay), while others were blocked by Stormont before it was dissolved in 1972 (e.g., abortion). Generally, British women were better off than women in NI in terms of women's rights. Advances in one jurisdiction did thus not necessarily extend to all women in the UK. ROI, on the other hand, was often more conservative than NI regarding women's rights (e.g., contraceptives being illegal) and therefore not as likely as GB to contribute to progressive change in NI. It was also difficult for women's rights groups in GB and ROI to work with groups in NI given their governments' involvement in the Troubles as well as the concern of becoming too "political" in relation to NI. Nonetheless, activists in NI

were able to tap into a wider feminist discourse thanks to relationships with international women's groups.

In NI, gendered notions of citizenship and ethno-nationalism have created both possibilities for and obstructions to women's political participation in public life. The increase in women's activism during this time tells us several things. NI society became a place where issues like discrimination, poverty and violence became highly visible at the grassroots level, especially in working-class communities. Women became involved due to the absence of men as many were interned/in prison, unemployed or on the run. Strategically it was easier for women to take part in this type of activism—and if not them, then who? There was also a pronounced absence of services that (should) exist during peace time, such as a (reliable) police force, public transportation, or even a functioning political system. The combination of these three factors went a long way to encourage—if not push—women into public and political activity. The experience of the Troubles also politicised many women, both in terms of ethno-nationalist belongings and as women. As such, in addition to supporting their communities, women also worked to reform their status and position as equal citizens with a right to participate fully in society. Women's work for gender equality and improving the lives of women has been performed, in different ways, through local community development work, in peace groups and by feminist organisations. At times it was done in single-identity settings and at other times with cross-community participation. To differing degrees, maternal, feminist, or intersectional identities have been utilised as basis for action and to build solidarity among women in their resistance and reform work.

The notions of citizenship present within both PUL and CNR communities tend to celebrate men as the “true” political beings, while women's participation has often been auxiliary and depoliticised. In the PUL community, notions of citizenship have largely adhered to a gendered division of labour. Women's work and participation has mostly been ancillary, supporting the political strategy of their male counterparts. This was true in both constitutional politics and armed groups. The encouragement for women to support Unionism and participate in public has often been framed in terms of maternal and domestic duties of protecting and caring for the home. The CNR community, on the other hand, has had a greater visible involvement of women in all roles, including as combatants. A rich history of female struggle and role models has developed, something that present-day activists have been able to utilise in their activism.

At strategic moments when women's participation was "needed", their public involvement has been tolerated and even celebrated. Despite this, their influence was restricted, and they were seldom treated as equals. The most distinct feminist activism took place within the CNR community. As explored in this chapter, the movements' relationships to the state can help us understand why this is. While Unionism/Loyalism defends the union with GB and, as such, the status quo, Nationalism/Republicanism challenges the state's legitimacy and aims to revolutionise it. Liberation movements, such as the Nationalist/Republican one, tend to present more fertile ground to develop analyses of other inequalities that also challenge the state, compared to defensive movements such as Unionism/Loyalism. Criticising the state that the community fights in defence of brings with it the risk of being labelled a traitor. Feminism has, as such, been strongly associated with the CNR community's anti-state struggle. The Republican feminist tradition linking British imperialism with patriarchy thus developed separately from the larger women's movement.

In community activism, sometimes based on the notion of family feminism and maternal politics, a version of female participation in public life is depoliticised. This activism is often framed as per chance, i.e., not premeditated, as a reaction to the situation in women's immediate vicinity. As many women became involved in community-based activism due to personal experiences in the private sphere as mothers and/or wives, (for example, losing a child to violence or having an incarcerated husband), many tended to interpret their participation as mothers and wives. The politicisation of the private sphere that occurred during the Troubles, where violence and politics "spilled over" into the private sphere, thus came to characterise the initiation of many women's activism and to inform how it was interpreted. The use of maternal politics was evident in the family feminism of some community activism and in women's peace activism. As such, some women activists have celebrated and emphasised women's roles as mothers in order to gain advances in rights for women, a strategy that resonated with many others. By pointing to women's "natural caring ability", they were able to carve out a niche of political public space for themselves, often without being seen as too threatening to traditional gender constructions and men. Traditional femininity was thus often used as an argument to allow women to take place alongside men in the public sphere, address conflict-related issues and encourage other women to do so too. As such, activism emerging from a conflict-ridden

private sphere was effectively expanded into a public setting, challenging the public/private divide despite its at times essentialising tendencies.

However, while this may paint an accurate picture of the day-to-day reality of the time, and women's own reasoning behind their activism, it can also lead to a depoliticisation of actions that, I would argue, are highly political. This type of reaction-based activism can be interpreted as a first step in a process of politicisation and political resistance. Just because one has not previously participated in public, political life or communicated their activism in terms of political ideology, does not mean that the first instance of activity is apolitical. So, the negative consequence of familial, maternal activism is that it reinforces the idea of women as non-political beings, belonging to the private sphere. While it encouraged participation, it did so within a narrow definition of what kind of participation was appropriate for women. This also leads to a reinforcement of the construction of women as inherently (more) peaceful (than men) and that women were not involved in the murky politics of ethno-nationalism. Additionally, constructing women as "having more in common with each other than with what divides them" without qualifying this claim adds to the perception of women being naturally inclined to work together, often while adding the argument that women do so "as mothers and wives".

The Troubles also witnessed a struggle for women's rights and feminism by a range of actors. Through their community work, women were able to re-define what political activism could entail, and as such, challenged the idea of a masculinised public sphere closed to women's participation. Out of this activism, a women's rights movement with a feminist analysis and agenda developed, and with this, maternalistic perceptions of earlier activism were challenged. So, the movement that emerged tried to move away from the gender tropes of the maternal, non-political, peaceful woman by instead encouraging women to participate as equal citizens on the basis of women's identities as women, not solely as mothers, carers or wives. Women's rights and feminist activism clearly placed women in the public sphere, explicitly challenging the idea of this as an exclusively male space and that women "belong" to the private non-political sphere, without essentialising women as caring or peaceful. The difficulties of the movement hinged on, among other things, the unwillingness to deal with difference and, a strategic avoidance of intersectional inequalities and contentious political issues which threatened to splinter an already frail movement. While women were encouraged to take public, political action, it tended to deal with issues they could agree on and

did not hinge on a specific woman's intersectional experience of multiple sites of oppression. This illustrates how difficult it was (and continues to be) to advance progressive politics while navigating a deeply divided ethno-national society.

Despite women's centrality in helping communities survive the conflict and their ability and success in building cross-community partnerships, women were largely excluded from the early phases of the peace process. The tradition of women's activism was being deliberately ignored and seen as "irrelevant" to the big-P politics of ethno-nationalist concern. Building on the feminist movement, decades of women's (at times maternal) cross-community grassroots work, and transversal theory, women came together, formed a political party and won seats to participate in the peace negotiations. Thanks to their relentless, difficult work, taking place in a sexist and conservative ethno-nationalist context, the peace agreement included promises of protecting human rights, including women's right to full and equal political participation. NIWC successfully utilised the transitional space to address a broad range of equality issues, including gender equality in public participation. Women thus fought the resistance they faced, making sure that their voices were heard. This activism was based on an ideology of intersectional, inclusive feminism and created space for women to bridge the divide between public and private. Women's intersectional identities were put at the centre of the work, giving voice to different perspectives, not only the common denominator for "women as a group". As such, NIWC's transversal activism encouraged differences to be brought into the open, to be discussed and acknowledged, while also establishing common ground and building coalitions on shared political goals.

## REFERENCES

- Alison, M. H. (2004). Women as agents of political violence: Gendering security. *Security Dialogue*, 35(4), 447–463.
- Alison, M. H. (2009). *Women and political violence: Female combatants in ethno-national conflict*. Routledge.
- Arexaga, B. (1997). *Shattering silence: Women, nationalism, and political subjectivity in Northern Ireland*. Princeton University Press.
- Arthur, P. (1996). Northern Ireland 1968–72. In A. Aughey & D. Morrow (Eds.), *Northern Ireland politics* (pp. 11–19). Longman.

- Ashe, F. (2012). Gendering war and peace: Militarized masculinities in Northern Ireland. *Men and Masculinities*, 15(3), 230–248.
- Ashe, F. (2019). *Gender, nationalism and conflict transformation: New themes and old problems in Northern Ireland Politics*. Routledge.
- Boyce, D. G. (1995). *Nationalism in Ireland*. Routledge.
- Breen, S. (2002). Mandarin Mayhem. In A. Bourke (Ed.), *The field day anthology, Irish women's writing and traditions* (Vol. V, pp. 432–434). New York University Press.
- Bryan, D. (2012). Titanic town: Living in a landscape of conflict. In S. J. Connolly (Ed.), *Belfast 400: People, place and history* (pp. 317–353). Liverpool University Press.
- Byrne, S. (2009). *Beyond the ethnonational divide: Identity politics and women in Northern Ireland and Israel/Palestine*. Queen's University Kingston.
- Byrne, S. (2013). Troubled engagement in ethnicized conflict: Negotiating difference among feminist activists in Israel/Palestine and Northern Ireland. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 16(1), 106–126.
- Cannavan, J. (2004). Revolution in Ireland, evolution in women's rights: Irish women in 1798 and 1848. In L. Ryan & M. Ward (Eds.), *Irish women and nationalism: Soldiers, new women and wicked bags* (pp. 30–44). Irish Academic Press.
- Cochrane, F., & Dunn, S. (2002). *People power? The role of the voluntary and community sector in the Northern Ireland conflict*. Cork University Press.
- Cockburn, C. (1998). *The space between us: Negotiating gender and national identities in conflict*. Zed.
- Connolly, C. (1995). Ourselves alone? Clár na mBan conference report. *Feminist Review*, 50(1), 118–126.
- Connolly, L. (2002). *The Irish women's movement: From revolution to devolution*. Palgrave.
- Corcoran, M. (2004). 'We had to be stronger': The political imprisonment of women in Northern Ireland, 1972–1999. In L. Ryan & M. Ward (Eds.), *Irish women and nationalism: Soldiers, new women and wicked bags* (pp. 114–131). Irish Academic Press.
- Dawson, G. (2010). *Making peace with the past?: Memories, trauma and the Irish troubles*. Manchester University Press.
- English, R. (2006). *Irish freedom: The history of nationalism in Ireland*. Pan Books.
- Evason, E. (1991). *Against the grain: The contemporary women's movement in Northern Ireland*. Attic Press.
- Fairweather, E., McDonough, R., & McFadyean, M. (1984). *Only the rivers run free: Northern Ireland, the women's war*. Pluto Press.
- Fearon, K. (1999). *Women's Work: The story of the Northern Ireland women's coalition*. Blackstaff Press.

- Fearon, K., & McWilliams, M. (2000). Swimming against the mainstream: the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition. *Gender, democracy and inclusion in Northern Ireland* (pp. 117–137). Basingstoke.
- Fitzduff, M. (2002). *Beyond violence: Conflict resolution process in Northern Ireland*. United Nations University Press.
- Forum for Political Dialogue and Understanding. (1998). *Northern Ireland forum for political dialogue*. Belfast. Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/19981212031403/http://www.ni-forum.gov.uk/> (Accessed: 2020-07-22).
- Gilmartin, N. (2017). Feminism, nationalism and the re-ordering of post-war political strategies: The case of the Sinn Féin Women's Department. *Irish Political Studies*, 32(2), 268–292.
- Glencross, J. (2011). *How the international women's movement discovered the 'troubles': Brokered and broken transnational interactions during the Northern Ireland Conflict, 1968–1981*. Peter Lang.
- Guelke, A. (2012). *Politics in deeply divided societies*. Polity Press.
- Hackett, C. (2004). Narratives of political activism from women in West Belfast. In L. Ryan & M. Ward (Eds.), *Irish women and nationalism: Soldiers, new women and wicked bags* (pp. 145–166). Irish Academic Press.
- Hammond Callaghan, M. (2002). Surveying politics of peace, gender, conflict and identity in Northern Ireland: The case of the derry peace women in 1972. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 25(1), 33–49.
- Hammond Callaghan, M. (2006). Bombings, burnings and borders: Remembering women's peace groups under internment. *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 32, 32–45.
- Hennessey, T. (1997). *A history of Northern Ireland 1920–1996*. Gill and Macmillan.
- Hill, M. (2020) 'Women's Movement in Northern Ireland' *Encyclopedia of Irish History and Culture*. Available at: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/international/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/womens-movement-northern-ireland> (Accessed: 2020-08-18).
- Kaufman, J. P., & Williams, K. P. (2007). *Women, the state, and war: A comparative perspective on citizenship and nationalism*. Lexington Books.
- Kilmurray, A. (2017). *Community action in a contested society: The story of Northern Ireland*. Peter Lang.
- Leonard, M. (1993). Rape: Myths and reality. In A. Smyth (Ed.), *Irish women's studies reader* (pp. 107–121). Attic Press.
- McCoy, G. (2000). Women, community and politics in Northern Ireland. In C. Roulston & C. Davies (Eds.), *Gender, democracy and inclusion in Northern Ireland* (pp. 3–23). Palgrave.

- McEvoy, S. (2009). Loyalist women paramilitaries in Northern Ireland: Beginning a feminist conversation about conflict resolution. *Security Studies*, 18(2), 262–286.
- McEvoy, S. (2010). Loyalist women paramilitaries in Northern Ireland: Beginning a feminist conversation about conflict resolution. In L. Sjoberg (Ed.), *Gender and international security: Feminist perspectives* (pp. 129–150). Routledge.
- McIntyre, A. (2004). *Women in Belfast: How violence shapes identity*. Praeger Publishers.
- McKittrick, D., Kelters, S., Feeney, B., Thornton, C., & McVea, D. (2007). *Lost lives: The stories of the men, women and children who died as a result of the Northern Ireland Troubles*. Mainstream Publishing.
- McVeigh, R. (2019). *Sectarianism: the key facts*. Equality Coalition.
- McWilliams, M. (1993). The Church, the State and the Women's movement in Northern Ireland. In A. Smyth (Ed.), *Irish Women's studies reader* (pp. 79–99). Attic Press.
- McWilliams, M. (1995). Struggling for peace and justice: Reflections on women's activism in Northern Ireland. *Journal of Women's History*, 7(1), 13–39.
- Miller, R. L., Wilford, R., & Donoghue, F. (1996). *Women and political participation in Northern Ireland*. Avebury.
- Morgan, V. (2003). The role of women in community development in Northern Ireland. In O. Hargie & D. Dickson (Eds.), *Researching the troubles: Social science perspectives on the Northern Ireland Conflict* (pp. 245–257). Mainstream Publishing.
- Morgan, V., & Fraser, G. (1994). *The company we keep: Women, community and organisations*. University of Ulster.
- Morgan, V., & Fraser, G. (1995). Women and the Northern Ireland conflict: Experiences and responses. In S. Dunn (Ed.), *Facets of the conflict in Northern Ireland* (pp. 81–96). St. Martin's Press.
- Morrow, D. (1996). Northern Ireland 1972–95. In A. Aughey & D. Morrow (Eds.), *Northern Ireland politics* (pp. 20–28). Longman.
- Mulholland, M., & Patel, P. (1999). Inclusive movements/movements for inclusion. *Soundings*, 12, 127–143.
- Ó Dochartaigh, N. (2017). What did the civil rights movement want? Changing goals and underlying continuities in the transition from protest to violence. In L. Bosi & G. De Fazio (Eds.), *The troubles in Northern Ireland and theories of social movements* (pp. 33–52). Amsterdam University Press.
- O'Keefe, T. (2017a). 'Mother Ireland, get off our backs': Republican feminist resistance in the North of Ireland. In L. Bosi & G. De Fazio (Eds.), *The Troubles in Northern Ireland and theories of social movements* (pp. 165–184). Amsterdam University Press.

- O'Keefe, T. (2017b) 'Policing unruly women: The state and sexual violence during the Northern Irish Troubles' *Women's Studies International Forum*, (pp. 69–77). Elsevier. Conference Proceedings.
- Opsahl, T., & Pollak, A. (1993). *A citizens' inquiry: The Opsahl report on Northern Ireland*. Lilliput Press.
- Persic, C. (2004). The emergence of a gender consciousness: Women and community work in West Belfast. In L. Ryan & M. Ward (Eds.), *Irish women and nationalism: Soldiers, new women and wicked bags* (pp. 167–183). Irish Academic Press.
- Piech, H. (2017). Feminism during the troubles in Northern Ireland. *The Onyx Review: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 3(1), 37–43.
- Porter, E. (1998). Identity, location and plurality: Women, nationalism and Northern Ireland. In R. Wilford & R. L. Miller (Eds.), *Women, ethnicity, nationalism: The politics of transition* (pp. 32–53). Routledge.
- Porter, E. (2007). *Peacebuilding: Women in international perspective*. Routledge.
- Racioppi, L., & O'Sullivan See, K. (2001). 'This we will Maintain': Gender, Ethno-nationalism and the politics of unionism in Northern Ireland. *Nations and Nationalism*, 7(1), 93–112.
- Racioppi, L., & See, K. O. S. (2000). Ulstermen and loyalist ladies on parade: Gendering unionism in Northern Ireland. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 2(1), 1–29.
- Ranstorp, M., & Brun, H. (2013) *Terrorism Learning and Innovation: Lessons from PIRA in Northern Ireland: A closed workshop summary*. Stockholm: Center for Asymmetric Threat Studies (CATS), Swedish National Defence College.
- Rooney, E. (1995). Political division, practical alliance: Problems for women in conflict. *Journal of Women's History*, 7(1), 40–48.
- Rooney, E. (2000). Women in Northern Irish politics: difference matters. In C. Roulston & C. Davies (Eds.), *Gender, democracy and inclusion in Northern Ireland* (pp. 164–186). Palgrave.
- Rooney, E. (2002). Community development in times of trouble: Reflections on the community women's sector in the north of Ireland. *Community Development Journal*, 37(1), 33–46.
- Rooney, E. (2003). Critical reflections and situated accounts: Women on war and peace. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 22(2), 151–156.
- Rooney, E. (2006). Women's equality in Northern Ireland's transition: Intersectionality in theory and place. *Feminist Legal Studies*, 14(3), 353–375.
- Rooney, E., & Swaine, A. (2012). The 'Long Grass' of agreements: Promise, theory and practice. *International Criminal Law Review*, 12(3), 519–548.
- Roulston, C. (1989). Women on the margin: The women's movement in Northern Ireland, 1973–1988. *Science & Society*, 53(2), 219–236.

- Roulston, C. (1996). Equal opportunities for women. In A. Aughey & D. Morrow (Eds.), *Northern Ireland Politics* (pp. 139–146). Longman.
- Roulston, C., & Davies, C. (Eds.) (2000). *Gender, democracy and inclusion in Northern Ireland*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Ryan, L. (2004). ‘In the line of fire’: Representations of women and war (1919–1923) through the writings of republican men. In L. Ryan & M. Ward (Eds.), *Irish Women and nationalism: Soldiers, new women and wicked hags* (pp. 45–61). Irish Academic Press.
- Ryan, L., & Ward, M. (2004). Introduction. In L. Ryan & M. Ward (Eds.), *Irish women and nationalism: Soldiers, new women and wicked hags* (pp. 1–13). Irish Academic Press.
- Sales, R. (1997). *Women divided: Gender, religion, and politics in Northern Ireland*. Routledge.
- Sharoni, S. (1998). Gendering conflict and peace in Israel/Palestine and the North of Ireland. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 27(4), 1061–1089.
- Shirlow, P., Graham, B., McEvoy, K., Ó hAdhmaill, F., & Purvis, D. (2005). *Politically motivated former prisoner groups: Community activism and conflict transformation*. Community Relations Council.
- Smithey, L. A. (2017). The Peace People: Principled and revolutionary non-violence in Northern Ireland. In L. Bosi & G. De Fazio (Eds.), *The troubles in Northern Ireland and theories of social movements* (pp. 203–221). Amsterdam University Press.
- Smooha, S. (1997). Ethnic democracy: Israel as an Archetype. *Israel Studies Bloomington*, 2(2), 198–241.
- Smyth, M., & Hamilton, J. (2003). The Human Costs of the Troubles. In O. Hargie & D. Dickson (Eds.), *Researching the troubles: Social science perspectives on the Northern Ireland Conflict* (pp. 15–36). Mainstream Publishing.
- Steel, J. (2004). And behind him a wicked hag did stalk’: From maiden to mother, Ireland as woman through the male psyche. In L. Ryan & M. Ward (Eds.), *Irish women and nationalism : Soldiers, new women and wicked hags* (pp. 96–113). Irish Academic Press.
- Talbot, R. (2004). Female combatants, paramilitary prisoners and the development of feminism in the republican movement. In L. Ryan & M. Ward (Eds.), *Irish Women and nationalism: Soldiers, new women and wicked hags* (pp. 132–144). Irish Academic Press.
- Urquhart, D. (2000). *Women in Ulster Politics 1890–1940: A history not yet told*. Irish Academic Press.
- Ward, M. (1995). Finding a Place: Women and the Irish Peace Process. *Race & Class*, 37(1), 41–50.

- Ward, M. (2004). Times of transition: Republican women, feminism and political representation. In L. Ryan & M. Ward (Eds.), *Irish women and nationalism: Soldiers, new women and wicked bags* (pp. 184–201). Irish Academic Press.
- Ward, R. (2006). *Women, unionism and loyalism in Northern Ireland: From 'tea-makers' to political actors*. Irish Academic Press.
- Women's Platform. (2024). *About us*. <https://womensplatform.org/about-us/our-story/>. Accessed 2024-07-15.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). Human/women's rights and feminist transversal politics. In M. M. Ferree & A. M. Tripp (Eds.), *Global feminism: Transnational women's activism, organizing, and human rights* (pp. 275–295). New York University Press.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





## Gender, Citizen Participation and Women's Political Activity in Post-Agreement Northern Ireland

This chapter explores how contemporary notions of and trends in citizen participation encourage or discourage women's participation in public, political life in Northern Ireland (NI) after the 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement (GFA). The chapter thus explores the consequences that notions of citizen participation have for women's political participation by comparing ideas about women's citizenship found in different levels of society, as well as obstacles to women's citizenship. Legally binding political agreements, as well as party manifestos, are analysed, exploring gender equality commitments and ideas about women's participation to unpack notions of women's political citizenship. These documents are contrasted with grassroots notions of women's participation based on interview and participant observation data.

NI is a consociational democracy and a transitional society, which is key for this analysis. As discussed in Chapter 2, transitions present a unique opportunity for women (and other excluded groups) to challenge and renegotiate ideas of political inclusion, put gender equality on the political agenda and broaden citizenship. However, the opportunity to reshape gender relations during transitions is often missed (Deiana, 2013) and women often face particular difficulties and backlash with new or increased restrictions of their rights. Women's participation in formal and informal politics is a necessary, although not sufficient, condition to seize opportunities for and combat obstacles to gender equality and

the fulfilment of women's rights in any society. It is especially important in a transitional setting, as potential backlash creates the suppression of women's participation and public sphere power (Ruth Roach Pierson, 2000).

In addition to being a transitional society, NI is also an ethnographically deeply divided society which further complicates issues of citizenship and political participation. Full and equal participation in political life is complicated in such societies as the political focus tends to be on constitutional arrangements and issues closely connected to those, i.e., issues that tend to reinforce rather than challenge the divide. Due to this, issues such as women's rights and political participation are often not prioritised. Thus, women's struggle for equal citizenship not only has to overcome the norms associated with the historically rooted, highly gendered, public/private divide and masculinised norms of citizen participation, but also the disinterest of the political elite and system of government in advancing issues outside the range of what is considered most important in terms of ethno-nationalist aims.

This chapter maps and analyses facts and perceptions of women's participation in public, political life, defined broadly to include political activity in formal and informal politics. Has the right to participate, and women's possibility to fulfil this right, been discouraged, marginalised or ignored? Or has women's participation been encouraged and have women been ensured sufficient access to participate? Overall, this chapter explores indications of progress, standstill or backlash in terms of women's right to participate in public, political life in NI since 1998. To explore how women's political agency and participation are encouraged or discouraged, this chapter unpacks what citizen participation means in NI, given its status as a transitional, deeply divided society. Based on data gathered from interviews, participant observation and document analysis, it does so by addressing three questions central to citizenship: Who is the ideal political participant? What does citizen participation and political activity entail? How is participation restricted and/or promoted in a consociational system?

This chapter addresses these questions by discussing gendered notions of citizen participation. The analysis explores different manifestations of women's public, political participation, filtered through aspects such as ethno-nationalist background, level of political activity and gender norms. Section 4.1 discusses ideas of who can, and should, participate

in public, political life. It explores study participants' gendered perceptions of the "good" citizen and the perceived validity of different voices in NI. Gendered (material) obstacles to women's political participation are discussed in 4.2. Section 4.3 then looks at what it means to be politically active by examining women's participation in formal politics, while 4.4 discusses consociational and ethno-national institutional barriers to women's participation in NI. It also analyses political parties' views of women's rights, as well as legislative trends in gender equality. The chapter is then concluded in 4.5, looking at how the ideas that underpin different types of participation encourage or discourage women's political participation.

## 4.1 THE IDEAL CITIZEN PARTICIPANT?

This section discusses how the ideal participant was imagined by study participants. All participants agreed that it was important for women specifically to be politically active, reasons for which are explored in Sect. 4.1.1. Section 4.1.2 explores participants' perceptions of their own political activity and the general lack of recognition of women's voices, experiences and contributions to public, political life in NI. Section 4.1.3 addresses fears of voicing dissenting opinions.

### 4.1.1 *Female Problem-Solvers and Male Troublemakers*

Four arguments for the importance of women's political participation emerged in the interview data, ranging from descriptive representation (representation by women) to substantive representation (representation of women's interests) (cf. O'Rourke, 2014). *First*, participants discussed the importance of female role models in politics to inspire other women to get involved. This "role model claim" articulates that "[w]hen more women candidates are elected, their example is said to raise women's self-esteem, encourage others to follow in their footsteps, and dislodge deep rooted assumptions about what is appropriate to women" (Phillips, 1995, p. 63). *Second*, participants argued that it is a question of democracy: since women make up half of the population, they should make up half of decision-making bodies. This articulates a "justice claim": a fair and representative political system should represent women as half of the populace (Danielsen et al., 2016; Donahoe, 2017; Phillips, 1995).

*Third*, women’s participation is important because they have lived experiences that lead to insights important for political life. This is based on the idea that not only is the personal political, but the political is indeed personal. In other words, politicians often speak and act from personal experience and, therefore, in male-dominated spaces, some experiences never surface. As such, “[t]here are particular needs, interests, and concerns that arise from women’s experience, and these will be inadequately addressed in a politics that is dominated by men” (Phillips, 1995, p. 66). Increasing women’s participation can thus result in a different political agenda (Donahoe, 2017). For instance, women were seen by participants as better at politically addressing issues related to women’s rights, families and communities. Men, on the other hand, were seen as disconnected from family and community life, and therefore unable to make “correct” political decisions regarding issues that directly impact women. As one participant argued, “men are ignorant in the true sense of [the word]—there are certain issues they do not understand first-hand” (Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist (PUL) interview).

*Fourth*, many participants argued that women are better than men at solving problems and working together, abilities that they have practised and developed through their lived experience of rearing families and community development. This was the most prevalent argument among participants as to why women’s political participation is important. This claim stresses “the way [women’s] presence will enhance the quality of political life” (Phillips, 1995, p. 62). What emerged was a quite essentialist and homogenised understanding of gender. In contrast to the citizenship theories permeated by male norms, participants argued that all the necessary “civic virtues” for a good citizen can be found in women. Women were described as being pragmatic problem-solvers willing to listen and compromise, while men were characterised as troublemakers who fight. Women were viewed as the “saviours” of small-minded political squabbling.<sup>1</sup> As one participant said:

I think men make a mess of everything they try to do [...] most men I know, they want to fight about everything. They do not want to sit down and talk about it and solve a problem [...] [women have to] bear the

<sup>1</sup> While this binary view was found in most responses, a few participants presented a more nuanced view.

brunt of the stupid mistakes men make. (Catholic/Nationalist/Republican (CNR) interview)

Women, participants argued, are accustomed to addressing problems pragmatically, and to looking at problems from different angles, which makes them “very good negotiators” (PUL interview).

Many participants therefore thought that if there were more women in political life, things would improve for NI. Women were perceived as both knowing what needs to be done, and “how to bring the changes about rather than just sitting and arguing over it” (PUL interview). The idea of women being determined to make progress was echoed by another participant: “men are lazy [...] women are more ‘get it done’ [...] and we will do it now” (CNR interview). This issue also came up in toolkit sessions (see Chapter 1), especially in relation to women’s resourcefulness during the Troubles, and a group of women pondered who is really the “weaker sex”? In another toolkit session, the group was asked by a visiting Republic of Ireland (ROI) civil servant what should be done to solve the Stormont impasse. The women in the cross-community group were confident they “could sort things out” and (half-jokingly) offered to take the place of Stormont politicians.

Similar results were found in the 2002 NI Life and Times Survey, where respondents were asked to choose characteristic attributes for male and female politicians (ARK, 2003), see Table 4.1. Confidence was the only characteristic that respondents attributed to both men and women. Apart from this, men and women were described almost entirely differently. Interestingly, respondents were also asked what characteristics they would like politicians to have, and the five highest-ranked attributes were all seen as more characteristic of women, see Table 4.2. This held true for male and female respondents, as well as those from a CNR and PUL background, with only slight variations.

It is not uncommon for this framing of women’s characteristics to be used as an argument for increasing women’s participation:

[i]t is often suggested, for example, that women will be less competitive, more co-operative, more prepared to listen to others; that women bring with them a different, and more generous, scale of values; that women raise the moral tenor of politics. These arguments are always associated with women’s role as caring for others, and often more specifically with their role as mothers. (Phillips, 1995, pp. 73–74)

**Table 4.1** Perceived top characteristics of male and female politicians

<i>Ranking</i>	<i>Male politicians</i>	<i>Female politicians</i>
1	Aggressive	Approachable
2	Ruthless	Able to compromise
3	Ambitious	Honest
4	Crafty	Level-headed
5	Tough; Strong leader	Practical; Believes in gender equality

Source NI Life and Times Survey 2002 ARK, 2003

**Table 4.2** Desirable characteristics of politicians per gender and community

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Total (%)</i>
Honest	69
Able to compromise	51
Hard working	46
Approachable	45
Level-headed	39

Source NI Life and Times Survey 2002 ARK, 2003

Such a characterisation of women thus aligns with ideas of political motherhood where maternal qualities of caring and compassion are privileged, facilitating women in bringing experiences from the private sphere into the political public sphere. In a sense, this does provide a challenge to the public/private divide. Despite this, it does not challenge the status quo that upholds traditional gender ideas. Women's participation then hinges on their maternal qualities, not their status as equal citizens with a participatory right. One can frame this binary narrative in terms of the "peaceful" woman and "warrior" man found in ethno-nationalism. This was seen in the maternal peace activism of the 1970s, in which women were portrayed, by themselves and society at large, as essentially more peaceful and willing to compromise than men (see 3.4.2). In this narrative, women's connection to and placement in the private sphere and their maternal experiences are seen as assets in terms of being able to work with Others as well as the ability to recognise what issues are most important. It also portrays women as "free" from ethno-nationalist ideas and identities, or at least, as being able and willing to look past them when confronted with problems that need solving. Men, on the other hand,

are portrayed as disconnected from the private sphere, stuck in ethno-nationalist ideology and aggression. Their citizen participation is thus strongly connected to their ethno-nationalist, and perhaps even violent ethno-nationalist, credentials—signalling a parallel to the citizen-soldier concept where citizenship is linked to military service. Women and men's participation thus hinges on a one-dimensional understanding of identity. Intersectional theory helps us see that such a simplified version of identity both homogenises women (and men) and conceals differences in terms of class, age, ability, ethno-nationalist background, etc.

The prevalence of this pro-woman binary gender narrative among both PUL and CNR participants might partly be explained by the fact that participants were chosen for this study because of their experience of cross-community activities. Cross-community settings probably attract participants willing to be challenged and learn new things from someone considered Other. As such, participants are, perhaps, more open to compromise and have learned to address problems with a sense of pragmatism, compared with people who have not participated in cross-community work. The tradition of cross-community work in NI has also historically been associated with women to a greater extent than men, as illustrated in Chapter 3. In this sense, it is not surprising that women with cross-community experience might see themselves as more skilled than men in terms of bridging divides, learning from others and compromising—skills required for successful cross-community work. Observing a formal political system, mostly populated by men, that is both dysfunctional and polarised probably adds to this perception. Additionally, most of the participants speak from grassroots experience, i.e., not experience of governance and political negotiations in formal politics. This can also impact their view of a dysfunctional formal political system dominated by men.

#### *4.1.2 Political Self-Image and Lack of Recognition*

Despite participating in a range of political activities and seeing women's private sphere experiences as meriting for political agency, most participants did not identify as politically active. Participants thus showed a discrepancy between self-perception and actual levels of political activity. Although a majority of participants answered “no” when asked if they considered themselves politically active, quite a few contextualised their answers. This was more common among CNR women, perhaps signalling

a broader understanding of what political activity can entail. Not identifying as politically active despite participating in political activities, can be understood in several ways. As one participant commented: being politically active is not seen as something positive in NI (PUL interview). This is connected to how political activity is defined. Many participants associated political activity with the formal party-political system. It is therefore not strange that women who are not in a party would decline to identify as politically active, as they would not see their activities as “political” in that sense of the word. However, even women who are active within party politics seem wary of identifying with formal politics. At an event about women’s public participation, Sinn Féin (SF) Minister and Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), Deirdre Hargey, said “I don’t see myself as a politician, I see myself as a political activist” and former Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) leader Dawn Purvis introduced herself as a “re-covering politician”.

As is discussed further on in this chapter many of the participants feel failed by the political system, which is yet another reason why they would not want to identify with it. This was echoed in an interview with Emma Campbell (Alliance for Choice (AFC)): “party politics have been so polluted by sectarianism [and] I think that is why people, quite rightly, are wary of it” (Expert interview). There is also sometimes a tendency to use “political activity” as a synonym for paramilitarism, which participants are (understandably) wary of. Identifying as politically active can also have the connotation of being set in your ways and closeminded, in the way men were characterised in the previous section. This was hinted at by one participant who, despite being quite active, said that she would not consider herself a politically active person, explaining “I am a Protestant, and I am a Loyalist, but [...] I see the wider picture, I don’t see the narrow side of things ever” (PUL interview). This corresponds to an understanding of politics as taking sides in the ethnonational conflict (Glencross, 2011) or as sectarianism (Miller et al., 1996).

While there was not a stark difference between CNR and PUL participants regarding identifying as politically active, when looking at ethno-national political identities (Unionist/Loyalist/Nationalist/Republican) they gave different answers. Among PUL participants, only one woman identified as Unionist, while six of the CNR participants identified as either Nationalist, Nationalist/Republican or Republican. Even though these labels can sometimes signify a cultural identity, they also carry a political significance. Looking at the political identities that

participants chose (Liberal/Conservative/Feminist/Socialist), a different picture emerges. While the majority of CNR participants did not choose any, the majority of PUL participants did. Of them, most identified as feminist, some as socialist and a few as liberal. Consistently, PUL participants more readily chose all three in comparison to CNR participants. This result was surprising given the fraught relationship between the PUL community and feminism as well as socialism and the limited space for political identities that challenge the status quo. Perhaps this signals that these PUL participants no longer identify with that tradition politically and identify as Other in terms of community belonging. As a consequence, they might have sought other identities that allow, for example, feminist ideas to be given priority over ethno-nationalism. Given the links between feminism and the CNR community, it is unsurprising that participants from a CNR background tended to more frequently choose both ethno-national and political identities to describe themselves.

Another discrepancy that emerged from the data was between participants' level of confidence and their level of political activity and experience. This issue was also brought up at an event addressing the under-representation of women in public, political life where several prominent women spoke about how low levels of confidence had been a barrier for them. A lack of confidence can certainly be a barrier to both identifying as and being politically active in the public sphere. While this is an issue that is worth discussing, it was interesting to see that this was the first thing mentioned in terms of restrictions to women's participation, rather than material obstacles such as lack of childcare, lack of means or lack of time (see 4.2), or institutional obstacles such as the ones a consociational system of government present (see 4.4). Some of these issues were brought up later during the event but boosting women's confidence was the most prominent remedy mentioned to increase women's participation. This perspective is problematic as it places the responsibility of increasing women's participation on individual women, rather than reforming the structures of public and political life that clearly restrict increased female participation. It is not about changing the system to fit women, but becomes women's job to change themselves to fit in the system.

An issue closely connected to one's political activity is the ability to voice an opinion and to be taken seriously. Participants were asked if they felt that all voices were seen as equally valid in their communities. The overall consensus was that women's voices are not seen as equally valid

and that they often have to provide evidence of their knowledge in order to be listened to and taken seriously. So, despite participants' understandings of women as being "better" than men at political decision-making and problem-solving, they were very aware of the opposite perception in society at large. They recognised that women are not seen or treated as political beings with valid ideas and agency to the same extent as men are. Even though many participants acknowledged improvements over time, they also expressed the lack of validity of women's voices, both in the PUL and the CNR community. The feeling that women's opinions are not taken seriously is "a fair feeling" according to Elaine Croy (Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA)), as women and the women's sector "aren't listened to" (Expert interview). One participant said that even confident women "have to basically produce a CV to get listened to", while men do not (PUL interview).

The lack of recognition also has to do with where politically active women can be found, and as such, the definition of political activity. NI's conservative ethno-nationalisms have often constituted women's identity as apolitical and suited to the private sphere (Ashe, 2006b). The tendency to define political activity as participation in formal party politics (usually at higher levels) renders some women's participation and contributions invisible because they take place in informal, grassroots settings, and therefore do not "count". This was addressed at an event by WRDA's Women's Sector Lobbyist, Rachel Powell, who argued that women are not seen as having expertise, despite the fact that they have been running and representing their communities for decades, and that this work needs to be acknowledged. It is also about women recognising their own expertise. As one participant said:

I think it is such a barrier to women participating in politics if they only think of politics as being an MLA, being a councillor, being an MP [Member of Parliament]. If they realise "I have actually been doing political work for 10 years and maybe I would actually be quite good at this", because I think that is what men are better at. (PUL interview)

Another participant shared this sentiment: "We don't recognise just how much we do do; we don't recognise all our achievements" (PUL interview). Instead of seeing experiences of family life as valuable experiences for political life, it is seen as obstacles by society: "instead of saying '[...] [I] would be really good, I am working for education because my kid has

needs in education [...] so I have experience', it is not used as experience, it is used as a hinderance" (CNR interview).

### 4.1.3 *Fear of Voicing (Dissenting) Opinions*

Another theme that emerged in the interviews was the fear of voicing your opinion and of voicing the "wrong" opinion when living in a deeply divided ethno-national society. This was discussed by both CNR and PUL women (CNR and PUL interviews). For example, one participant said that she identifies as Irish even though she is from a Protestant family:

you are not allowed say that in my family. [They would say] "you are what? You are British! Don't be saying you are Irish"—you get hung, drawn and quartered! [...] There is no room for even any movement. (PUL interview)

Another PUL participant also touched on a similar issue as she talked about family pressures to vote for Democratic Unionist Party (DUP): "why do I have to vote DUP just because I am Protestant and because I am from East Belfast?" (PUL interview). The issue of being punished or targeted in response to voicing the "wrong" opinion was also discussed by CNR participants:

you are scared to say things in the community [...] if you get mixed up in the wrong kind of things they will come back on your house or they will take it out on your car [...] you would be targeted. (CNR interview)

There is also a gendered aspect to this fear. One participant, having experience of living in both communities, talked about the social control that stems from a paramilitary presence:

that is very intimidating for women in particular, particularly for women who are single mothers or for women who do not have another man who can back them up. That serves to silence a lot of women [...] you think twice about what you are going say, because you have got to live in your area, and you cannot take the risk of being homeless. [...] I think both [communities] are hostile environments for women [...] sometimes the Loyalist community gets a bit of a bad press with things like this, but honestly [...] I would not say that it was any better or any worse than any other community, both were bad. (PUL interview)

Both CNR and PUL women discussed their reluctance to voice dissenting opinions in their communities and expressed fear of being targeted if they were to do so.

## 4.2 GENDERED OBSTACLES TO WOMEN'S CITIZENSHIP

A lack of reproductive rights, childcare, employment opportunities and domestic and sexual violence are examples of obstacles, often framed as “private sphere issues”, women have to overcome to participate in society's public sphere. They illustrate the impact the lack of resources and support have on women's ability to fully participate in public, political life.

A key issue for women's equal citizenship and participation is access to *reproductive rights*. Not having control of one's body and being forced to travel to access reproductive healthcare negatively impacts women's ability to participate fully in society. When the 1967 Abortion Act became law in Great Britain (GB), it was not extended to NI. As such, until recently, NI was governed by a law from 1861 which made having or assisting an abortion in NI punishable by life in prison (Ashe, 2019). Only when a woman's life was at risk and there was permanent/serious risk to her physical and/or mental health have abortions been allowed. In all other cases, including in cases of rape or fatal foetal abnormalities, abortion has been illegal, despite strong public support for abortion rights in such cases (Gray, 2017; Gray et al., 2018). For a long time, NI women have thus had to travel to England for abortions, paying out of pocket (Ashe, 2019; Evason, 1991). Abortion was decriminalised in 2019 (see 4.4.2.1) and the abortion rights framework came into effect in March 2020 (Amnesty International UK, 2020). However, as of August 2023, full abortion services had not been commissioned yet and only abortions through medication (so-called Early Medical Abortions) were available in the region (Women's Resource & Development Agency, 2023).

NI is the only part of the United Kingdom (UK) that does not have a government-funded *childcare* scheme (Powell, 2020) and the average cost of full-time childcare remains high (Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland, 2020). Half of families and 63 per cent of single parents spend more than 20 per cent of their income on childcare, and about half of families resort to loans and savings to pay for childcare (WPG, 2020). The lack of affordable childcare impacts women disproportionately as they are

more likely to provide care, work less outside the home and make up the vast majority (91 per cent) of single parents (WPG, 2020). As such,

a universal, free and high-quality childcare provision [...] is fundamental to facilitating women's participation and ability to access paid work, education and training and progressing gender equality in paid and unpaid work. (WPG, 2020, p. 46)

In 2020, 52 per cent of women were *unemployed* and represented 82 per cent of part-time workers (Powell, 2020). Compared to men, women are more likely to be forced out of the labour market by unpaid, domestic work and caring responsibilities (Powell, 2020). Women with dependent children are also over-represented in part-time work (WPG, 2020). There is also a gender pay gap, as women's gross annual earnings are almost 30 per cent below that of men (WPG, 2020). Women are more often concentrated in "low paying and precarious sectors such as caring, cleaning and the service/hospitality industry" (WPG, 2019, p. 2).

*Intimate partner violence* (IPV) and *sexual violence* continue to be problems in NI, which has "significant implications for physical and psychological well-being and a victim's capacity to engage in society" and disrupts all facets of life for victims (Doyle & McWilliams, 2018, p. 4). As such, IPV is linked to women's limited societal participation and should be addressed to enhance gender equality and women's social, economic and political participation (Doyle & McWilliams, 2018). In 2018/19, nearly 32,000 domestic abuse incidents were recorded by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), the highest level in 15 years and a 10 per cent increase from the previous year (Powell, 2020; WPG, 2019). From 2004/05 to 2021/22 the number of domestic abuse crimes more than doubled (Wright et al., 2024). In total, domestic abuse accounts for 16 per cent of all crime and the PSNI responds to an incident every 17 minutes on average (Powell, 2020). About 2,400 sexual offences were recorded in 2018/19 and roughly 1,000 rapes (WPG, 2019). In 2017, NI "was identified as having the joint highest levels of femicide in Europe" (WPG, 2019, p. 5), three times higher than in GB (Wright et al., 2024). Between 2017 and 2021, 34 women and girls were murdered by men (Wright et al., 2024).

Gender-based violence remains invisible and lacking in political priority—the 2016 strategy for addressing domestic violence came without a budget (Claire Pierson, 2018). Domestic and sexual violence

continues to be underreported and prosecutions remain low (WPG, 2019); the vast majority of cases in 2010–14 not leading to prosecution (Claire Pierson, 2018). However, some advances have been made. With the Domestic Abuse & Civil Proceedings Act (NI) 2021 (which came into force in 2022), coercive control was criminalised (Nexus, 2024), as well as psychological, emotional, financial and economic abuse in addition to physical and sexual violence (Police Service of Northern Ireland, 2024). Perpetrators of IPV are no longer able to “draw readily on paramilitary connections (real or fictitious) to control their intimate partners” as previously, due to the demobilisation of paramilitary groups (Doyle & McWilliams, 2018, p. 5). There has also been a significant increase in access to policing, especially for IPV victims in the CNR community (Doyle & McWilliams, 2018).

### 4.3 DEFINING WOMEN’S CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN FORMAL POLITICS

The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) argues that states should “ensure to women, on equal terms with men”, the right to vote, stand for and hold public office, and participate in civil society organisations (‘Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,’ 1979, article 7). This section takes a closer look at women’s participation in the formal political system by examining voting and running for office as examples of political participation (cf. liberal citizenship theories). Women’s participation in informal, local politics and public life is discussed in Chapter 5.

According to Hayes and McAllister (2013), women in NI (regardless of community background) are significantly less likely than men to report an interest in politics and support a political party. This was echoed by study participants, who largely viewed the formal political system negatively. Politics and politicians were described as focusing on the wrong things, not taking important issues seriously and not being able to solve problems. Participants also characterised politics as sexist and misogynistic and politicians as fearmongering:

I do not think any politician over here knows anything about anything. [...] the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing. [...] I

do not think they realise to what degree [...] people are struggling. (PUL interview)

Given this negative view, in addition to the tendency to equate political activity with party politics, it is not surprising that so few participants were keen to identify as politically active. Participants' characterisation of the political system and politicians also had many things in common with how men in general were described. As such, the formal political system was largely coded male by participants. Despite this, there has been an increase in women's participation in party politics since 1998.

### *4.3.1 Political Parties and Citizen Participation*

This section explores party-political views of citizen participation by analysing manifestos from the five biggest parties—Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (APNI), DUP, Socia Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), SF and Ulster Unionist Party (UUP).<sup>2</sup> Manifestos were chosen to give a snapshot view of the parties' and political elites' understandings of citizen participation roughly 20 and 25 years post-GFA<sup>3</sup> for elections at different decision-making levels (local councils, Stormont assembly and Westminster parliament): 2017 assembly election; 2017 general election; 2022 assembly election; 2023 local election and 2024 general election. Analysing these manifestos enabled a comparison between the parties' views (over time), those of study participants and feminist conceptualisations of gender-equitable participation.

In the 2017 manifestos, APNI was the only party that substantially discusses participation, while the Unionist and Nationalist parties show a narrow, passive understanding of citizen participation, mostly focusing on voting. As Table 4.3 shows, participation is rarely mentioned and when it is, it tends to refer to NI/UK participation in international forums like the European Union. The only time it is discussed in relation to individuals is in the DUP general manifesto (DUP, 2017b) in terms of guaranteeing full participation in celebration and commemoration of national events to maintain and promote a common identity. It is striking that the DUP

<sup>2</sup> Smaller parties, like the Greens, have been excluded because of their marginal number of elected politicians.

<sup>3</sup> The 2019 elections were excluded as the idea was to provide a comparison between 20 and 25 years post-GFA.

only speaks of participation in terms of maintaining PUL cultural identity, rather than as engagement with the political system. This also shows an exclusive notion of participation as it only applies to the PUL community, not the entire citizenry. In the 2017 and 2022/23/24 manifestos SF discusses citizenship rights, respect and equality of people who live on the island of Ireland (SF, 2017a, 2017b, 2022, 2024), while UUP discusses citizenship in relation to the Union with GB (UUP, 2017b) and DUP again discusses the rights of citizens to celebrate their culture and identity (DUP, 2023). The fact that a Nationalist party speaks of citizen rights on an all-island basis, while a Unionist party focuses on the UK is not surprising. It is, however, interesting that both speak of citizenship in terms of protection of rights, rather than highlighting the duties that come with those rights.

Neither the DUP nor the UUP discuss citizen participation in any of their manifestos from 2022/23/24, apart from the DUP (2024) discussing their return to participating in Stormont. APNI (2017a, 2022), however, discusses “active citizenship”, arguing for government structures and a strategy that promotes active citizenship and supports the voluntary sector. The party wishes to “promote an active role in communities for those who want it” for instance by producing a public consultation on active citizenship (APNI, 2017a, p. 66; 2022, p. 77). They thus recognise that the vital importance of the voluntary and community sector in NI (APNI, 2017a), which aligns with republican citizenship theories that promote active citizens.

In the 2022/23/24 manifestos, there has been a slightly increased focus on participation in the manifestos of SDLP and SF (and continued focus in APNI manifestos)—especially in the form of citizens’ assemblies. APNI (2022, 2024), for instance, wishes to establish a citizens’ assembly to tackle societal issues such as the climate emergency and promote citizen engagement. SDLP (2023) also promotes the use of (mini-)citizens’ assemblies as a way to promote and increase civic participation in local council areas, alongside townhall meetings and participatory budgeting. SF (2022, 2023, 2024) wishes to establish an all-island citizens’ assembly, in cooperation with the Irish government, to discuss Ireland’s constitutional future and allow people to participate in the planning and preparation for constitutional change. Similarly, SDLP has created an “Experts and Reference Panel” with members from civil society across the island to hold discussions on a new Ireland (SDLP, 2022, 2024).

**Table 4.3** Citizen participation analysis of party manifestos 2017–2024

<i>Manifesto (number of pages)</i>	<i>Participation</i>	<i>Citizen</i>
APNI Assembly 2017 (88)	16	11
APNI General 2017 (39)	8	7
APNI Assembly 2022 (94)	14	15
APNI Local 2023 (16)	1	1
APNI General 2024 (48)	2	3
Total (285 pages)	41 (14.4%)	37 (13%)
SDLP Assembly 2017 (28)	1	1
SDLP General 2017 (32)	0	4
SDLP Assembly 2022 (40)	2	8
SDLP Local 2023 (36)	11	11
SDLP General 2024 (48)	1	5
SF Assembly 2017 (12)	0	9
SF General 2017 (14)	0	10
SF Assembly 2022 (20)	1	4
SF Local 2023 (16)	1	1
SF General 2024 (10)	0	3
Total (256 pages)	17 (6.6%)	56 (21.9%)
DUP Assembly 2017 (8)	0	0
DUP General 2017 (24)	6	4
DUP Assembly 2022 (60)	4	2
DUP Local 2023 (28)	0	5
DUP General 2024 (48)	2	9
UUP Assembly 2017 (32)	0	3
UUP General 2017 (12)	0	3
UUP Assembly 2022 (40)	1	3
UUP Local 2023 (20)	1	2
UUP General 2024 (40)	1	7
Total (312 pages)	15 (4.8%)	38 (12.2%)

*Sources* Political manifestos 2017–2024 Alliance Party Northern Ireland, 2017a, 2017b, 2022, 2023, 2024; Democratic Unionist Party, 2017a, 2017b, 2022, 2023, 2024; Sinn Féin, 2017a, 2017b, 2022, 2023, 2024; *Social Democratic and Labour Party*, 2017a, 2017b, 2022, 2023, 2024; Ulster Unionist Party, 2017a, 2017b, 2022, 2023, 2024

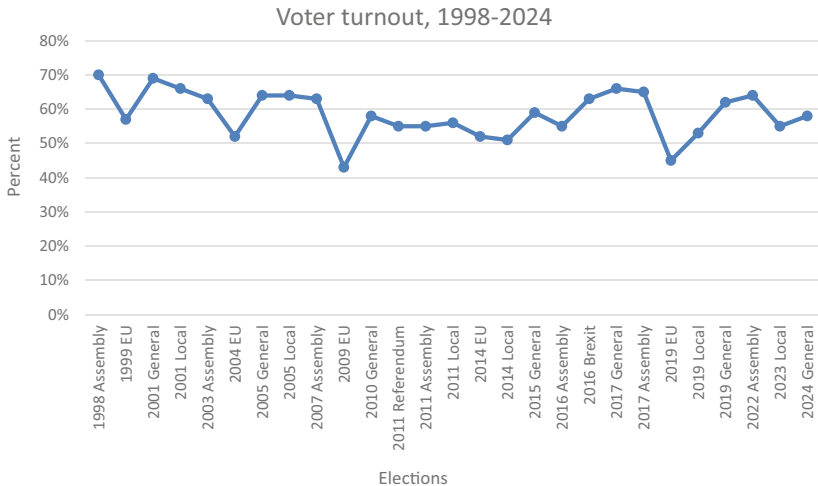
### 4.3.2 *Women and Voting as Political Participation*

Voting is a key participatory activity in representative democracies. Although most participants in this study had voted at least once, the ones who did not identify as politically active articulated feeling fed up with politics, which has often led to them not voting. This is not uncommon in NI. From 1998 to 2014, there was a steady decrease in voter turnout

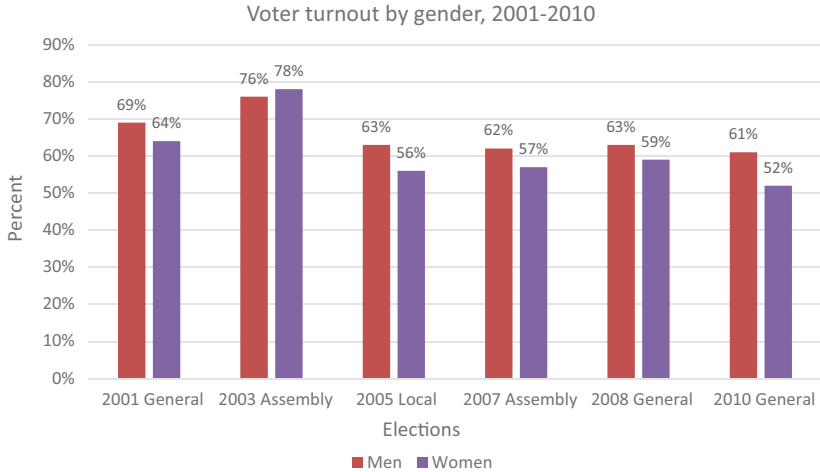
(from 70 to 51 per cent) and the highest turnout (70 per cent for the 1998 election) has not been reached since (see Fig. 4.1). Additionally, data from 2001 to 2008 shows a gender difference in voting, with women’s turnout being consistently lower than men’s (see Fig. 4.2).

In terms of community belonging, the differences are starker, especially in terms of the turnout of people who identify as “Other” (see Fig. 4.3). Despite the group of people identifying as “Other” growing, their voter turnout is significantly lower. In terms of CNR and PUL, the election data presented in Fig. 4.3 shows that the numbers are close. In three of the elections, CNR turnout was slightly higher than PUL. However, in pre-agreement NI, the electoral turnout was traditionally higher among Protestants than Catholics (Hayes, 2017b).

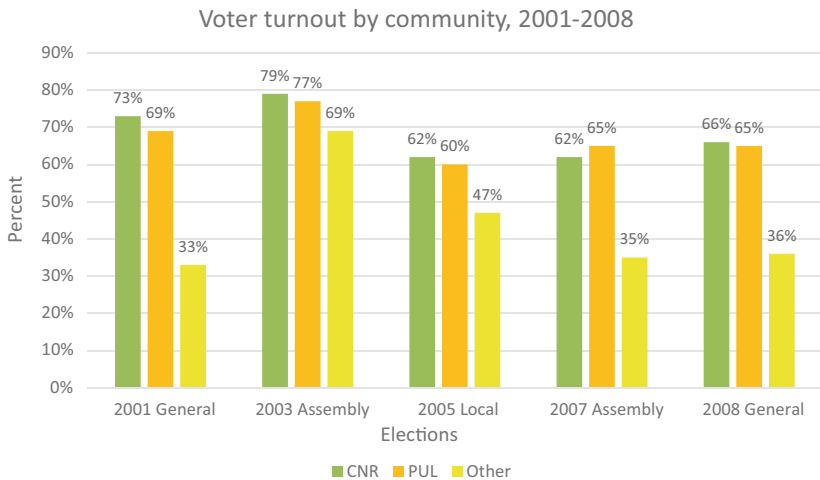
In terms of gender and community belonging, Hayes (2017a) argues that there has been “a significant religious gap in women’s electoral participation” since 1998, with PUL women being “notably less likely to turn out to vote”. This gap in women’s turnout is both greater than the gap between CNR and PUL men, as well as the gap between CNR and



**Fig. 4.1** Voter turnout, 1998–2024 (*Sources* ARK, 2019; BBC, 2005; Conflict Archive on the Internet, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d, 2024e, 2024f, 2024g, 2024h, 2024i, 2024j, 2024k, 2024l, 2024m, 2024n, 2024o, 2024p, 2024q, 2024r, 2024s; Electoral Office for Northern Ireland, 2011, 2024)



**Fig. 4.2** Voter turnout by gender, 2001–2010 *Note* This is based on self-reported voting data (*Sources* ARK, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2009; Galligan, 2013; Hayes et al., 2003)



**Fig. 4.3** Voter turnout by community, 2001–2008 *Note* This is based on self-reported voting data (*Sources* ARK, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2009; Hayes et al., 2003)

PUL communities as a whole (Hayes, 2017b). For example, in the 2015 Westminster election, 70 per cent of CNR women claimed to have voted, compared with 55 per cent of PUL women (Hayes, 2017b). According to voter turnout data controlled for other variables, Catholic women are almost twice as likely as Protestant women to vote (Hayes, 2017b, p. 335). This was also the case for the women in this study, as more of the CNR participants had voted.

PUL women's lower turnout can be understood in terms of their greater antipathy towards political parties and lack of trust in politicians, as well as a lack of support for power-sharing at Stormont (Hayes, 2017a, 2017b). This is something that participants in this study, especially PUL participants, touched on. Some participants said they did not vote because they were tired of political squabbling or as a protest against their family's or community's political alignments along ethno-nationalist lines (CNR and PUL interviews). There was also a strong feeling of lack of change, that key issues in their neighbourhoods were not being taken care of, and that politicians do not seem to care about local communities (CNR and PUL interviews). Several PUL participants had been told by family members to vote for the DUP, to make sure "their side" would not lose seats. One PUL participant talked about how her grandmother was key to her voting, indicating that she also encouraged her to vote DUP: "if it wasn't for my Nanny, I wouldn't vote. [...] if I have not voted she will take me around and she will stand outside the ballot box and she will be 'just tick it [...] every vote counts'" (PUL interview).

### 4.3.3 *Female Politicians, Feminism and Double Standards*

Since 1998, there has been a slow increase in the number of female MLAs in NI, see Table 4.4. As of the 2017 assembly election, 30 per cent of MLAs were women (Conflict Archive on the Internet, 2024a) and there was thus, for the first time, a critical mass<sup>4</sup> of women at Stormont. By 2022, the percentage of female MLAs had increased to 38 per cent (McMurray, 2022). As of the 2024 general election, 28 per cent of the 18 Westminster seats reserved for Members of Parliament (MPs) from NI were filled by women (O'Neill, 2024). For comparison, the percentage of

<sup>4</sup> A critical mass is reached when over 30 per cent of the representatives are women (Cowell-Meyers, 2003).

female members of Dáil Éireann was 23 and the percentage of Irish senators was 38 in 2023 (Women for Election Data Hub, 2024). In 2024, 40 per cent of the members of the European Parliament were women (European Parliament, 2024), the regional average in Europe was 31 per cent and 40 per cent of MPs in Westminster were women (IPU Parline, 2024).

In the first years following the Agreement, leadership positions were rarely occupied by women (Margaret Ward, 2000). However, between 1998 and 2016, 13 women have held ministerial seats and in the new executive formed in 2024, four of the ten ministers were women (a slight decrease from the previous executive where six ministers were women). The executive is led by two women—First Minister Michelle O’Neill (SF) and Deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly (DUP). There were more women in political leadership positions in NI during 2016–2020 than the combined number of women members at Stormont 1921–1972.

There have also been some improvements in local government. The percentage of female candidates increased from about 16 in 1997 to 32 in 2023 and the percentage of elected female councillors increased from about 15 in 2000 to 31 in 2023 (Galligan, 2019; Hughes, 2023; McCoy, 2000; National Women’s Council of Ireland, 2024). At this rate, it will take another five elections to achieve gender parity at the polls (National Women’s Council of Ireland, 2024). In 2019, women constituted 42 per cent of public appointments (Rouse, 2020), an increase from 35 per cent in 1996 (Galligan, 2013).

**Table 4.4** Female MLAs elected to the NIA, 1998–2022

<i>Election year</i>	<i>Number of female MLAs</i>	<i>Total number of MLAs</i>	<i>Percentage of female MLAs</i>
1998	14	108	13
2003	18	108	16.7
2007	18	108	16.7
2011	20	108	18.5
2016	30	108	27.8
2017	27	90	30
2022	34	90	37.8

*Sources* Conflict Archive on the Internet, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d, 2024e, 2024f; McMurray, 2022; Northern Ireland Assembly, 2017; Potter, 2016

Public perceptions of women in politics are also becoming more positive: “[s]upport for the general notion that the involvement of women in politics would help matters has increased over time, and there is a fairly large body of people who believe that the involvement of women in the Assembly had made things better in NI politics” (Galligan & Dowds, 2004). However, these perceptions do not speak to whether the increase in female politicians have made any substantial difference in political life or for women in NI. Data from 2002 shows that a majority of respondents thought that the increased involvement of women had either made things better in politics (41 per cent) or that things had not changed as a result (32 per cent) (ARK, 2003). Participants in this study, however, were divided on how much of a difference the increase has made. As one participant said: “we still have the same issues [...] if we had changed, we wouldn’t be sitting the way we are today” (CNR interview). There is also a risk associated with the visuals of more women in party politics, as it can lead (some) to equate it with a substantial reform of the system as well as society itself in terms of gender equality:

there is still quite a lot of sexism. I think people try to say there is not. [...] like “we are fine now” in terms of gender equality. And we are obviously not fine now. (CNR interview)

Such a perception could, in turn, lead to the idea that gender equality no longer needs to be put on the political agenda. This type of discussion also runs the risk of equating female politicians with feminism:

obviously, there is a difference between being a female politician and being a feminist [...] we need to be careful not be misled by the visuals [...] there are female leaders who are going to progress the position of women, there are those who because of the ideology of the party or because of their own personal beliefs are definitely not. (PUL interview)

Female politicians do not automatically promote feminist policies. Emma Campbell (AFC) commented on this in relation to Arlene Foster (DUP): “Arlene being head of the DUP is a bit like Margaret Thatcher being the Prime Minister in that she hasn’t done anything to raise up the standards of living for women [...] she may well be a woman, but she is certainly not a feminist” (Expert interview). Closely connected to this, as well as to the fact that women participate in a male-dominated political system,

is the question of how much power female politicians “actually” have. In a toolkit session (see Chapter 1), participants argued that as long as the political system is structured as it is, an increase in women politicians will not necessarily change anything. Many participants also pondered whether women have substantial power, or if they are tokens, only there just for the show to make the party look good in terms of gender equality and to get more (female) votes (CNR and PUL interviews). One participant summarised this:

I think strategically a lot of parties have been putting women at the fore-front to [show they are equal], but I think some of them deep down still do not respect [women] enough. They use them as the face of the party, but they are not actually a voice. (PUL interview)

The tokenistic explanation for the increase in female politicians goes hand in hand with a phenomenon called “the glass cliff”. Research has shown that “women are more likely to be placed in leadership positions which are risky or precarious” (Exeter Psychology Department, 2020). The metaphor of the cliff “evokes a woman who has reached the heights of senior leadership, but nonetheless finds herself teetering on the edge” (Exeter Psychology Department, 2020). This was explored by one participant who said: “[when] everything is going to s\*\*t, we’ll put a woman in charge. [...] if it does not [go well], then, ah, well, it is because she was a woman” (PUL interview). For example, in terms of Prime Minister (PM) Theresa May and Brexit: “[her] appointment coincided with a flurry of male politicians standing down from (or away from) significant leadership roles” (Exeter Psychology Department, 2020).

Another thing that inhibits the possibility for female politicians to make substantial change is sexist double standards. Women who work in political institutions have faced many difficulties as the post-Agreement period “has been marked by sexist exclusion, [and] gender-based harassment through verbal intimidation” (Brown & Ní Aoláin, 2015, p. 134). The sexist double standard of NI politics was something that many participants addressed, including the abuse female politicians face online. Many spoke about how women in politics are judged and ridiculed, more harshly than men, in terms of things like family life, qualifications and physical appearance and how this deterred them from public political participation (CNR and PUL interviews). Several participants mentioned that when Arlene Foster was elected as DUP leader, she was congratulated by a

(male) colleague who said that her most important job was still as a wife and mother (PUL and Expert interviews). The seeming obsession with female politicians' family lives was also evident when Michelle O'Neill was promoted into her current leadership position, she was spoken about as "Mum of two" (PUL and Expert interviews). One participant talked about how this impacts women's participation in formal politics: "Not a lot of women are going to step forward to have constant judgements" (CNR interview) and another said: "[as a woman if] you say the wrong thing, you are done for. [...] Women are very much [...] dispensable" (PUL interview). Considering this, it is understandable that many women prefer participation in venues such as local communities (explored in Chapter 5).

#### 4.4 CONSOCIATIONAL RESTRICTIONS TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

This section explores institutional restrictions and consociational consequences for women's public, political participation in NI. Consociationalism, or power-sharing, is the system of government opted for in the GFA (Brown & Ní Aoláin, 2015). It recognises the societal fragmentation and ethno-nationalist divide in conflict-ridden societies like NI and emanates from a perspective of conflict management through formal politics (Murtagh, 2008). For instance, to ensure a mutual veto for the two ethnonational communities, the 90 MLAs have to register as "Nationalist", "Unionist" or "Other" (Murtagh, 2008; Nagle & Clancy, 2012). In the short term, power-sharing incentivises groups to end violence and share political power (Nagle & Clancy, 2012), thus providing stability during transitions (Brown & Ní Aoláin, 2015). However, they are also associated with a set of obstacles for women's political citizenship, explored below. First, a discussion of how political polarisation and instability are rewarded is presented in 4.4.1. Following this, in 4.4.2, the lack of focus on gender equality issues is investigated and the lack of women in conflict-legacy institutions is discussed in 4.4.3.

#### 4.4.1 *Rewarding Political Polarisation, Ethno-National Politics and Instability*

Deeply divided societies tend to have a high degree of political stalemate over key issues, which, unfortunately, may be exacerbated in consociational structures. As Horowitz (2014, p. 12) argues, consociationalism “is a system frequently immobilized with respect to the very questions the agreement was made to settle”, leading to deadlock and inability to get things done. NI is an example of this: while consociationalism has helped keep the peace, “it failed to deal with contentious ethnic issues” set out in the GFA (Horowitz, 2014, p. 14). As such, it could be argued that consociationalism is not suited to mitigate conflict in deeply divided societies (Horowitz, 2000, p. 256). In addition to political stalemate, states with power-sharing often see continuously unstable and inefficient governments with polarisation being institutionalised (Jarstad, 2009). This tends to exacerbate and entrench divisions (Nagle & Clancy, 2012) and ethnic elites may be incentivised to escalate their claims (Rothchild & Roeder, 2005). This can lead to a prioritisation of hostilities based on group identification rather than building a shared, reconciled, democratic society (Nagle & Clancy, 2012).

In such a system, the issues deemed most urgent in ethno-nationalist terms are often prioritised. As Murtagh (2008, p. 23) argues, incentives for parties to pay attention to “other” issues are reduced in consociationalism, which “renders a severe disconnect between citizens and the political system”. The NI political agenda has been dominated by ethno-national divisions over the constitutional issue (Hayes & McAllister, 2013). Many study participants touched on this, talking about how politicians in NI tend to focus on so-called “Orange-and-Green”<sup>5</sup> (i.e., ethnonational) issues, instead of addressing more urgent, everyday issues as defined by the participants (CNR and PUL interviews). One participant said:

[politicians] are either Orange or Green and I have no time for that. [...] I want politicians who want to negotiate and be willing to compromise, everybody cannot have everything they want and deny the other party

<sup>5</sup> These colours are seen to represent the two ethno-national communities—Orange/PUL and Green/CNR.

everything that they want [...] that is not a democratic society, that is a dictatorship in another form. (PUL interview).

Another PUL participant said: “if the likes of the Irish Language Act and the parades [...] [were] taken out of politics and if working groups were set up to address those issues, would it give the politicians more time [to focus on other issues?]” (PUL interview). As such, there was a perception among study participants that the focus on ethno-nationalist issues is at the expense of “normal politics”. They criticised the lack of political action and cuts to a range of policy areas: social welfare and benefits; education; mental health and healthcare (CNR and PUL interviews). This is echoed by Murtagh (2008) who argues that politicians often neglect issues such as health, welfare and education, as these are subordinated to the “national” question. While consociational structures have been successful in so far as they have helped NI move on from dealing with the conflict by violent means, the ethno-national conflict (and issues tied to it) have been embedded in the structures themselves. As Brown and Ní Aoláin (2015, p. 128) argue, power-sharing arrangements

are necessary scaffolding and a limiting straitjacket in one handy package, preventing disintegration but also stunting growth [...] [They have] had a singular effect on deepening nationalist identity and rewarding its expression through political power that enables clientelism, resilience and the intensification of traditional identities and militant expressionism.

One can see evidence of this happening in NI. A process of political polarisation has occurred since 1998 (Guelke, 2012). The political parties central to the peace process, the SDLP and UUP, have lost their political majority as the once smaller, more radical, ethno-nationalist parties, the DUP and SF, have increased their electoral presence. Already in the 2003 election, the inversion of majority parties became clear and both SF and DUP continued to increase their political presence in the two subsequent elections, 2007 and 2011 (Rooney & Swaine, 2012). However, the stance of SF and DUP “has become more accommodating to the functioning of the Belfast Agreement, albeit it has been amended in a number of ways so as to address their views and interests” (Guelke, 2012, p. 117). Both parties have also moderated their positions in some ways as their share of the votes have increasing (McCulloch, 2014).

The political life of the Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA) and Executive has been fraught with conflict and setbacks since its inception. The Executive has been suspended on six occasions, three of them lengthy, since it met for the first time in 1999.<sup>6</sup> In January 2017, it collapsed as Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness (SF) stepped down due to First Minister Arlene Foster (DUP) and her party's involvement in a scandal surrounding a failed renewable energy scheme costing the public millions of pounds (BBC, 2016; McDonald, 2017).<sup>7</sup> The suspension carried on for three years until January 2020 and was frequently discussed in the interviews. With so many uncertainties about the future that directly impact the day-to-day lives of people, especially women, requiring political attention (such as Brexit and Universal Credit), the bulk of participants viewed the suspension as irresponsible and many criticised that MLAs were still receiving wages even though Stormont was not up and running.<sup>8</sup> After extensive negotiations, a new Executive was formed in January 2020 (see 4.4.3 for analysis of the deal that was made). After only two years, it collapsed again in February 2022 as the DUP withdrew in protest of post-Brexit trade checks between NI and GB in the Irish Sea (BBC, 2024). At the start of 2024, a deal ("Safeguarding the Union") was made between the DUP and the UK Government laying out measures to simplify trade between GB and NI (Campbell, 2024). On the basis of the deal, the DUP agreed to form a new Executive in February 2024, with Michelle O'Neill (SF) being appointed as the first Nationalist First Minister and the first non-Unionist Executive leader since partition and the DUP's Emma Little-Pengelly as Deputy First Minister (Carroll, 2024).

The suspensions go hand in hand with how ethno-national divisions are maintained by politicians and the formal political system. Since the system of government is built on (and upholds) a division between the ethno-nationalist blocs, political parties depend on differences being maintained to protect their power and influence. As Hayes (2017a)

<sup>6</sup> [1] 11 February-29 May 2000; [2] 11 August 2001; [3] 22 September 2001; [4] 15 October 2002-8 May 2007; [5] 9 January 2017-11 January 2020; and [6] 4 February 2022-3 February 2024.

<sup>7</sup> Under the power-sharing rules, the resignation of the First or Deputy First Minister means that the other automatically loses their position as well and the Executive collapses.

<sup>8</sup> New laws could not be passed nor issues debated in the Assembly, public services being run by civil servants.

argues, “the electoral mobilization of citizens along ethnic and/or religious lines and the calculation of the ‘ethnic/religious headcount’ has dominated the political agenda”. Some participants argued that people have moved further in terms of bridging this divide and that politicians are the ones keeping communities apart, playing on people’s fears of being left behind or oppressed (CNR and PUL interviews). As one participant put it,

we get on better [without politicians]. It is the politicians that is causing the issues [...] they are the ones that is hurting more and doing the damage to this country. They are trying to push us all back. [...] We get on a lot, lot better without “themmens”. (CNR interview)

#### *4.4.2 Lack of Focus on Gender Equality Issues*

Consociationalism thus has negative consequences for issues deemed outside the scope of ethno-national politics, such as gender equality. This section explores the lack of political focus on gender equality, first by looking at NI politics in general (4.4.2.1), and then by exploring the gender equality attitudes among the five biggest political parties (4.4.2.2).

##### *4.4.2.1 Gender Equality and Post-Agreement Consociational Politics*

Since the GFA, it has proved difficult to maintain gender equality on the mainstream political agenda (Eitrem Holmgren, 2014), as it is “generally regarded as separate from and less pressing than equality of opportunity between the two communities” (Side, 2009, p. 71). The implementation of the Agreement and the institutional framework it established, including policy decisions made within the new framework, have “retained gendered exclusions and perpetuate gendered stereotypes” with relative ease (Deiana, 2013, p. 400). Fifteen years post-Agreement, women’s citizenship thus continued to be demoted (Deiana, 2013). Although the GFA offered the potential to expand women’s political citizen rights, progress has been lagging (Side, 2009). As Byrne (2009, p. 110) notes:

the political spaces open to women during the peace process all but disappeared in the post-Agreement period as political institutions in [NI] become bogged down by narrow ethnonational agendas.

Gender issues have thus tended to be filtered out by ethno-national concerns (Ashe, 2012), despite ideas about gender being integral for upholding ethno-nationalist structures and identities. Devolution was motivated by a desire to end the violence, rather than bringing about a more progressive politics in terms of gender equality (Meehan, 2003). This has acted to supersede gendered experiences of the conflict (Deiana, 2013) and gender concerns are “held hostage of a de facto ‘ethno-national straitjacket’” (Deiana, 2016, p. 109). Rewarding nationalist structures in this way also results in an entrenchment of male privilege, which can act to silence women who criticise patriarchal structures (Brown & Ní Aoláin, 2015). Women’s full and equal political participation has not been reinforced and gender equality continued to be ranked as a low priority (Margaret Ward, 2004, 2006). This is enhanced by the fact that the GFA’s commitment to women’s full and equal political participation was made without an enforcement mechanism (Rooney & Swaine, 2012).

In an attempt to take gender equality seriously, the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister adopted a ten-year Gender Equality Strategy in 2006 with the aim to “identify the causes of gender inequality and tackle the structural inequalities which can perpetuate them” (Braniff & Whiting, 2016, p. 98). One of its strategic objectives was “to ensure the active and equal participation of women and men at all levels of civil society, economy, peace building and government” (Office of the First Minister & Deputy First Minister, 2010, p. 34). However, “ambitious and promising as this strategy is, actual impact has been less impressive” (Braniff & Whiting, 2016, p. 98). As long as ethno-national identity remains a prominent institutionalised feature of formal politics, challenging gender inequalities will require more than a strategy (Braniff & Whiting, 2016). During the Stormont shutdowns, NI was run by the civil service which meant that only existing policies could be implemented and no new policies could be instituted, such as a new gender equality strategy (Gorvett, 2019). The political instability of the state has thus had consequences for a range of issues as planned policies and programmes were halted or never initiated, which also negatively impacted the implementation of gender equality measures. Despite the persistence of entrenched gendered violence and discrimination, gender equality has not been given the attention (or resources) it requires (Deiana, 2013).

In late 2020, work began on the development of a new Gender Equality Strategy, following approval from the new Executive formed in January 2020 (Department for Communities, 2024). The new strategy will aim to fulfil commitments made in the New Decade, New Approach agreement (see 4.4.3) (Department for Communities, 2024). In March 2021, an expert advisory panel drawn from academia and the voluntary and community sectors<sup>9</sup> published a report making recommendations on the themes the strategy should address (Department for Communities, 2024). The idea was for the content of the report to be used to inform the Executive’s Gender Equality Strategy, with support and advice from a co-design group with key stakeholders drawn from civil society<sup>10</sup> and a cross-departmental working group<sup>11</sup> (Department for Communities, 2024). The fact that expertise from both academic studies and civil society was taken into consideration in the report and will be considered in the drafting of the strategy is a positive step in the right direction, mitigating some of the lack of communication between formal politics and grassroots activism (further discussed in Chapter 6). The new strategy was set to be published by the end of 2021, subject to the agreement of the Executive (Department for Communities, 2024) but as of August 2024, no new strategy had been published. In April 2024 the Minister for Communities, Gordon Lyons (DUP), reported that he is considering the next steps for the strategy and that its content and implementation will be subjective to Executive agreement (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2024).

Two gender issues that have managed to surface in the ethno-nationalist political climate, equal marriage and abortion rights, have been framed by parties as battering rams. The issues have thus, to a degree, become “ethno-nationalised” with SF being pro-choice, pro-equal marriage and DUP anti-abortion and against equal marriage. As Emma Campbell (AFC) put it: “parties like the DUP have tried to weaponise [...] [and] sectarianise equality [...] and Sinn Féin try to make themselves the party of equal rights [even though] it took so long to get them onboard some of the issues in the first place” (Expert interview).

<sup>9</sup> Panel members: Ann Marie Gray (ARK), Siobhan Harding (Women’s Support Network), Rachel Powell (WRDA), Louise Coyle (NI Rural Women’s Network).

<sup>10</sup> Groups include, among others, WRDA, Women’s Policy Group, Women’s Platform, the Equality Commission and trade unions.

<sup>11</sup> Departments include, among others, Justice, Health and the Education.

Constructing an ethno-nationalist narrative around issues such as abortion has cemented conservative views in Unionist parties, where progressive politics are portrayed as “Nationalist” and therefore, by default, not something Unionists can agree with. This narrative has been constructed despite many disagreeing with the idea that equality is a “Nationalist” concern. In fact, Protestants have historically been more accepting of abortion (Gray, 2017) and there is strong support for abortion reform across NI (Gray et al., 2018). Linking gender equality to ethno-nationalist identity politics has been a barrier to progressive legislation allowing little room for movement. When legislation did come through, it was not through Stormont. The DUP and other anti-abortion MLAs even staged a (failed) recall of the assembly (which was suspended at the time) to prevent the rights being extended to NI (Carroll, 2019). NI civil society groups successfully lobbied Westminster MPs, who extended protection for abortion rights and legalised equal marriage in NI in October 2019. As such, the power-sharing system, and the parties within it, were unable to legislate to protect basic human rights.

#### 4.4.2.2 *Party Differences in Women’s Participation and Gender Equality*

As “there are no designated or mandatory institutional responsibilities for the advancement of women’s *political* citizenship rights” in NI, it largely falls on individuals and political parties to improve women’s political participation (Side, 2009, p. 74). Unfortunately, most politicians have poor track records when it comes to this (Side, 2009). However, this does not mean that progress is equally restricted by all political parties. In fact, when comparing Nationalist,<sup>12</sup> Unionist<sup>13</sup> and Other<sup>14</sup> parties, stark differences emerge. As prefaced in Chapter 3, the CNR and PUL communities have differing relationships to the state and to feminism. This section builds on Chapter 3 by adding to it a discussion of post-Agreement party politics which also includes parties designated as Other. As such, this section looks at how female participation in party politics and gender equality attitudes differ between the political blocs. As Table 4.5

<sup>12</sup> Nationalists: SF, SDLP.

<sup>13</sup> Unionists: DUP, UUP, Traditional Unionist Voice, NI Conservatives, UK Independence Party, PUP, UK Unionists.

<sup>14</sup> Other (non-ethnonationally aligned): Alliance, Green Party, People Before Profit, Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition, Independents.

shows, Nationalist parties are ahead of Unionists in terms of female representation in the NIA, and MLAs designated as Other closely resemble Nationalists, sometimes with a greater representation, sometimes falling behind. The same patterns hold when examining the percentages of female candidates standing for local government and the percentages of elected female councillors in the 2019 election (see Table 4.6).

Galligan (2013, p. 21) summarises the differences:

the written commitment to women's equal participation in political and public life contained in the [GFA] has largely been ignored until recently by [U]nionist parties, consistently promoted as part of a [N]ationalist equality agenda by Sinn Féin, regularly acknowledged as challenge for

**Table 4.5** Female MLAs by community designation, 1998–2022

<i>Election year</i>	<i>Nationalists women (tot) percentage (%)</i>	<i>Unionists women (tot) percentage (%)</i>	<i>Other women (tot) percentage (%)</i>	<i>Female MLAs percentage (%)</i>
1998	8 (42) 19	3 (55) 5.5	3 (11) 27.3	13
2003	12 (42) 28.6	4 (59) 6.8	2 (7) 28.6	16.7
2007	12 (44) 27.3	4 (55) 7.3	2 (9) 22.2	16.7
2011	11 (43) 25.6	7 (55) 12.7	2 (10) 20	18.5
2016	13 (40) 32.5	13 (55) 23.6	4 (13) 30.8	27.8
2017	15 (39) 38.5	7 (39) 18	5 (12) 41.7	30
2022	17 (35) 48.6	9 (37) 25	8 (18) 44.4	37.8

*Sources* Conflict Archive on the Internet, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d, 2024e, 2024f; McMurray, 2022; Northern Ireland Assembly, 2017; Potter, 2016

**Table 4.6** Female candidates and elected councillors by community designation, 2019 local election

<i>Party group</i>	<i>Per cent of female candidates (%)</i>	<i>Per cent of elected female councillors (%)</i>
Nationalists	37	35
Unionists	19	18
Other	29	28
Total	28	26

*Source* Galligan, 2019

democratic politics by Alliance, and subject to variable attention by the SDLP.

So, while SF has been more active on gender equality issues (partly due to the pressure women have put on the party), very few Unionist women have held positions of power (Ashe, 2006a). In terms of candidate selection, the DUP adheres to the merit principle (Galligan, 2013; Hayes, 2017b), a policy supported even by a new, more progressive membership that is more supportive of increasing women's participation (Braniff & Whiting, 2016). Candidates are chosen through a central selection process, which tends to be the primary route for DUP women into political office (Braniff & Whiting, 2016). Likewise, the UUP avoids quotas and positive discrimination to increase women's participation (Rachel Ward, 2002).

The relationship of Unionism and Nationalism to the state and whether they are challenging or defending the status quo is a key aspect in understanding their differences regarding women's participation and progressive gender equality policies. Due to the parties' alignment with ethno-nationalisms, the left–right political spectrum is of limited use in NI, although perhaps more so in the past twenty years. To some extent, the main parties representing the CNR community lean towards socialism and left-wing politics, while the main PUL parties are more conservative and lean to the right. At the same time, SF has had strong ties with socially conservative Catholicism, which in part explains the party's anti-abortion stance being held until 2018. As Elaine Crory (WRDA) stated in 2020: “[SF] absolutely refused to engage [...] we had to drag [them] kicking and screaming to a pro-choice position and the SDLP still aren't fully there” (Expert interview). The DUP, while clearly socially conservative, is not as conservative in its fiscal policies and public spending as “traditionally” right-wing parties might be expected to be. As such, any neat left–right classification is difficult to achieve. Nonetheless, this does mean that for progressive Unionists, there are few left-wing alternatives (only PUP), and for right-leaning Nationalists there are no parties to vote for without going against their constitutional interest. As Emma Campbell (AFC) put it: “there is a lot of holding your nose to vote in NI” (Expert interview). This was recognised by a PUL participant, who said:

I agree a lot with [SF's] socialist views [...] Just a wee bit more resigned to the fact that their total focus is on a United Ireland, if they took it off that, I would actually vote for them. (PUL interview)

This additional political divide thus either reinforces the dependency on ethnonationalist voting or leaves people without electoral options. It also provides context in understanding the differences in ethno-nationally aligned policies on women's participation, as left-wing parties tend to have more progressive stances and right-wing parties' gender policies more conservative. But what about a centrist, liberal non-ethnonational party like Alliance? In general, liberalism incorporates a degree of gender equality politics, traditionally focusing on the protection of women's (liberal) rights. In addition to this, it might be possible to understand their focus on gender equality and women's participation as a consequence of not being aligned with ethno-nationalist politics, and therefore being freer to focus on issues outside the spectrum of Orange-and-Green. As discussed in Chapter 2, nationalism is a gendered phenomenon, instructed by patriarchal ideas about "appropriate" roles for women and men. A party that is not aligned to a nationalist movement, might create space for focusing on gender equality and promoting women's participation. An analysis of political manifestos from 2017 and 2022/23/24 shows that APNI and the Nationalist parties mention women and gender issues at about the same rate, while the Unionist parties lag behind (see Table 4.7).

In the 2017 *Unionist* manifestos, there are a few mentions of women and gender, but none to very little substantial gender analysis or policies. Neither of the DUP manifestos offer any gender analysis. Similarly, previous manifestos have also tended to emphasise constitutional matters and generally ignore women's issues (Galligan, 2013). In the 2017 Assembly manifesto (2017, p. 19), UUP discusses "an economy that struggles to meet the needs of women returning to work" after having children and their commitment to a Childcare Strategy. The focus is thus placed on women's mothering responsibilities, rather than focusing explicitly on women's participation in public life. As Galligan (2013, p. 17) argues: "UUP policies on gender equality are constructed on classical liberal equal opportunity lines". The lack or very limited inclusion of gender equality in Unionist politics was also touched on by participants in this study. Several PUL participants shared experiences of not being treated as political subjects, with a lack of expectation of them to

Table 4.7 Gender analysis of party manifestos 2017–2024

<i>Manifesto (number of pages)</i>	<i>Women/girls/female</i>	<i>Men/boys/male</i>	<i>Gender/sex</i>	<i>Women in photos (total)</i>	<i>Men in photos (total)</i>
APNI Assembly 2017 (88)	28	5	10	8 (8)	6 (8)
APNI General 2017 (39)	10	2	2	1 (1)	0 (1)
APNI Assembly 2022 (94)	24	8	25	21 (26)	19 (26)
APNI Local 2023 (16)	2	0	2	6 (8)	4 (8)
APNI General 2024 (48)	8	1	2	9 (13)	10 (13)
Total (285 pages)	72 (25.3%)	16 (5.6%)	41 (14.4%)	45 (80.4%)	39 (69.6%)
SDLP Assembly 2017 (28)	0	0	2	18 (43)	31 (43)
SDLP General 2017 (32)	6	0	2	20 (27)	26 (27)
SDLP Assembly 2022 (40)	11	0	4	26 (43)	28 (43)
SDLP Local 2023 (36)	11	0	4	20 (22)	11 (22)
SDLP General 2024 (48)	12	1	6	13 (19)	16 (19)
SF Assembly 2017 (12)	0	0	6	2 (3)	2 (3)
SF General 2017 (14)	3	0	1	2 (4)	2 (4)
SF Assembly 2022 (20)	8	0	5	9 (10)	6 (10)
SF Local 2023 (16)	4	0	0	5 (5)	3 (5)
SF General 2024 (10)	5	0	2	2 (2)	0 (2)
Total (256 pages)	60 (23.4%)	1 (0.4%)	32 (12.5%)	117 (65.7%)	125 (70.2%)

(continued)

Table 4.7 (continued)

<i>Manifesto (number of pages)</i>	<i>Women, girls/female</i>	<i>Men, boys/male</i>	<i>Gender/sex</i>	<i>Women in photos (total)</i>	<i>Men in photos (total)</i>
DUP Assembly 2017 (8)	0	0	0	0 (0)	0 (0)
DUP General 2017 (24)	2	1	0	1 (2)	1 (2)
DUP Assembly 2022 (60)	6	1	3	19 (26)	17 (26)
DUP Local 2023 (28)	2	2	0	6 (11)	8 (11)
DUP General 2024 (48)	9	1	3	11 (21)	18 (21)
UUP Assembly 2017 (32)	3	2	3	7 (13)	10 (13)
UUP General 2017 (12)	3	2	0	8 (28)	27 (28)
UUP Assembly 2022 (40)	9	2	11	15 (38)	26 (38)
UUP Local 2023 (20)	0	0	0	3 (4)	3 (4)
UUP General 2024 (40)	10	0	4	17 (44)	36 (44)
Total (312 pages)	44 (14.1%)	11 (3.5%)	24 (7.7%)	87 (46.5%)	146 (78.1%)

*Sources:* Political party manifestos Alliance Party Northern Ireland, 2017a, 2017b, 2022, 2023, 2024; Democratic Unionist Party, 2017a, 2017b, 2022, 2023, 2024; Sinn Féin, 2017a, 2017b, 2022, 2023, 2024; Social Democratic and Labour Party, 2017a, 2017b, 2022, 2023, 2024; Ulster Unionist Party, 2017a, 2017b, 2022, 2023, 2024

be politically involved. One PUL participant talked about how women are not highlighted within the Unionist tradition, arguing that if “you are a woman, you are a second-class citizen” (PUL interview). The idea that female political leaders were used as tokens to make the party look good was especially prevalent in relation to Unionist politics, specifically the DUP and former party leader Arlene Foster. Such ideas are fed by the concept of the political sphere as the realm of men, constraining women’s agency (Donahoe, 2017). Many participants, from both PUL and CNR backgrounds, talked about how Foster does not have any “real” power and that she is merely a puppet (CNR and PUL interviews). For instance, one participant said: “I think Arlene [...] is not really allowed to do her job. I think those men are more dinosaurs [...] they are pulling her strings” (CNR interview).

The 2022/23/24 Unionist manifestos provide a slightly enhanced discussion of gender issues compared with their 2017 counterparts. In both the DUP and UUP manifestos there is a clear focus on different aspects of women’s health and women as victims of violence. While the UUP focuses on providing menopause care and fertility treatment, the DUP take a clear pro-life stand, raising concerns about abortion pills and abortion being “foisted” on relationship and sexuality education in schools (DUP, 2022, 2023, 2024, UUP, 2022, 2024). In terms of women as crime victims, both parties address the importance of a strategy and legislation to tackle various forms of violence against women and girls (DUP, 2022, 2024; UUP, 2022, 2024). Both the focus on women’s health and victims of violence portray women as needing protection and help, rather than as actors in their own right.

Unlike the DUP, the UUP (2022, p. 25) offers a commitment to “achieving true gender equality”, wanting to “create a world where woman have equal opportunities, equal pay, are protected from discrimination and are safe and respected”. Their manifestos address barriers to women’s participation in employment (like affordable childcare), gender-responsive budgeting and parental leave (UUP, 2022, 2024). There is, however, no discussion of improving women’s representation in politics. The UUP (2024, p. 12) also promotes what they call “the widely accepted definition” of women as adult females and promises to protect women’s spaces, a perspective that could be seen as transphobic. At the same time, they (2022) want to ensure that transgender people have access to support, information and care services.

The 2017 *Nationalist* manifestos differ from the Unionist ones in that they include a slightly more evident gender analysis and commitment to gender equality. SF (2017a, p. 10) argues that gender equality is a priority, and they commit “to adopting the UN gender approaches to post conflict situations”. Even though the manifestos only include a handful of references to women and gender, SF have historically “displayed a sustained commitment to gender equality, and to gender proofing and mainstreaming all policies”, thanks to its women’s section (Galligan, 2013, p. 21). The 2017 SDLP general election manifesto (2017a) discusses women and gender issues in a range of different areas, such as in relation to the two-child cap on tax credits and women’s pension inequalities. The SDLP (2017a, p. 14) also addresses domestic abuse and gender violence, calling for a strategy and comprehensive legislation to tackle NI’s “unacceptable levels”. As such, the party demonstrates a certain level of gender analysis. The party “has had the benefit of drawing on detailed feminist-oriented policy research and analysis” and input from an active women’s group (Galligan, 2013, p. 18). However, the commitment to gender equality and women’s participation has been uneven in SDLP manifestos since 1998: some include an active agenda to increase women’s participation in public and political decision-making, while others have been silent (Galligan, 2013).

The Nationalist manifestos from 2022/23/24 share many similar areas of focus. Both the SDLP and SF seek to protect and promote women’s human rights in their manifestos, with SF placing a priority on the production of a new Gender Equality Strategy (SDLP, 2023, 2024; SF, 2022, 2023, 2024). They also focus on violence against women, discussing the importance of a strategy addressing violence against women and girls (SDLP, 2022, 2023, 2024; SF, 2022, 2023, 2024). The 2024 SDLP manifesto (2024) also discusses the urgent need to reverse the cut of state funding to Women’s Aid. In terms of healthcare, SF argues that reproductive health services must be delivered (SF, 2022, 2024), while SDLP focuses on the provision of gender-affirming healthcare (SDLP, 2024). There is a scant focus on women’s political participation in the manifestos of both parties: SF (2023) only mentions that over 40 per cent of their candidates are women and SDLP (2023) writes about how women’s groups were included in their New Ireland Commission. The biggest difference between the parties is SDLP’s focus on women’s employment, such as protection from discrimination, pension justice,

maternity pay, the gender pay gap and costly childcare (SDLP, 2022, 2023, 2024).

Some of the issues mentioned in Nationalist and Unionist manifestos were also found in *Alliance* manifestos, such as unequal retirement policies and women returning to work after having children (APNI, 2017b). The 2017 assembly election manifesto has an entire section solely devoted to women, addressing issues related to gender inequality and “systemic barriers” to equal opportunities for women:

supporting the right of women to reach their potential in work, public life and public services. We will continue to represent women whose views are often unrepresented in the public debate about the future of Northern Ireland. (APNI, 2017a, p. 18)

The section deals with many priorities—childcare, careers, parental leave, pensions, violence, equal pay, health and education (APNI, 2017a). This trend continues in the manifestos from 2022/23/24, which display a broad range of issues relating to women’s rights and gender equality. They want to remove systemic barriers preventing gender equality and promote “equality of opportunity, equality of treatment, equality of access, and equality under the law for all people, irrespective of gender” (APNI, 2022, p. 14). In addition, APNI (2022) argues for central and local government to conduct gender impact analyses for all policies.

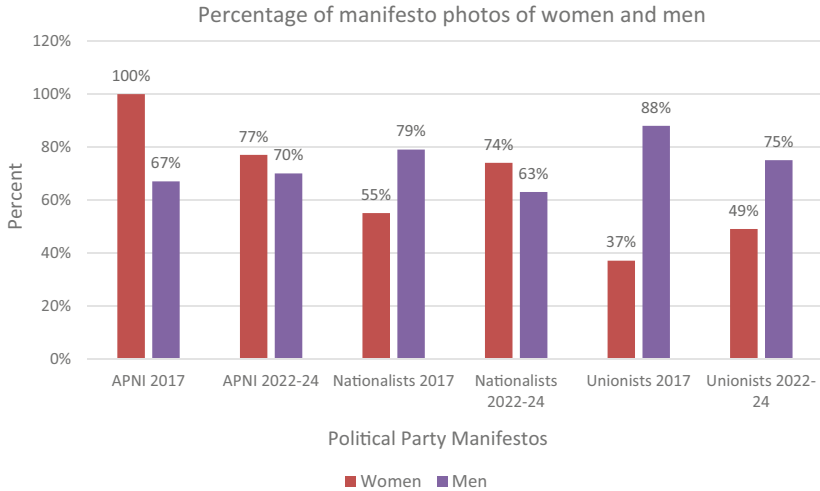
Like all the other parties, APNI also discusses domestic and sexual violence against women and strengthening measures to help victims of such crimes, including revenge porn and trafficking, through a Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy (APNI, 2022). In terms of women’s health, the party wishes to develop a women’s health strategy to include issues ranging from reproductive healthcare and sexual health to menopause and female cancers (APNI, 2022). APNI’s 2022 manifesto also includes discussions on the need for a comprehensive childcare strategy, shared parental leave and equal pay. APNI is the only party with a clear focus on women’s political participation, wanting to increase the participation of women in public life and implement mentoring schemes to increase women in decision-making positions (APNI, 2022, 2023). They also wish to champion the participation and recognition of rural women at all levels of government (APNI, 2022). The APNI manifestos thus show commitment to gender equality and an underlying gender analysis. This corresponds well with Galligan’s research (2013, p. 19) which argues that

the party has, over time, “indicated an increasing support for women’s empowerment and these issues have occupied an ever-growing space in the party’s policy agenda”, a development that is “compatible with its ambitions to represent cross-community, non-sectarian and inclusive politics”.

Another finding from the manifesto analysis is the lack of focus on men and boys. In general, gender is often equated to women, showing a narrow understanding of the concept. Although many of the manifestos discuss other gender identity issues (such as the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer (LGBTQ) community), they are lacking in their analysis of the role men play in upholding a patriarchal society. The Nationalist parties have next to no mentions of boys or men in their manifestos. The Unionist parties mention men and boys slightly more often, though without any deeper analysis—they mention the important service of men (and women) in the military and the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and in the world of sports (DUP, 2017b, 2022, 2023, 2024; UUP, 2017a, 2017b, 2022). APNI has a somewhat deeper analysis of men and boys in their manifestos. In the 2017 manifestos, they recognise that men are both financially and politically advantaged in comparison to women, but also advocate for the need for a men’s health strategy to combat increased rates of suicide and male cancers (APNI, 2017a, 2017b, 2022, 2024).

As for inclusivity in the manifestos’ photographs,<sup>15</sup> there are some similarities between the manifestos from 2017 to 2022/23/24 (see Fig. 4.4 and Table 4.7). For both time periods, APNI was the most visually representative of women (and had more photos with women than men), while the Unionist parties had the lowest percentage of photos with women in them (with a significantly higher percentage of photos with men than women). The difference between the number of photos of men and women in the 2017 manifestos was significantly smaller for the Nationalist parties when compared to the Unionist parties where men tended to visually dominate. While both the Unionist and Nationalist parties increased their visual representation of women and decreased their visual representation of men from 2017 to 2022/23/24, APNI went in the opposite direction.

<sup>15</sup> Only photographs of people are included in the analysis.



**Fig. 4.4** Percentage of manifesto photos of women and men (*Sources* Political party manifestos Alliance Party Northern Ireland, 2017a, 2017b, 2022, 2023, 2024; Democratic Unionist Party, 2017a, 2017b, 2022, 2023, 2024; Sinn Féin, 2017a, 2017b, 2022, 2023, 2024; *Social Democratic and Labour Party*, 2017a, 2017b, 2022, 2023, 2024; Ulster Unionist Party, 2017a, 2017b, 2022, 2023, 2024)

#### 4.4.3 *Transitional Trends in Women's Participation and Gender Equality*

Due to the hard work of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC), the GFA included commitments to women's political participation, equal opportunities in social and economic life and affirmation of human rights. This section explores the subsequent political agreements and their respective legislative acts in terms of women's participation and gender equality. As such, this section explores two areas of potential gender equality backlash: the inclusion of women in transitional decision-making bodies (descriptive participation) and the inclusion of gender equality on the transitional agenda (substantive participation). At the outset of the transitional period, there was some political agreement to protect women's rights to political participation. However, subsequent agreements quickly moved away from a broad gender equality commitment.

The *Northern Ireland Act 1998* implemented the GFA and established the devolved NIA. Section 75 of the Act provides for statutory duties of public authorities<sup>16</sup> to promote equality of opportunity between men and women (among other groups)<sup>17</sup> (‘Northern Ireland Act, 1998,’). Trade union Unison and the Committee on the Administration of Justice established the Equality Coalition and with other civic groups led a “strategic and detailed campaign” which resulted in making mainstreaming a statutory duty (Donaghy, 2004a, p. 406; 2004b). In practice this duty means that all policies should “be reviewed to ascertain its impact on equality of opportunity between men and women” (Potter, 2014, p. 7). In essence, this is a mechanism to mainstream gender equality: “Public authorities need to consider equality in all aspects of their organisation. This includes how they plan and deliver a service, to policies on employing people, enforcing the law, buying services, approving budgets and regulating others” (Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, 2020). To monitor and offer advice on the statutory equality duties, the Equality Commission was set up (‘Northern Ireland Act, 1998,’). A key part of the mainstreaming process is public consultation. This participative-democratic model relies on the participation of civil society in consultations, and, as such, “the relationship between civic groups and government has been formalised and developed under a governance structure” (Donaghy, 2004b, p. 51).

Through Section 75, NI “currently boasts one of the world’s leading models of mainstreaming”, the strength of which lies in its enforcement (Donaghy, 2004a, p. 398). It is the “primary strategy identified for the implementation of the equality agenda and the promotion of citizenship rights in the post-GFA period” (Side, 2009, p. 72). However, institutional resistance and implementation and regression problems indicate that Section 75 has failed to deliver in terms of gender equality—and may have even deepened inequality for the most marginalised women (Rouse, 2016, p. 234). As Rouse (2016, p. 235) argues,

<sup>16</sup> Public authorities range from housing associations and health and social care trusts to district and city councils and government departments.

<sup>17</sup> It also addresses equality regardless of religion, political opinion, race, age, marital status, sexual orientation, ability and dependency. Socio-economic status is, however, not included.

when it comes to the decisions with significant resource implications, there is ample evidence of systematic failure to subject policy to full impact assessment [...] no significant budget lines have been re-profiled or adjusted as a result of identified gender impacts.

In addition to Section 75, a key part of the GFA was the commitment to a Bill of Rights for NI. However, the Bill is still unrealised (Rouse, 2016; Side, 2009). The 2008 Bill proposal published by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) included a legally enforceable protection of women's right to full and equal participation in political and public life, as well as economic and social welfare rights pertaining specifically to women, and protection against violence (Ashe, 2019; Rouse, 2016). Unfortunately, ethno-national politics have pushed it off the agenda. Some Unionist parties opposed NIHRC's recommendations, arguing that they were "inimical to [U]nionist interests" (Ashe, 2019, p. 85). The many suspensions of Stormont have also made it difficult to realise (Side, 2009), as well as the UK government stating the NIHRC exceeded its remit (Rouse, 2016).

The *St Andrews Agreement and Act* that restored devolution to NI in 2006 do not mention gender equality or women's rights at all, despite stating a general commitment to human rights and equality ('Agreement at St Andrews, 2006,' Section 3). As such, gender equality was pushed further back on the political agenda (Deiana, 2016). The 2010 *Hillsborough Agreement*, which devolved policing and justice powers to NI, also states a commitment to equality, but the only mention of women is in relation to a women's prison ('Agreement at Hillsborough Castle, 2010,' Sections 1–2) and gender equality is not mentioned. The *Stormont House Agreement* (SHA) from 2014 reiterated the importance of compliance with human rights ('Stormont House Agreement, 2014,' Section 21). In terms of participation, it articulates the importance of hearing civic views in relation to key issues and sets out the goal of establishing a civic advisory panel which would advise the Executive ('Stormont House Agreement, 2014,' Section 67). Unlike its two predecessors, this agreement includes a commitment to the advancement of women in public life ('Stormont House Agreement, 2014,' Section 69). However, the agreement has been criticised for "the absence of a gendered lens and the sustained exclusion of women" (Legacy Gender Integration Group, 2015, p. 3). It fails to fully and holistically integrate gender in dealing with the past, recognise and redress structural obstacles to inclusion, and value

gender expertise and lived experience (Legacy Gender Integration Group, 2015). The agreement's implementation plan, *A Fresh Start* (2015), also almost entirely lacks measures to ensure women's participation. There is no reference to gender equality and women are only mentioned twice: a commitment to the advancement of women in public life and to increase the participation of women in preventing paramilitarism ('A Fresh Start. The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan, 2015,' sections F69 and A3.9). The former commitment has no implementation plan, while the latter mentions the "development of a programme".

The Fresh Start plan does, however, set out a commitment to political inclusivity, participative democracy and plans for a civic advisory panel ('A Fresh Start. The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan, 2015,' sections A1.2 and F67, Appendix F7). This is followed up on in the *New Decade, New Approach* (NDNA) deal which restored devolved government in 2020. The deal states that "the parties recognise the value of structured and flexible engagement with civic society" and aims to reform the civic advisory panel and organise one Citizens' Assembly per year ('New Decade, New Approach, 2020,' p. 23). In terms of gender, the deal recommends the implementation of a gender strategy, as well as addressing the handling of serious sexual offence cases ('New Decade, New Approach, 2020,').

All in all, the political agreements and acts passed since 1998 in an attempt to move NI's transition forward have largely lacked a gender analysis as well as implementation mechanisms (and funding) to ensure women's political participation. As Ní Aoláin et al. (2011) argue, in transitional states there is a tendency for a divide between the rhetoric of equality and implementation of enforcement measures. Consistently since the GFA, equality and human rights have been eroded in subsequent negotiations, and "the promise of the 'full and equal participation of women' may now be even more elusive than it was then" (Rouse, 2016, p. 240). The political agreements "illustrate a damning failure in addressing the gendered legacy of conflict and, thus, in remaking citizenship for women in the transition" (Deiana, 2016, p. 106). An example of this, brought up by a participant (PUL interview), was the lack of women represented on the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition (FICT). This 15-member commission was appointed in 2016 with only one female member, Dr. Katy Radford (Commission on Flags Identity Culture & Tradition, 2020). Another example is the 2013 Cardiff talks

on contentious issues, such as flags and parades: of more than 30 participants, only three were women (Claire Pierson, 2018). These examples demonstrate a clear lack of female participation in forums established to discuss transitional peacebuilding issues (Claire Pierson, 2018). As such, despite the success of women's grassroots activism during the Troubles, "the translation to political power in new political institutions has been decidedly limited" (Brown & Ní Aoláin, 2015, p. 133).

In addition to a lack of attention to gender equality, consociationalism has tended to emphasise the centrality of political elites and has thus excluded civil society from political decision-making in NI (Guelke, 2003). Many politicians, determined to restore representative democracy, "saw it as proper for them to take over the policy-negotiating role and for civic associations to back off, as unrepresentative, unelected, and it was to be hoped, now unnecessary" (Meehan, 2003, p. 15). A permanent feature of formal politics has thus been a democratic deficit, where the public's needs and interests are not always represented, women bearing the brunt of the democratic inadequacies (Murtagh, 2008). Elaine Crory (WRDA) commented on the gap between grassroots and formal politics, outlining how the views and needs of women are fed into Stormont through the WRDA, and that they are met with nods and "all the right words" but rarely actions (Expert interview):

I can understand the complete despair [of] activists here. [...] It feels sometimes like pushing that rock up a hill. [...] By and large you know you are shouting into a void.

Another consequence of a system that embeds ethno-nationalist politics is that when women are paid attention to, they are often interpreted as standing outside ethno-nationalism. This construction of a fictional woman "who is not involved in discredited, 'sectarian' politics; or at least not 'involved' through her agency or consent" is criticised by Rooney (2008, p. 461). The idea that "most women do not sully themselves with politics and dislike political conflict is strong" in NI (Ashe, 2006a, p. 157). As such, women's "non-violent, non-sectarian protests tend to draw more support", protests that do not necessarily threaten traditional ideas about women's identities (Ashe, 2006b, p. 164). However, in the context of NI, prioritising "other" issues and thus being perceived as an "outsider", translates in practice to standing outside the centre of formal political life. The rendering of women as outsiders in this respect also

further the justification of their exclusion. As Rooney (2008, p. 460) argues,

[t]he conceptualization of women as apart from constitutional issues of state governance at the core of the political conflict suggests that politics in the North is a male-only matter. This discourse operates to conceal women, obviate gender and ignore deep rooted political and religious inequalities and the many inegalitarian consequences of institutional sectarianism central to the conflict.

This also makes it easier and more likely to dismiss those working for gender equality as being “divorced from reality” (Margaret Ward, 2000, p. 17). As discussed previously, democratic participation in NI tends to stem from the political affiliation and historical experience of the state that the ethno-nationalist identities represent (Rooney, 2008). In general, this focus on ethno-nationalist identities and ideas has proved to have a strong negative impact on women’s participation in political life (Murtagh, 2008).

## 4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has analysed trends and perceptions of women’s political participation post-1998 by exploring how political activity is defined and how women are positioned in politics. The analysis explored different notions of women’s citizenship and political participation, as well as the implications for gender equality of NI’s status as a consociational, ethno-nationally divided, transitional society. Women’s participation in public, political life has both been encouraged and discouraged in different ways since the GFA. As such, there are both signs of progress and backlash in terms of women’s citizenship, discussed in the following sections.

### 4.5.1 *Encouraging Trends*

Study participants argued strongly for the importance of women’s descriptive and substantial participation in political life. They articulated that women bring with them experiences, understandings and perspectives to an otherwise male-dominated political sphere. Women were also framed as ideal political participants due to their perceived ability to work together and solve problems. As such, participants produced a gendered

perception of the “good” citizen and tended to view the skills women develop through their lived experience in the private sphere, such as pragmatic problem-solving skills, as having merit for being a successful political participant. Some participants also recognised the importance of including a range of activities in defining political participation, in addition to voting and running for office. This correlates to the fact that many women in NI continue to be active in informal politics.

The GFA’s commitment to women’s right to participate fully in public, political life initiated NI’s transitional period. This was followed by Section 75’s statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity and mainstream gender equality—a necessary first step to ensure women’s participation. A Gender Equality Strategy was adopted in 2006, with a new strategy set to be developed in 2024 with civic participation, and the 2014 SHA reaffirmed the commitment to advance women in public life. The SHA also introduced the idea of a civic advisory panel, which was followed up on in the 2015 Fresh Start and 2020 NDNA deal. These examples represent encouraging signs for women’s political participation. If implemented, they could help mitigate the divide between formal and informal participation and more readily include women in decision-making bodies.

In the past decades NI has seen an increase in the number of women in party politics and political leadership, as well as improved societal attitudes towards female politicians. However, the commitment to gender equality differs between the political parties. The analysis of manifestos showed that APNI has the most substantial and thorough gender analysis embedded in their political programme. The Nationalist parties also show evidence of gender analysis and commitment to gender equality in their manifestos. Alliance is also the only party that talks about active citizenship participation with support for the voluntary sector. Both Nationalist and Other parties show a higher number of female politicians than Unionists.

#### 4.5.2 *Discouraging Trends*

Despite some encouraging signs, there are still many gaps in legislation, implementation and resource allocation that need to be addressed to guarantee and encourage women’s full and equal participation in public, political life. The political agreements following the GFA either lack a focus on gender equality or reaffirm a commitment to women’s equality

without any substantive analysis or implementation plans. Looking at how the political system is designed, there are indications of a negative trend in terms of putting gender equality on the agenda. Gender equality issues have repeatedly had to take a back-seat to issues deemed of ethno-national importance or denied altogether, partly indicative of a backlash against women's rights. Consociationalism has maintained and enhanced a specific set of barriers for women's participation, such as rewarding political polarisation, keeping gender equality off the agenda and failing to promote women's participation in transitional decision-making bodies.

Over the past decades, women's community activism has continued to be of importance (further explored in the next chapter). However, playing a key role in civil society has not proven to be a requisite for involvement in formal politics—rather the opposite. Grassroots activity, especially if cross-communal, tends to place women in a position with experiences perceived to be “outside the politics of sectarianism”, and as such outside the scope of formal politics. Additionally, the idea of what constitutes politics in NI is still quite narrow to the detriment of large numbers of women active in civil society. For instance, the discrepancy between participants' levels of political activities and their perception of themselves as political beings relates to a definition of political activity that tends to exclude community organising. Women not being listened to and having to prove their credentials to be taken seriously also correlates with a narrow idea of political participation. It reinforces the idea that expertise, whether academic or vocational, is required (demoting lived experience), often in addition to being white, male and middle-class, to access the right to full political participation. This also relates to women's lack of confidence and a feeling that their experiences and/or knowledge are not enough to merit political participation in some arenas. In turn, this deters, discourages or prohibits community-active women from entering the formal corridors of power. The inability to harness the political work many women do at a grassroots level is problematic.

Even though NI has seen an increase in the number of female politicians since 1998, many barriers still exist to women's participation and substantive progress in terms of gender equality. Participants spoke about requirements to toe the party line (regardless of gender) and that being a female politician does not necessarily mean being a feminist and championing women's rights. The fact that the increase in female politicians is interpreted by some as having “reached gender equality” was strongly criticised by participants. The issues of women as political puppets (e.g.,

Arlene Foster) and the glass cliff phenomena (e.g., Theresa May) were also raised by participants. This chapter has also shown a gap in female representation between Unionist parties on the one hand, and Nationalist and Other parties on the other. The analysis of political manifestos also showed that the Unionist parties had few mentions of women and gender issues, with little to no gender analysis and few gender equality commitments. In addition to the different relationships to the state (challenging or upholding the status quo), the political blocs also correlate somewhat to the left–right political scale. This complicates identification with political parties when one’s ethno-nationalist background (for example PUL) points to one set of parties, but one’s political ideas (for example feminist socialism) point to another. Voting for the “other side” is not easy and adds an additional level of alienation from the formal political system. Voting (or rather lack of it) was also an issue often discussed by participants who expressed political fatigue and lack of reciprocity from the political system. The sexist judgements and double standards of political life were also brought up by many participants as a barrier to participation.

### 4.5.3 *Concluding Comments*

The potentially progressive discursive space opened during the peace negotiations, representing a historic opportunity to reframe gender issues, has in some ways been closed over the past twenty-five years with evidence of the public/private divide being reasserted. The lack of legislated gender equality enforcement mechanisms has, in addition to consociational barriers to women’s participation, helped enable this development. A backlash against women’s participation is not easily averted in such a setting. As such, there has not been a substantial positive shift in terms of enabling and encouraging women’s participation in politics. Instead, this chapter has revealed both encouraging and discouraging trends for women’s political participation across the board demonstrating signs of an overall setback.

The importance of how political participation is defined has been discussed throughout this chapter. A broad definition that includes political activity at different societal levels, many different kinds of participative activities, and interaction with different stakeholders is needed to both encourage women’s political participation and recognise the work they already do. The lack of recognition of women’s community work as a form of political activity—both by themselves and others—also supports

the need for a wider definition of political participation. This also relates to the lack of ability and/or political interest to harness this kind of work. As Heater (2004, p. 129) argues, “citizenship itself should be radically transformed, so that the quintessentially feminine contributions of caring—for the family, for the neighbourhood, for the environment—may be integral features of the identity and status”. Such a definition could help reimagine what participative citizenship entails and better accommodate women’s lived experiences as vital qualifications or—to borrow the language of civic republicanism—civic virtues, in a way that does not essentialise or homogenise women.

## REFERENCES

- ‘A Fresh Start. The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan 2015’ (2015). Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/479116/A\\_Fresh\\_Start\\_-\\_The\\_Stormont\\_Agreement\\_and\\_Implementation\\_Plan\\_-\\_Final\\_Version\\_20\\_Nov\\_2015\\_for\\_PDF.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/479116/A_Fresh_Start_-_The_Stormont_Agreement_and_Implementation_Plan_-_Final_Version_20_Nov_2015_for_PDF.pdf) (Accessed: 2018-03-12).
- ‘Agreement at Hillsborough Castle 2010’ (2010). *United Kingdom*. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/136435/agreement\\_at\\_hillsborough\\_castle\\_5\\_february\\_2010.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/136435/agreement_at_hillsborough_castle_5_february_2010.pdf) (Accessed: 2018-03-12).
- ‘Agreement at St Andrews 2006’. (2006). *United Kingdom*. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/136651/st\\_andrews\\_agreement-2.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/136651/st_andrews_agreement-2.pdf) (Accessed: 2018-03-12).
- Alliance Party Northern Ireland. (2017a). *Assembly Election Manifesto: How To Change Northern Ireland. For Good*. Belfast: Alliance Party Northern Ireland. Available at: <https://allianceparty.org/document/manifesto#document> (Accessed: 2018-03-13).
- Alliance Party Northern Ireland. (2017b). *General Election Manifesto: Change Direction*. Belfast: Alliance Party Northern Ireland.
- Alliance Party Northern Ireland. (2022). *Together We Can. Alliance Party Assembly Manifesto 2022*. Belfast: Alliance Party Northern Ireland.
- Alliance Party Northern Ireland. (2023). *Alliance Works. Better Is Possible. Alliance Party Local Government Manifesto 2023*. Belfast: Alliance Party Northern Ireland.
- Alliance Party Northern Ireland. (2024). *Alliance Party Westminster Manifesto 2024. Alliance leading change for everyone*. Belfast: Alliance Party Northern Ireland.

- Amnesty International UK. (2020). *Abortion in Ireland and Northern Ireland: Abortion decriminalised in Northern Ireland*. <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/abortion-rights-northern-ireland-timeline>. Accessed 2020-07-22.
- ARK. (2002). *Northern Ireland life and times survey 2001*. <https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2001/> Accessed 2024-07-25.
- ARK. (2003). *Northern Ireland life and times survey 2002*. <https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2002/>. Accessed 2024-07-25.
- ARK. (2006). *Northern Ireland life and times survey 2005*. <https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2005/> Accessed 2024-07-25.
- ARK. (2008). *Northern Ireland life and times survey 2007*. <https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2007/> Accessed 2024-07-25.
- ARK. (2009). *Northern Ireland life and times survey 2008*. <https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2008/> Accessed 2024-07-25.
- ARK. (2019). *The 2019 Local government elections in Northern Ireland*. <https://www.ark.ac.uk/elections/flg19.htm>. Accessed 2024-07-25.
- Ashe, F. (2006a). Gendering the Holy Cross school dispute: Women and nationalism in Northern Ireland. *Political Studies*, 54(1), 147–164.
- Ashe, F. (2006b). The McCartney Sisters' search for justice: Gender and political protest in Northern Ireland. *Politics*, 26(3), 161–167.
- Ashe, F. (2012). Gendering war and peace: Militarized masculinities in Northern Ireland. *Men and Masculinities*, 15(3), 230–248.
- Ashe, F. (2019). *Gender, nationalism and conflict transformation: New themes and old problems in Northern Ireland Politics*. Routledge.
- BBC. (2005). *Northern Ireland councils overview*. BBC. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/vote2005/nicouncil/html/main.stm>. Accessed 2024-07-25.
- BBC. (2016). *RHI Scandal: RHI 'Cash for Ash' Scandal to Cost NI taxpayers £490m*. BBC. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-38414486>. Accessed 2017-05-24.
- BBC. (2024). *Stormont crisis: Decisions to make if Stormont not restored*. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-politics-67957520>. Accessed 2024-07-27.
- Braniff, M., & Whiting, S. A. (2016). 'There's Just No Point Having a Token Woman': Gender and representation in the democratic unionist party in post-agreement Northern Ireland. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 69(1), 93–114.
- Brown, K., & Ní Aoláin, F. (2015). Through the looking glass: Transitional justice futures through the lens of nationalism, feminism and transformative change. *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 9(1), 127–149.
- Byrne, S. (2009). *Beyond the ethnonational divide: Identity politics and women in Northern Ireland and Israel/Palestine*. Queen's University Kingston.
- Campbell, J. (2024). *DUP deal: What exactly is in the Safeguarding the Union paper?* <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-68157167>. Accessed 2024-07-28.

- Carroll, R. (2019). *DUP to return to Stormont to protest against abortion rights*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/oct/21/dup-stormont-protest-against-abortion-rights>. Accessed 2024-07-28.
- Carroll, R. (2024). *Sinn Féin's Michelle O'Neill appointed first minister as Stormont reconvenes*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/feb/03/northern-ireland-government-to-reconvene-after-two-year-dup-boycott>. Accessed 2024-07-28.
- Commission on Flags Identity Culture and Tradition. (2020). *The Commission*. <https://www.fictcommission.org/en/commission>. Accessed 2020-09-20.
- Conflict Archive on the Internet. (2024a). *Assembly Election (NI) Thursday 2 March 2017*. <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/2017nia/ra2017.htm>. Accessed 2024-07-25.
- Conflict Archive on the Internet. (2024b). *Assembly Election (NI) Thursday 5 May 2011*. <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/2011nia/ra2011.htm>. Accessed 2024-07-24.
- Conflict Archive on the Internet. (2024c). *Assembly Election (NI) Thursday 5 May 2016*. <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/2016nia/ra2016.htm>. Accessed 2024-07-25.
- Conflict Archive on the Internet. (2024d). *Assembly Election (NI) Thursday 25 June 1998*. <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/ra1998.htm>. Accessed 2024-07-24.
- Conflict Archive on the Internet. (2024e). *Assembly Election (NI) Wednesday 7 March 2007*. <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/2007nia/ra2007.htm>. Accessed 2024-07-24.
- Conflict Archive on the Internet. (2024f). *Assembly Election (NI) Wednesday 26 November 2003*. <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/ra2003.htm>. Accessed 2024-07-24.
- Conflict Archive on the Internet. (2024g). *European Election (NI)—Thursday 4 June 2009*. <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/re2009.htm>. Accessed 2024-07-24.
- Conflict Archive on the Internet. (2024h). *European Election (NI)—Thursday 10 June 2004*. <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/re2004.htm>. Accessed 2024-07-24.
- Conflict Archive on the Internet. (2024i). *European Election (NI)—Thursday 22 May 2014*. <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/re2014.htm>. Accessed 2024-07-24.
- Conflict Archive on the Internet. (2024j). *European Election (NI) Thursday 10 June 1999*. <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/re1999.htm>. Accessed 2024-07-24.
- Conflict Archive on the Internet. (2024k). *Local Government Elections (NI) Thursday 5 May 2005*. <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/rd2005.htm>. Accessed 2024-07-24.

- Conflict Archive on the Internet. (2024l). *Local Government Elections (NI) Thursday 7 June 2001*. <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/rd2001.htm>. Accessed 2024-07-24.
- Conflict Archive on the Internet. (2024m). *Local Government Elections (NI) Thursday 22 May 2014*. <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/2014lg/rd2014.htm>. Accessed 2024-07-24.
- Conflict Archive on the Internet. (2024n). *Results of the AV Referendum in Northern Ireland and UK, Thursday 5 May 2011*. <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/2011ref/ref2011.htm>. Accessed 2024-07-24.
- Conflict Archive on the Internet. (2024o). *Westminster General Election (NI) Thursday 5 May 2005*. <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/rw2005.htm>. Accessed 2024-07-24.
- Conflict Archive on the Internet. (2024p). *Westminster General Election (NI) Thursday 6 May 2010*. <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/2010west/rw2010.htm>. Accessed 2024-07-24.
- Conflict Archive on the Internet. (2024q). *Westminster General Election (NI) Thursday 7 June 2001*. <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/rw2001.htm>. Accessed 2024-07-24.
- Conflict Archive on the Internet. (2024r). *Westminster General Election (NI) Thursday 7 May 2015*. <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/2015west/rw2015.htm>. Accessed 2024-07-24.
- Conflict Archive on the Internet. (2024s). *Westminster General Election (NI) Thursday 8 June 2017*. <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/2017west/rw2017.htm>. Accessed 2024-07-24.
- ‘Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women’. (1979). 18 December 1979. United Nations Treaty Series.
- Cowell-Meyers, K. (2003) *Women legislators in Northern Ireland: gender and politics in the new legislative assembly*. Belfast: Centre for Advancement of Women in Politics, School of Politics, Queen’s University Belfast.
- Danielsen, H., Jegerstedt, K., Muriaas, R. L., & Ytre-Arne, B. (2016). Gendered citizenship: The politics of representation. In H. Danielsen, K. Jegerstedt, R. Muriaas, & B. Ytre-Arne (Eds.), *Gendered citizenship and the politics of representation* (pp. 1–13). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Deiana, M.-A. (2013). Women’s citizenship in Northern Ireland after the 1998 Agreement. *Irish Political Studies*, 28(3), 399–412.
- Deiana, M.-A. (2016). To settle for a gendered peace? Spaces for feminist grassroots mobilization in Northern Ireland and Bosnia–Herzegovina. *Citizenship Studies*, 20(1), 99–114.
- Democratic Unionist Party. (2017a). *Our Plan for Northern Ireland: The DUP Manifesto for the 2017 NI Assembly Election*. Belfast: Democratic Unionist Party.

- Democratic Unionist Party. (2017b). *Standing Strong for Northern Ireland: The DUP Manifesto for the 2017 Westminster Election*. Belfast: Democratic Unionist Party.
- Democratic Unionist Party. (2022). *DUP. Our 5 Point Plan for Northern Ireland. Real Action on the Issues That Matter to You. Assembly Election Manifesto 2022*. Belfast: Democratic Unionist Party.
- Democratic Unionist Party. (2023). *DUP. Our Plan for Local Government in Northern Ireland. Real Action at Lowest Cost on the Issues That Matter to You. Local Government Manifesto 2023*. Belfast: Democratic Unionist Party.
- Democratic Unionist Party. (2024). *DUP. Speaking Up For Northern Ireland. Working and Winning for You. General Election Manifesto June 2024*. Belfast: Democratic Unionist Party.
- Department for Communities. (2024). *Gender equality strategy*. <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/gender-equality-strategy>. Accessed 2024-07-26.
- Donaghy, T. B. (2004a). Applications of mainstreaming in Australia and Northern Ireland. *International Political Science Review*, 25(4), 393–410.
- Donaghy, T. B. (2004b). Mainstreaming: Northern Ireland's participative-democratic approach. *Policy & Politics*, 32(1), 49–62.
- Donahoe, A. E. (2017). *Peacebuilding through women's community development: Wee women's work in Northern Ireland*. Springer International.
- Doyle, J. L., & McWilliams, M. (2018) *Intimate partner violence in conflict and post-conflict societies: Insights and lessons from Northern Ireland*. Belfast and Edinburgh: Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University and Political Settlements Research Programme, University of Edinburgh.
- Eitrem Holmgren, L. (2014). "Where There is Dialogue, There is Hope": *Nation, gender and transversal dialogue in Belfast, Northern Ireland*. Department of Political Science, Lund University.
- Electoral Office for Northern Ireland. (2011). *Local Council Election 5 May 2011 Turnout Statistics*. [https://web.archive.org/web/20190806053349/http://www.eoni.org.uk/getmedia/ead8d7d0-38a7-4692-a49e-0f08d205c69d/local\\_council\\_election\\_2011\\_-\\_turnout-statistics](https://web.archive.org/web/20190806053349/http://www.eoni.org.uk/getmedia/ead8d7d0-38a7-4692-a49e-0f08d205c69d/local_council_election_2011_-_turnout-statistics). Accessed 2024-07-25.
- Electoral Office for Northern Ireland. (2024). *Election results and statistics*. <https://www.eoni.org.uk/Elections/Election-results-and-statistics>. Accessed 2024-07-24.
- Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. (2020). *Section 75 Duties for Public Authorities. Equality Commission Northern Ireland*. <https://www.equalityni.org/S75duties>. Accessed 2020-09-22.
- European Parliament. (2024). *Women in the European Parliament (infographics)*. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20190226STO28804/women-in-the-european-parliament-infographics>. Accessed 2024-07-25.

- Evason, E. (1991). *Against the grain: The contemporary women's movement in Northern Ireland*. Attic Press.
- Exeter Psychology Department. (2020). *Discovering the glass cliff: Insights into addressing subtle gender discrimination in the workplace*. University of Exeter. <https://psychology.exeter.ac.uk/impact/theglasscliff/> and <https://psychology.exeter.ac.uk/cic/about/theglasscliff/#a0>. Accessed 2020-02-29.
- Galligan, Y. (2013). Gender and politics in Northern Ireland: The representation gap revisited. *Irish Political Studies*, 28(3), 413–433.
- Galligan, Y. (2019). 'The Northern Ireland Local Elections May 2019—A Gender Analysis...' *Sluggie O'Toole*. 2019-05-21. Available at: <https://sluggerrotoole.com/2019/05/21/the-northern-ireland-local-elections-may-2019-a-gender-analysis/> (Accessed: 2020-09-10).
- Galligan, Y., & Dowds, L. 26 (2004). 'Women's Hour?' *Research Update*. February 2004. Available at: <https://www.ark.ac.uk/ARK/sites/default/files/2018-08/update26.pdf> (Accessed: 2019-10-20).
- Glencross, J. (2011). *How the International Women's Movement Discovered the 'Troubles': Brokered and Broken Transnational Interactions during the Northern Ireland Conflict, 1968–1981*. Peter Lang.
- Gorvett, J. (2019). *Northern Irish politics are broken*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/08/27/northern-irish-politics-are-broken/> Accessed.
- Gray, A. M. (2017). Attitudes to Abortion in Northern Ireland. *ARK Research Update*, (115).
- Gray, A. M., Horgan, G., & Devine, P. (2018). Do social attitudes to abortion suggest political parties in Northern Ireland are out of step with their Supporters? *ARK Feature*, (7).
- Guelke, A. (2003). Civil society and the Northern Irish peace process. *Voluntas: International journal of Voluntary and nonprofit Organizations*, 14(1), 61–78.
- Guelke, A. (2012). *Politics in deeply divided societies*. Polity Press.
- Hayes, B. C. (2017a). 'Female Electoral Turnout in Northern Ireland: the Democratic Deficit Among Protestant Women' *LSE blog*. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/female-electoral-turnout-in-northern-ireland/> (Accessed: 2020-08-10).
- Hayes, B. C. (2017b). Religious differences in electoral turnout among women in Northern Ireland. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 70, 322–343.
- Hayes, B. C., Evans, G., Dowds, L., & Mitchell, P. (2003). 'Northern Ireland Assembly Elections Study—2003'. Available at: [https://www.ark.ac.uk/sol/surveys/electoral\\_studies/NIAES/2003/website/Main/](https://www.ark.ac.uk/sol/surveys/electoral_studies/NIAES/2003/website/Main/) (Accessed: 2024-07-25).
- Hayes, B. C., & McAllister, I. (2013). Gender and consociational power-sharing in Northern Ireland. *International Political Science Review*, 34(2), 123–139.
- Heater, D. (2004). *A brief history of citizenship*. Edinburgh University Press.

- Horowitz, D. L. (2000). Constitutional design: An oxymoron? In I. Shapiro & S. Macedo (Eds.), *Designing democratic institutions* (pp. 253–284). New York University Press.
- Horowitz, D. L. (2014). Ethnic power sharing: Three big problems. *Journal of Democracy*, 25(2), 5–20.
- Hughes, B. (2023). *Call for gender quotas in NI elections as only a third of councillors are women*. Belfast Live. <https://www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/call-gender-quotas-ni-elections-27016090>. Accessed 2024-07-25.
- IPU Parline. (2024) ‘Global data on national parliaments’ *Inter-Parliamentary Union*. Geneva. Available at: <https://data.ipu.org/> (Accessed: 2024-07-25).
- Jarstad, A. K. (2009). The prevalence of power-sharing: Exploring the patterns of post-election peace. *Africa Spectrum*, 44(3), 41–62.
- Legacy Gender Integration Group. (2015). *Gender principles for dealing with the past*. Belfast: Legacy Gender Integration Group.
- McCoy, G. (2000). Women, community and politics in Northern Ireland. In C. Roulston & C. Davies (Eds.), *Gender, democracy and inclusion in Northern Ireland* (pp. 3–23). Palgrave.
- McCulloch, A. (2014). *Power-sharing and political stability in deeply divided societies*. Routledge.
- McDonald, H. (2017). *Martin McGuinness resigns as Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jan/09/martin-mcguinness-to-resign-as-northern-ireland-deputy-first-minister> Accessed 2018-01-28.
- McMurray, A. (2022) ‘Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) ‘ *Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service Research Paper*. 2022-05-23. Belfast: Northern Ireland Assembly 26/22.
- Meehan, E. (2003). *From Government to Governance, Civic Participation and New Politics: The Context of Potential Opportunities for the Better Representation of Women*. Belfast: Centre for Advancement of Women in Politics, School of Politics, Queen’s University Belfast.
- Miller, R. L., Wilford, R., & Donoghue, F. (1996). *Women and political participation in Northern Ireland*. Avebury.
- Murtagh, C. (2008). A transient transition: The cultural and institutional obstacles impeding the Northern Ireland women’s coalition in its progression from informal to formal politics. *Irish Political Studies*, 23(1), 21–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07907180701767948>
- Nagle, J. M., & Clancy, M.-A.C. (2012). Constructing a shared public identity in ethnationally divided societies: Comparing consociational and transformationist perspectives. *Nations and Nationalism*, 18(1), 78–97.

- National Women's Council of Ireland. (2024). *Gender quotas needed for local elections in Northern Ireland*. [https://www.nwci.ie/learn/article/gender\\_quotas\\_needed\\_for\\_local\\_elections\\_in\\_northern\\_ireland](https://www.nwci.ie/learn/article/gender_quotas_needed_for_local_elections_in_northern_ireland). Accessed 2024-07-25.
- 'New Decade, New Approach 2020' (2020). Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/856998/2020-01-08\\_a\\_new\\_decade\\_\\_a\\_new\\_approach.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/856998/2020-01-08_a_new_decade__a_new_approach.pdf) (Accessed: 2020-10-13).
- Nexus. (2024) 'What is Coercive Control?' *Coercive Control Blog*. Available at: <https://nexusni.org/coercive-control-blog/> (Accessed: 2024-07-27).
- Ní Aoláin, F., Haynes, D. F., & Cahn, N. (2011). *On the frontlines: Gender, war, and the post-conflict process*. Oxford University Press.
- 'Northern Ireland Act 1998' (1998). *United Kingdom*. Available at: [https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/47/pdfs/ukpga\\_19980047\\_en.pdf](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/47/pdfs/ukpga_19980047_en.pdf) (Accessed: 2018-03-05).
- Northern Ireland Assembly. (2017). *MLA Montage*. [http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/your\\_mlas/mla-montage-2017-2022.pdf](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/your_mlas/mla-montage-2017-2022.pdf) Accessed 2018-03-10.
- Northern Ireland Assembly. (2024). AQW 8925/22-27. <https://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/questions/printquestionssummary.aspx?docid=394158>. Accessed 2024-07-26.
- O'Neill, S. (2024). *General Election 2024: New Cabinet and NI's new MPs*. Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action <https://www.nicva.org/article/general-election-2024-new-cabinet-and-nis-new-mps>. Accessed 2024-07-25.
- O'Rourke, C. (2014). 'Walk[ing] the Halls of Power'? Understanding women's participation in international peace and security. *Melbourne Journal of International Law*, 15(1), 128–154.
- Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. (2010). '*A gender equality strategy for Northern Ireland 2006–2016*' 2. Belfast: Gender Equality Unit, Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.
- Phillips, A. (1995). *The politics of presence*. Clarendon Press.
- Pierson, C. (2018) 'The Marginalisation of Women's Rights in Northern Ireland, 20 years After the Good Friday Agreement' *LSE Blog*. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/the-marginalisation-of-womens-rights-in-northern-ireland-20-years-after-the-good-friday-agreement/> (Accessed: 2020-09-11).
- Pierson, R. R. (2000). Nations: Gendered, racialized, crossed with empire. In I. Blom, K. Hagemann, & C. Hall (Eds.), *Gendered nations: Nationalisms and gender order in the long nineteenth century* (pp. 41–61). Berg.
- Police Service of Northern Ireland. (2024). *Domestic abuse and civil proceedings act*. <https://www.psn.police.uk/safety-and-support/keeping-safe/protecting-yourself/domestic-abuse/domestic-abuse-and-civil>. Accessed 2024-07-27.

- Potter, M. (2014). 'Review of Gender Issues in Northern Ireland' *Research and Information Service Research Paper* 2014-01-28. Belfast: Northern Ireland Assembly NIAR 510-13.
- Potter, M. (2016). Female Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly 1998–2016. *Northern Ireland Assembly, Research and Information Service Briefing Paper* Belfast: Northern Ireland Assembly 30/16.
- Powell, R. (2020). *Gender Inequality in Northern Ireland: Where Are We in 2020?*. Women's Resource and Development Agency. Available at: [https://wrda.net/2020/02/07/gender-inequality-in-northern-ireland-where-are-we-in-2020/#\\_edn1](https://wrda.net/2020/02/07/gender-inequality-in-northern-ireland-where-are-we-in-2020/#_edn1) (Accessed: 2020-09-25).
- Rooney, E. (2008). Critical reflections: 'Documenting gender and memory.' *Women's Studies International Forum*, 31(6), 457–463.
- Rooney, E., & Swaine, A. (2012). The 'Long Grass' of agreements: Promise, theory and practice. *International Criminal Law Review*, 12(3), 519–548.
- Rothchild, D., & Roeder, P. G. (2005). Dilemmas of state-building in divided societies. In P. G. Roeder & D. Rothchild (Eds.), *Sustainable peace: Power and democracy after civil wars* (pp. 1–26). Cornell University Press.
- Rouse, M. (2016). In need of a fresh start: Gender equality in post-GFA Northern Ireland. *Northern Ireland Legal Quarterly*, 67(2), 233–240.
- Rouse, M. (2020). *Gender, decision-making and the Northern Ireland senior civil service: A feminist institutional analysis of elite bureaucracy in transition*. Ulster University.
- Side, K. (2009). Women's civil and political citizenship in the post-good friday agreement period in Northern Ireland. *Irish Political Studies*, 24(1), 67–87.
- Sinn Féin. (2017a). *Assembly Election Manifesto: Standing up for equality, respect and integrity*. Belfast: Sinn Féin.
- Sinn Féin. (2017b). *General Election Manifesto: Standing Up for Equality, Rights, Irish Unity. No Brexit. No Border. No Tory Cuts*. Belfast: Sinn Féin.
- Sinn Féin. (2022) *Sinn Féin. Time for Real Change. Am Don Athrú Cheart. Assembly Election 2022 Sinn Féin Manifesto*. Derry: Sinn Féin.
- Sinn Féin. (2023) *Sinn Féin. Working for All. Ag Obair Do Chách. Local Council Election 2023 Sinn Féin Manifesto*. Derry: Sinn Féin.
- Sinn Féin. (2024) *Strong leadership, positive change. Westminster Election 2024 Sinn Féin Manifesto*. Belfast: Sinn Féin.
- Social Democratic and Labour Party. (2017a). *General Election Manifesto: Taking Our Seats. Taking A Stand*. Belfast: Social Democratic and Labour Party.
- Social Democratic and Labour Party. (2017b). *Make Change Happen: Manifesto 2017*. Belfast: Social Democratic and Labour Party.
- Social Democratic and Labour Party. (2022) *SDLP People First. Manifesto 2022*. Belfast: Social Democratic and Labour Party.
- Social Democratic and Labour Party. (2023). *Local Election Manifesto 2023. End Division. Build a New Ireland*. Belfast: Social Democratic and Labour Party.

- Social Democratic and Labour Party. (2024). *'SDLP Manifesto Westminster 2024'*. Belfast: Social Democratic and Labour Party.
- 'Stormont House Agreement 2014' (2014). *United Kingdom*. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/390672/Stormont\\_House\\_Agreement.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/390672/Stormont_House_Agreement.pdf) (Accessed: 2018-03-12).
- Ulster Unionist Party. (2017a). *Assembly Election Manifesto: A Manifesto for real partnership. A Plan for a Better Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Ulster Unionist Party.
- Ulster Unionist Party. (2017b). *General Election Manifesto: For a Stronger, Better Union*. Belfast: Ulster Unionist Party.
- Ulster Unionist Party. (2022). *Ulster Unionist Party. Northern Ireland Assembly Election 2022 Manifesto. Build a Better Northern Ireland*. Northern Ireland: Ulster Unionist Party.
- Ulster Unionist Party. (2023) *Ulster Unionist Party. Northern Ireland Local Government Election 2023. Making Northern Ireland Work*. Northern Ireland: Ulster Unionist Party.
- Ulster Unionist Party. (2024). *Ulster Unionist Party. Making Northern Ireland Work. Vote for Change. Vote Ulster Unionist. 2024 Westminster Manifesto*. Northern Ireland: Ulster Unionist Party.
- Ward, M. (2000). *The Northern Ireland Assembly and Women: Assessing the Gender Deficit*. Belfast: Democratic Dialogue.
- Ward, M. (2004). Times of transition: Republican women, feminism and political representation. In L. Ryan & M. Ward (Eds.), *Irish women and nationalism: Soldiers, new women and wicked hags* (pp. 184–201). Irish Academic Press.
- Ward, M. (2006). Gender, citizenship, and the future of the Northern Ireland peace process. *Éire-Ireland*, 41(1), 262–283.
- Ward, R. (2002). Invisible women: The political roles of unionist and loyalist women in contemporary Northern Ireland. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 55(1), 167–178.
- Women for Election Data Hub. (2024). *Women in Irish Politics, 2023*. <https://datahub.womenforelection.ie/>. Accessed 2024-07-25.
- Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland. (2019). *Northern Ireland Women's Manifesto: General Election 2019*. Belfast: Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland.
- Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland. (2020). *Covid-19 Feminist Recovery Plan*. Belfast: Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland.
- Women's Resource and Development Agency. (2023). *WRDA Newsletter August 2023*. Available at: <https://wrda.net/resources/wrda-publications/>.
- Wright, K. A. M., McAreevey, R., & Donaldson, R. (2024) *The Impact of Brexit on Women in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





## Women’s Cross-Community Activities, Agonistic Dialogue and Transversal Politics in Belfast

This chapter explores women’s participation in informal, local politics and public life in Northern Ireland (NI) and grassroots activism as an act of citizen participation is explored. Participants in this study identified a range of political activities—voting, using social media, organising events, protesting in demonstrations, promoting public awareness, doing administrative work, trade union involvement and having difficult conversations about political issues. Along these lines, political participation can involve activities within both formal and informal politics. Despite this, grassroots level work in community development is often not seen as “political activity”:

The people that we do not realise are politically active are people setting up Mother-and-Toddler groups or people going out into the community and doing a lot of community work. [...] I would see that sort of activity as vital. (Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist (PUL) interview)

When a definition of political activity is limited to party politics, “the variety of forms of participation that women undertake”, such as community development and civil society work, are ignored (Donahoe, 2017, p. 79). As women’s political participation is often placed in local communities, it is important to redefine political activity to include more forms of political activity than in formal politics. Women’s roles in their communities were emphasised by several participants, including the important role

played by women's centres. One participant spoke of her experience at a local women's centre:

I wouldn't have [considered myself to be a politically active person] before [...] but starting in here it makes me more aware and makes me want to learn more about politics, so it does. [...] it opened my eyes so much. (Conflict/Nationalist/Republican (CNR) interview)

Another participant also talked about community activism, saying,

women in the community [...] would be the ones that would rally the women together to do something about [issues in the neighbourhood]. [...] The women in this area are very much to the front of doing anything when there is problems. (CNR interview)

The community-based activism in informal politics that women to a large part engaged in during the Troubles (as discussed in chapter 3) has thus continued in post-Agreement NI. In 2003, there were some 5,000–6,000 community and voluntary associations in NI and about 60 per cent of their staff were women (Meehan, 2003). In 2008, there were over 1,000 groups specifically in the community women's sector (Murtagh, 2008). NI women have continued having influence in local communities rather than party politics (Kaufman & Williams, 2007; Persic, 2004; Stapleton & Wilson, 2014) and are represented in decision-making at grassroots levels rather than in formal politics (Cowell-Meyers, 2003). As such, participation in civic life has continued to be a pattern for many women (Deiana, 2013), especially in working-class neighbourhoods where most women's groups are based (Rooney, 2002). Unfortunately, the praise for women's community work to develop civil society is not being followed up with funding and proper resources (Deiana, 2013; Rooney, 2002) and there is a lack of structures to channel local community work into formal politics (see Chapter 6).

This chapter explores a specific part of women's grassroots activities<sup>1</sup> by looking at the premises of cross-community activities, i.e., how women unite and organise around an identity as women across ethno-national lines. The women who participated in this study have a

<sup>1</sup> Even though this book explores a variety of women's cross-community activities, it does not cover every arena of participation. For instance, trade unions are only mentioned in passing and participation in church groups has been excluded. The main reason for

wide range of cross-community experiences: from educational classes and recreational events to feminist activism and exploring the legacy of the conflict in a cross-community setting. These activities tend to organise around different facets of identity and utilise different strategies to deal with difference: by strategically avoiding it, openly discussing it and/or employing strategic silences. The chapter discusses these issues through the lens of transversal politics and agonistic peace.

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed in Chapter 2, transversal dialogue that successfully accommodates situated knowledge in cross-community settings requires a willingness and ability to root and shift, embracing difference and shared values and goals. Agonistic peace is built on inclusive dialogues allowing for counter-hegemony and identity transformation through recognition and reconciliation. Women's cross-community activities in post-1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement (GFA) NI are evaluated against these transversal and agonistic tenets with the aim to explore how women from different ethno-nationalist backgrounds adapt, manage and/or use them. Exploring different types of cross-community activities that approach solidarity and difference in varied ways adds to the knowledge and understanding of how transversalism and agonism can be practised. It also allows for an exploration of their challenges.

One of the central concerns of both transversalism and agonism is how "difference" is addressed and managed. If identity is viewed as fluid and relational, an intersectional analysis is enabled. If not, differences easily become essentialised. As each person incorporates a constellation of identity facets, such as gender, sexuality, age, etc., "difference" can signify variance among any one of these. As this study is set in a deeply divided ethno-national society, politicised ethno-national difference is the main focus. In other words, when terms like "embracing difference" or "engaging meaningfully with difference" are used, they mostly refer to the ethno-national divide. However, in intersectional analyses, it is important to pay attention to how identities interact. This chapter illustrates how different identities are emphasised in different cross-community settings

doing so is the tendency for such groups to be single-identity, although there are exceptions. Excluding them is based on the focus on cross-community activities, not an attempt to downplay the importance of women's contributions in such settings.

to build solidarity across the ethno-national divide. Therefore, differences other than those based on ethno-national background are also discussed, such as gender and class. Intersectionality reminds us that ethno-national identities, like all identities, are not unchanging, homogeneous monoliths. For instance, CNR and PUL women also have many other belongings and will therefore experience their ethno-national identity in different ways depending on if they are young or old, gay or straight, middle-class or working-class, etc. As such, cross-community groups not only have to manage ethno-national difference, but they must also consider other identities.

As Chapter 3 demonstrated, the majority of women's Troubles-era activism was built on strategic avoidance of ethno-national differences while focusing on a shared goal. There were also a few examples of transversal activism (e.g., the Women's Support Network (WSN) and the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC)). Since then, NI, albeit still a deeply divided society, has entered a transitional phase which has created space for new kinds of cross-community work, including peace-building activities. For example, there are a range of cross-community initiatives that address the legacy of the conflict, in addition to recreational and educational cross-community classes. The post-Agreement period has also seen the development of a relatively small, but powerful, (cross-community) feminist movement.<sup>2</sup> These three types of cross-community activities—recreational/educational, conflict legacy and feminist—have different aims and foundations. They differ in their relationships to, and management of the transversal and agonistic tenets.

*Recreational and educational activities* include art classes, health and wellbeing classes, educational training and social events. As their aim is to teach a specific skill and/or act as a space to socialise, although sometimes conducted in a cross-community setting,<sup>3</sup> the focus is on the topic of the class rather than similarities or differences among participants. It is a space for women from different backgrounds to meet, socialise and perhaps develop cross-community relationships. These activities are built

<sup>2</sup> Organisations include the Belfast Feminist Network (est. 2010), Alliance for Choice (est. 1996), Reclaim the Agenda (est. 2010) and Reclaim the Night (est. 2014) (see Table 1.1).

<sup>3</sup> Classes such as these are offered by women's centres to women regardless of background. As such, sometimes the groups happen to be single-identity and sometimes cross-community.

on strategic avoidance of ethno-national difference. In a sense, participants work towards a shared goal (e.g., learning a skill), but do not discuss values, conflict legacy or shared issues on a substantial level.

The second type of activities, *legacy-based*, deals with the past through shared history classes, good relations courses or the Transitional Justice Toolkit Programme (see Chapter 1), for instance. The goal is to learn about and discuss issues at the heart of peace, conflict and transition. This means that identity issues, especially but not exclusively ethno-national identities, are acknowledged and discussed. Even though participants employ strategic silences to show respect and avoid offence, they also create space to discuss difficult issues, manage disagreements and explore differences. Micro-level intersectionality is used in relation to participants' personal backgrounds and differing identities and experiences are discussed openly. Activities that address the past also allow participants to explore shared values and goals.

Unlike the two previous activities in the women's sector, the *feminist* sector also incorporates cross-community participation in organisations such as the Belfast Feminist Network (BFN) and Reclaim the Agenda. Feminist activities are goal-oriented and aim to improve gender equality in NI. The participants choose to take part because of their shared feminist values and goals. In terms of engaging with difference, feminist activities utilise an intersectional analysis at a macro-level. In other words, an intersectional understanding of identity is used theoretically and outwardly. However, between the individual participants of the feminist groups, strategic avoidance of ethno-nationalist difference is employed.

The three types of cross-community activities are analysed in this chapter. First, in 5.2, shared identities as a source of solidarity are discussed, including how mutual respect and trust are developed. In 5.3, agonistic and transversal methods of dealing with difference are explored in the context of women's cross-community activities. This includes a discussion of the use of rooting/shifting, strategic silences and agonistic listening, as well as differences between the three activity types in terms of avoiding or addressing difference. Section 5.4 then addresses shared issues, values and goals to work towards in cross-community settings. This section also explores the difficulties of building coalitions across an ethno-national divide, despite sharing values and goals. The chapter is then summarised and concluded in 5.5.

## 5.2 BUILDING SOLIDARITY THROUGH TRUST, RESPECT AND SHARED IDENTITY

A fundamental part of transversalism and agonism is respect. Without it, it is difficult, if not impossible, to engage with difference in a meaningful and substantial way. A key aspect of transversalism is what Cockburn (1998, p. 227) calls “group process”. This entails employing democratic processes “to ensure that all [...] voices are heard, that all are given equal weight and that decision-making is fully shared” (Cockburn, 1998). Agonism also emphasises a pluralist, inclusive democratic process. Trust, respect and democratic ideals are explored in the following section. Then, in 5.2.2, shared identity as a basis for solidarity is discussed.

### 5.2.1 *Building Trust, Respect and Democratic Ideals*

In Cockburn (1998, p. 214), women in cross-community workshops from different ethno-nationally divided societies discussed how to “make democracy out of difference” to ensure the survival of their alliances and have wider influence. As such, they identified a democratic process as a key part of their work. This entails creating a safe space with transparent, democratic processes where destructive Othering can be contradicted (Cockburn, 1998). When such space is created, participants “may feel able to ‘own’ rather than project [their] fears”, which, in turn, increases the likelihood of listening to and engaging with the Other (Cockburn, 1998, p. 215). Similarly, Maddison (2015) discusses the importance of participant engagement with both democratic process and dialogue content in agonistic encounters. Agonism also emphasises the importance of encounters being based on respect. As such, creating a democratic process is inextricably linked to building trust and respect in cross-community activities. Participants need to feel comfortable enough to share experiences, ideas and views with as little fear as possible of being judged or ostracised. Structures need to be in place to ensure this, it cannot be taken for granted or expected to happen organically.

Creating a democratic space with trust and respect can be done in several ways. For instance, agreeing on some ground rules for the group can be useful. This was done at the start of every toolkit programme (introduced in Chapter 1), allowing participants to articulate ideas about how the programme should run. Speaking one at a time, making sure everybody gets a chance to speak, confidentiality (“what is said in the

room stays in the room”), listening with compassion and being respectful when talking about sensitive issues were examples. The size of the group is important, as one participant said: “usually those classes [about the conflict] are quite small [...] there is maybe the maximum eight people” (CNR interview).

Another aspect of building trust is the importance of banter and socialising. This became clear during the participant observation as the tea breaks were as important as the workshop (if not more so!). The breaks offered a chance to get to know each other. For instance, one participant talked about the benefits of residential (i.e., weekend retreats):

At the start I hated the residential [...] but actually I can see the benefit of those now [...] because people do go away off and go for a walk or have a drink of whatever it is and they are spending just downtime with each other, and the thing is people have a respect for each other. (PUL interview)

Especially in legacy-focused activities, the importance of having a professional facilitator with the expertise to build trust and guide participants through difficult conversations became apparent:

A good facilitator [...] will come in and they will do ice breakers with you and mix you all up so people will be sat in different places [...] [The sensitive issues are discussed] down the line once you have done all the other things first. (CNR interview)

Another participant also pointed out the importance of good facilitation:

Sensitive issues can cause people to fall out [...] it is about your management of your group to make sure that people are OK with being heard [...] make people feel safe to talk. (PUL interview)

A good facilitator may also have shared lived experiences with participants and through that build trust in the group. As one participant, with experience in facilitating cross-community activities, said:

Sharing your experience of how you got where you are now and that you can relate to all their fears and worries because you came through exactly the same thing. [...] That helps right away to break down barriers. [...] If

I am willing to share and trust you, then you can certainly share and trust me, and that usually happens. (PUL interview)

The Bridge of Hope facilitator of the toolkit workshops (see 1.3.1.2) demonstrated the importance of this often. By sharing her own experiences, she encouraged participants to share theirs. Being from Belfast and having extensive knowledge of the experiences of people in the area helped guide the groups through difficult discussions. In deeply divided societies, cross-community dialogues are especially reliant on skilled facilitators: “It takes skilled facilitation to draw participants in dialogue into a deep and intensive process that does not merely skate over the conflicts that are present among the group” (Maddison, 2015, p. 1024).

Another aspect includes what happens before cross-community work. One participant talked about possible training needed ahead of cross-community work:

Would a certain level of training have to be given [...] in terms of how you act in a group? Because we love to think we just throw people together and it will all be grand [...] Working out what are judgements, [...] how do you deal with something sensitively, [...] how to manage high emotions. (PUL interview)

Training can also include reflective work in single-identity settings before cross-community activities, especially in projects dealing with the past. One participant had experienced this: “we done our own individual identity stuff and then met up and done group work” (PUL interview). Doing single-identity work was also addressed by participants in the Opsahl Commission who argued that “people needed to build up their confidence and self-esteem within their own communities before they would be willing and able to cross the divide” (Opsahl & Pollak, 1993, p. 87).

### 5.2.2 *Transforming Identities*

In agonistic peace, especially from a feminist perspective, identities are viewed as intersectional and multiple (Murphy, 2024). Similarly in transversalism, it is key to not overly emphasise or essentialise one facet of identity, but employ an intersectional perspective, recognising the multitude of identities (Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999). In both agonism and

transversalism, one of the goals of dialogue is relational identity transformation. It is a process of both focusing on shared identities and of acknowledging the range of differences and diversity that exist in any group. For instance, in NI there are people who do not belong to either the CNR or PUL communities (such as migrants) or people who grew up in both (e.g., through “mixed marriages”). The binary CNR/PUL identity construct is thus not clear-cut. This section explores three identity facets solidarity is built on in women’s cross-community activities: motherhood, class and political identities.

Related to this is whether cross-community work is performed in the private or public sphere. Most activities in the women’s sector take place in the private sphere, whereas the feminist cross-community activism is public. The activities in the women’s sector are introspective, aiming mostly to benefit those involved. In the feminist sector, on the other hand, the activities are outward facing, often with the goal to challenge societal structures to benefit society, not just those involved. If the activities in the women’s sector had a campaigning or lobbying goal<sup>4</sup> which required interaction with public sphere actors perhaps participants would have responded differently when asked about shared identities. Identities used in a private setting might not be used as readily in a public one, and vice versa.

#### 5.2.2.1 *Motherhood*

Three themes around motherhood emerged in the data: as a tool for bonding; as a strategically employed identity; and as a motivator to action. Motherhood did not seem to be used as the sole identity on which women build their activities. There is an acknowledgement, especially in the women’s sector, that it is an important facet of women’s identities, experiences and everyday lives, perhaps influencing their perspectives on political issues, but not seen as the sole reason for uniting as women across ethno-national boundaries.

The most widely discussed theme was motherhood as a tool for bonding. Participants argued that in the women’s sector, talking about one’s family, children and grandchildren was a way of connecting with other women. As one participant said: “that would be the most common denominator between us all, that would be something then that would

<sup>4</sup> They sometimes do, but none of the activities included in this study did.

spark conversations” (CNR interview). Another participant said: “being a parent means you are in [...] a little club [...] [it] does really help” (PUL interview). Another participant also addressed this: “If I go and speak to another woman and she has had a child, we can communicate, we can connect over our experiences” (PUL interview). In this context, motherhood was brought up as a way of getting to know others on a personal level.

Motherhood as a motivator for action also came up as a theme in the legacy-based activities. Elaine Crory (Women’s Resource and Development Agency (WRDA)) talked about facilitating a cross-community group of women who had participated in the Loyalist Holy Cross protests<sup>5</sup> and women whose daughters went to the school:

There was a huge amount of hurt and anger and we talked about some incredibly difficult topics. [...] What united those women was a feeling that “we owe it to our kids and grandkids” [...] [they were] thinking “it is uncomfortable to talk about this stuff, but even though I will storm out when somebody will say something that hurts me, I will come back in because I feel that I have an obligation to [future] generation of kids”. (Expert interview)

A motivation to work through difficulties was thus the thought of future generations. Similarly, in the toolkit workshops concern for future generations was a common motivator. They often talked about the Troubles in terms of “we don’t want our kids to go through what we went through”. As Emma Campbell (Alliance for Choice (AFC)) said, “it is the thing that can bring them onboard” (Expert interview).

A strategic use of maternal identities emerged as a theme in relation to feminist activism. Emma Campbell talked about how motherhood is sometimes used strategically in the pro-choice campaign “to break down the hierarchy of good abortions/bad abortions, [and convey] the idea that even mothers have abortions. In fact, most people who have abortions already have one or two children” (Expert interview). This uses the idea that “if a woman is a parent, she intrinsically has more value” (Expert

<sup>5</sup> In 2001/2002 Loyalist protesters prevented Catholic girls from entering their school (the Holy Cross Girls Primary School in north Belfast) through sectarian abuse, throwing bottles and stones and using blast bombs. The protests lasted many weeks and police had to escort students and parents entering the school.

interview). Although this conceptualisation can be useful in some settings to win people over, Emma also added that,

[It] would be harmful if that was the only way we framed it, we try not to. [...] If it is used too much, it can infect things [...] You just have to be really careful whenever we are talking about a maternal identity that we are not using that in an exclusive way. (Expert interview)

So, overall, the campaign “is about unseating the role of mother, it questions the idea that you always have to be a sacrificial martyr mother” (Expert interview). Despite sometimes strategically playing with essentialised ideas of motherhood, the campaign more often employs non-essentialist maternal identities, ones in which abortion is a part.

#### 5.2.2.2 *Class*

Class was discussed by half of the participants as an identity used to build solidarity. There was a slight difference between the women’s sector and the feminist sector. Among participants at women’s centres, a working-class identity is an important part of building solidarity:

It doesn’t matter if you are from a Protestant or Catholic background, you are working-class, everybody is dealing with the same things, so I think that brings people together [...] When you know that their struggle is the same, it doesn’t matter what side of the peace line you live on. (PUL interview)

Despite this, the labour movement in NI has always been divided by ethno-nationalism (Expert interview) and it has been difficult to organise around class politics. In addition to working-class experiences, there are also people who could be said to belong to a “non-working class”, i.e., people who have never been in paid employment due to issues such as ill health, disability or caring responsibilities.<sup>6</sup> One participant touched on this: “I think that is the case with a lot of women who do come to women’s centres, the women who can’t get out to work [...] a lot of them can be older, they might have health issues” (CNR interview).

<sup>6</sup> In 2018, 17 per cent of the working-age population (aged 16–64, excluding students and retirees) were economically inactive in NI. The majority (58 per cent) were women. Long-term sickness and disability were the most common reasons (see Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2019).

Class background looks a bit different in the feminist sector:

It still would be predominantly middle-class, there has been working-class women who have got involved to varying degrees, varying levels, but I think a lot of activism [...] does tend to be middle-class. [...] A lot of us would be lower middle-class, [...] [but with] a working-class understanding, [...] [recognising the importance] to look at how it works in a class structure as well as feminist structure and how those things intersect. (CNR interview)

As such, class issues are more used as a basis for political analysis than as a shared identity.

### 5.2.2.3 *Political Identity: Feminism and Socialism*

In terms of political identity, there was a big difference between the women's sector and feminist sector. One's identity as a feminist is, of course, key within the feminist sector as a basis for activity, often accompanied by a socialist identity. In the women's sector, this was seldom the case. Even though quite a few participants in the women's sector identified as feminists or socialists, they did not speak of these identities as the basis of their participation. One participant active in the feminist sector said in terms of what the key identity to build relationships on is:

I would say feminist is a big one, and I think a lot of us would be socialist as well [...] believing in equality is the big one. What that looks like can vary between people, but that is the main driver for us all. (CNR interview)

Emma Campbell (AFC) also argued that feminist credentials are at the forefront of alliances. When asked what women have in common in feminist groups, another participant said:

It is less about the identity and more about the viewpoints, so there are people involved who are disabled, who are carers and parents, who are university educated, who are working-class, [...] lesbian, or bi, or queer, or straight... It is not about the identity markers, it is about your viewpoint, that is the most important thing. [...] Do you support safe, legal abortion access? Do you think rape culture is bad? It is those things that people have in common, [...] people who are going to call themselves feminists and socialists. (PUL interview)

Among women who are active in the women's sector, the picture looks quite different. In general, there was an ambivalence towards feminism, even among participants who identified as such. For example, one participant said: "I am not saying that I am a feminist... Well, I suppose, I think I am..." and talked about how it is (still) associated with tropes of being a hippy, not shaving, burning your bra, being a lesbian and wanting to get rid of men (CNR interview). Possible explanations for this can be found in misconceptions of feminism:

There is a stigma attached to feminism [...] Am I a feminist? No. That is what is going on for me in my body right now. [...] Do I support women's rights? Yes. Do I feel that women need to have more of a voice? Yes, but would I identify myself as a feminist? No, but I probably am. (PUL interview)

Several women had experiences of doing classes at women's centres and through that coming to identify as feminists:

I never thought I would have said I was a feminist until I did this wee survey [in a Women in Politics course at a women's centre] and it came out I was a feminist. [...] It is not all bra burning... That is what I had to realise though, that was my perspective before. (CNR interview)

Others had a clearer feminist identity. One participant explained her relationship to feminism: "I just believe that we should have equality, it is not about men-bashing or women should be this and that, it is just about bringing equality to both sexes" (PUL interview). Another participant said: "feminism to me is about the women standing up for themselves, and each other, and empowering each other and having a voice" (PUL interview).

### 5.3 DEALING WITH DIFFERENCE

This section explores how cross-community activities address difference. Cockburn (1998, p. 224) speaks of this in terms of "affirming difference", which entails "resist[ing] the temptation of erasing [difference], collapsing mixity into mere heterogeneity or, worse, a pretended homogeneity". As such, pretending participants have nothing in common or that they have everything in common should be avoided. One way of

doing this is by adopting a perspective that allows for “non-closure on identity”, which entails not essentialising identities or predicting “what might flow from them” (Cockburn, 1998, p. 225). In other words, participants should recognise the plurality of identities and not expect others to think or act in a certain way due to their ethno-national belonging.

In transversalism, difference is embraced through rooting and shifting, the method used to empathically imagine and place oneself in the position of others, while not abandoning one’s sources of belonging (Cockburn, 1998; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Similarly, in agonism, plurality should be at the centre of relationships and differences among participants should be acknowledged and allowed to coexist, i.e., dialogue should be sustained both across and about difference (cf. Maddison, 2015). Participants should listen with respect, finding ways to disagree without demonisation and practice “agonistic listening” with the goal of transforming relationships (Maddison, 2015; Strömbom & Bramsen, 2022; Strömbom et al., 2022). The aim of agonistic listening is not to overcome disagreements. Rather, it “facilitates the expression of emotions and hearing what is expressed by the Other without necessarily agreeing with its content” and is a prerequisite for recognising the Other (Göker & Çelik, 2022, p. 1255).

In the following sections, key transversal and agonistic ideas (listed below) are discussed in relation to the different types of cross-community activities (educational/recreational activities in 5.3.1; legacy-based activities in 5.3.2 and feminist activities in 5.3.3).

- The ability of participants to stay rooted in their plural identities and simultaneously reflect on them.
- The ability of participants to shift and embrace others’ situated knowledge through agonistic listening.
- The ability to deal with difference: are differences ignored, managed, discussed and/or challenged?

### *5.3.1 Recreational and Educational Activities*

In recreational and educational activities, difference is not dealt with, sensitive issues are not discussed and the policy of “checking your politics at the door” is adhered to. As such, difference is strategically avoided:

In the knitting class, you don't know what people's feelings are about the conflict or had they suffered severe loss, so you are always going to be guarded not to hurt or offend someone. (PUL interview)

Another participant echoed this, saying: "the instructor [...] will say: 'clearly we have both sides of the community [in the room], so we won't talk about political issues or anything like that'" (PUL interview). In one event this participant took part in, the group was told not to discuss a specific current violent event:

[The staff member] said "I just want to make us all aware that we don't want to hear opinions about the latest news issue, this is a classroom and we are here to do x, y and z, not to debate anything outside because what your opinion is on the issue maybe not be your neighbour's opinion, so it is best it is just left at the door". (PUL interview)

There are several reasons for this strategic avoidance. It can limit offence, hurt feelings and re-traumatisation. It can also be a way to mitigate the risk that arguments erupt, which might derail the activity as well as relationships. As one participant put it: "some people still live in the conflict, and I think it would be hard for some people to [let things go and trust others]. [...] [When] there is no room for movement it could cause a bit of conflict" (PUL interview). Another participant echoed this: "some people [...] would still have that bit of bitterness and that bit of hatred [...] You have to tread around what you are saying and what you are speaking about" (CNR interview). This shows that not everyone is comfortable with discussing difference, which is understandable given the trauma that so many people still live within NI.

Strategic avoidance of difference is also connected to the facilitator's role. For instance, say there is a cross-community computer course with a facilitator who is not from NI and/or not trained in facilitating legacy discussions. In such a setting, bringing up a discussion on a sensitive issue might prove to be destructive without proper facilitation. It might cement, rather than challenge, the ethno-national divide. At the same time, when avoidance is mandated by staff it can be perceived as censorship and denigrating. The participant whose group had been told not to discuss a specific event said: "to be actually saying to a group of grown women, 'we don't want you to be debating this', [...] it is nearly like

saying ‘we don’t think you are adult enough to be able to pad your way through this’” (PUL interview).

In recreational/educational activities, there is no problem for participants to stay rooted in their positions. However, reflecting on their “roots” and shifting is difficult, if not impossible, due to the fact that ethno-national difference is entirely avoided. Difference is recognised for it to be avoided, not embraced or affirmed. As such, there are few, if any, opportunities for agonistic listening. Participants do not engage with difference in a substantial way. This is not to say that such activities are not of importance; they are in terms of meeting each other and becoming acquainted in a safe space without risking relationships by talking about sensitive issues. They can also act as a stepping-stone to cross-community engagement for some participants, although not everyone. Not everyone is ready or willing to reflect on and perhaps challenge their ideas and identities.

### 5.3.2 *Legacy-Based Activities*

Work in legacy-based cross-community activities differs greatly from the recreational/educational activities. In legacy-based work, strategic silence, rather than avoidance, is employed to show consideration. This allows participants to explore differences and reflect on positionings while showing respect. As such, there is a meaningful and substantial engagement with difference. When ethno-national differences are highly politicised, affirming difference is a challenge. However, women in Cockburn’s (1998) study of cross-community groups in NI concluded that “difficult differences ‘don’t have to be left outside the door in order for us to work together’” (Cockburn, 1998, p. 224). This is also the case in the legacy-based activities studied in this book.

The legacy-based cross-community activities that are the basis for this analysis were structured around the Transitional Justice Grassroots Toolkit programme (introduced in Chapter 1, see also Rooney, 2012a; Rooney, 2012b, 2013, 2014, 2016). Semi-structured interviews with participants and participant observation of several programmes demonstrated the transversal and agonistic potentials of the toolkit<sup>7</sup>. Even though the programme does not use transversal or agonistic language, it

<sup>7</sup> Although the analysis focuses mainly on the toolkit programme, study participants also shared experiences from other cross-community activities.

does enable dialogue through rooting and shifting and agonistic listening. As such, it illustrates how both transversalism and agonism can be translated into practice, without making it too abstract or theoretical. The programme “enable[s] critical conversations and provide[s] a basis for conflict analysis at both single identity and cross community levels” (Rooney, 2013, p. 3). Even though it does not presume or require cross-community engagement, it can be used in such settings. Participants can also differ in terms of age, gender, country of origin, etc. As such, the basis of conversations does not necessarily have to be ethno-nationality.

### 5.3.2.1 *Rooting and Reflecting*<sup>8</sup>

The toolkit acknowledges participants’ situated knowledge and employs an intersectional understanding of identities. It discusses how people’s experiences of conflict and transition are shaped by different factors:

Gender is an obvious one [...] Another [...] is social class [...] Where a person lives is closely tied to resources such as employment, education and housing. [...] The main point here is that a range of factors come together, along with age, to shape individual experience of conflict and transition. (Rooney, 2014, pp. 11-12)

As such, the programme “offer[s] a means to harness very different individual and community perspectives” (O’Connell in Rooney, 2014, p. 2). The first part of the toolkit operationalises this perspective and encourages participants to reflect on their “rootedness”. It asks participants “to think about the experiences and events that made you the person you are” and emphasises life experience as a valuable resource (Rooney, 2014, p. 20). It also acknowledges how “personal experience has political consequences” (Rooney, 2014, p. 47). As such, each participant brings their own experiences and perspectives to the conversation and is encouraged to reflect on these, the basic idea behind rooting and reflecting.

The ability to stay rooted and reflect is not only up to the individual. The group also has a responsibility to create the trust and respect needed for one to feel safe to do so, as discussed previously. Feeling confident and not having to hide one’s identity is an important aspect of staying

<sup>8</sup> “Rooting/shifting” was not used by study participants. However, it was discussed with different terminology.

rooted and for agonistic dialogue. When asked if there are any experiences or identities that are off-limits in cross-community work, one participant said:

At the beginning, I would have been very wary, but now if I want to say it, I will say it and I don't say it to offend anybody, but I just say it to let them know how I think it is. (CNR interview)

The toolkit also recognises the importance of different perspectives and acknowledges that reflecting on them can be demanding (Rooney, 2014). Therefore, it emphasises the programme's flexibility, stating that participants "can be assured that how they use the toolkit is entirely up to them" (Rooney, 2016, p. 7). There is no requirement or expectation for participants to openly share their experiences with the group. However, in my experience of five toolkit programmes, there are always some participants who do, and it is usually more difficult to wrap up, rather than initiate, group discussions, even in cross-community settings. The grids/worksheets are collated (anonymously) at the end of the programme and distributed to the group (Rooney, 2016). This also creates an opportunity for reflection and to learn from experiences and views that were not articulated out loud during the programme.

Some participants in cross-community work will have reached further in reflecting on their positionings than others. One participant touched on this and talked about how people come "with a whole lot of emotional baggage" and some have dealt with this baggage, while for others it "is still clawing at them" (PUL interview). This is especially relevant in cross-community activities that address conflict legacy<sup>9</sup>. Several PUL participants also talked about how it can be difficult to stay rooted, when the position one is rooted in differs from outside expectations. The distinction between "us" and "them" enforced in ethno-national identity politics places a burden on the members of the respective groups to always defend "their" group (Voet, 1998). Hailing from a certain community might come with an expectation of specific political views or cultural experiences, and it can be difficult if one does not live up to those expectations.

<sup>9</sup> Reflective space can also be created in single-identity settings, which is sometimes a prerequisite for constructive cross-community work. However, single-identity spaces also have an intrinsic value in themselves (cf. Kahanoff 2018 on cross-community work in Israel/Palestine).

In other words, sometimes it is hard to stay rooted in and openly express identities that do not match the expectations of one's own group. An example was given by a PUL participant who talked about how she in many ways identifies with the CNR community and how this is seen as strange by other PUL people: "I am Orange<sup>10</sup> by history, but not by choice [...] I didn't teach it to my children, and I don't want it taught to my grandchild" (PUL interview). This was echoed by another PUL participant who said:

I was wary of people from the PUL community expecting me to go down a certain line because of my background, [...] to be "right, you are in our group, and we will wrap ourselves in the Union Jack" because that makes me deeply uncomfortable, but it also makes me deeply uncomfortable to say, "that is not who I am". (PUL interview)

These reflections on community background, and how this does not automatically inform views, are exactly the kind of reasoning transversalism is based on: one's membership in communities should not be automatically conflated with personal values (see Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999). They also show how dialogue is sustained both across and about difference, with plurality being encouraged, just as in agonistic peace.

### 5.3.2.2 *Strategic Silences*

One way that study participants demonstrated their ability to reflect on rooted identities, was through a discussion of what is not said, and, as such, the use of strategic silences. This is not imposed censorship, but rather an attempt from participants to show empathy and compassion. Cockburn (1998, p. 83) recognised this as "elective and selective speech and silence" on potentially divisive issues, sometimes conscious, sometimes intuitive. This was also the case in the toolkit programme. The toolkit itself "calls for sensitivity from everyone involved" and encourages participants to "talk, listen and engage with respect" (Rooney, 2014, p. 6). It also emphasises that "listening is as important as talking" and that "silence is also a form of communication" (Rooney, 2014, pp. 18–19). This is strongly connected to agonistic listening, discussed below.

When discussing divisive issues, timing and tone are important. All conversations are not necessarily appropriate to have at all times and in all

<sup>10</sup> A Protestant, Loyalist and/or Unionist identity.

settings. However, this does not mean that difficult issues are ignored. By using strategic silence, participants consciously choose when—and equally when not to—raise certain issues. As such, it is more about timing than censorship: difficult issues are discussed, but the timing is important. *How* things are said is also key. Many participants reflected on how they are conscious of wording to minimise offence and, ultimately, to be respectful of other’s rootedness. One participant talked about how it took time for a cross-community victims and survivors’ group to speak their minds:

I have no doubt people are toning it down [...] [they] are careful, but I also think that is mature adult behaviour and we need more of that [...] That idea that you can just come in and shout your views without any respect for the other people in the room or any respect of the consequence that might have on the people in the room, it is just not good enough and we need to get away from that as a society. And also, we need to get to a place where you can put across your view in a reasoned, quiet, calm, respectful manner [...] and it will actually be listened to better. (PUL interview)

Another participant also discussed this, and said she is mindful of not offending others:

I would wait until somebody else started [the conversation], I wouldn’t broach it on my own. [...] There is other people who could approach it diplomatically [...] and then I would join in. (CNR interview)

The importance of not throwing things in other people’s faces was similarly brought up by one participant (CNR interview). Another participant said:

It is hard sometimes, my mouth is a wee bit... sometimes it just comes out and I had to reign that in [...] not in the sense of a religion stance, it is because you are in different company [...] and you have to be careful to not to offend somebody. (CNR interview)

As argued by Joanna McMinn in Cockburn’s study (1998, p. 73): “tact, knowing when to keep your mouth shut, is a valued sign that ‘people have learned to hold a complex identity’”.

### 5.3.2.3 *Shifting and Agonistic Listening*

In addition to rooting and reflecting, shifting is necessary for participants to affirm and embrace difference. Elements of shifting are also incorporated into the toolkit. It enables “space for the uncomfortable conversations that are critical to bridging the divides between individuals and communities” (O’Connell in Rooney, 2014, p. 2). Agonism teaches us how important it is that space is made for these kinds of difficult conversations, especially if the aim is to transform identities and relationships (see Strömbom & Bramsen, 2022). To embrace such conversations, participants must engage in agonistic listening. As such, they learn from each other’s lived experiences and perspectives through active listening (Rooney, 2014) and facilitators are encouraged to “emphasise the usefulness of thoughtful reflection on the diversity of individual and community experience as a way of learning” (Rooney, 2016, p. 7). The programme thus helps “facilitate open exchange” (Rooney, 2012b, p. 10).

Understanding other perspectives, commonalities and differences requires active listening (Rooney, 2014). This is the first step to enable shifting. This is echoed by Porter (2007, pp. 64–65):

Listening is as important as talking. With careful listening, we begin to hear the voice of the other. [...] the ‘other’ loses the abstract distancing of ‘othering’ to become a ‘subject’, a real person.

Similarly, agonistic listening allows participants to hear what the Other says, but does not require agreement on content (i.e., there is space for dissident voices, contestation and alternative narratives). As such, it is a prerequisite for recognising the Other (Göker & Celik, 2022).

The ability to listen, even to opposite and controversial views, was demonstrated in almost every toolkit session I participated in. In one session, three (male) ex-combatants—one former IRA member, one former Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) member and one former British soldier—were invited to speak about their experiences to the women’s group doing the toolkit programme. They talked about everything from internment, violence and doing time in prison to returning to education and community work. The issues were difficult, particularly in terms of how to relate to “truth” and violence perpetrated during the conflict. As someone who is not from NI, I was surprised by the level of calm the women exhibited as the men spoke, despite some very hurtful and traumatic experiences and perspectives being discussed. At times, I felt that I,

the only one in the room without direct experience of armed conflict, was having a hard time calmly listening and asking questions out of concern that it would sound accusatorial.

The women in the group, on the other hand, asked many questions in a matter-of-fact manner without emotional displays. Part of this can be explained by the fact that none of what the ex-combatants were saying was news to the women, they had heard it before. However, sitting face to face with someone who, for a long time, was considered “the enemy” and hearing them talk about victimhood and truth, cannot be easy no matter if you have heard similar ideas before. The women’s active, calm listening and their ability to see the ex-combatants as “real people” is also proof of the work they had put into building cross-community bonds. This particular group had been meeting on a weekly basis for years, so they were no strangers to listening to different opinions. The only time during this session I noticed a negative change and tension was when the issue of accountability of soldiers was brought up. This issue was being discussed in NI at the time, in relation to the possible prosecution of soldiers involved in Bloody Sunday in 1972<sup>11</sup>, and strong opinions were found in both communities. It was clear that the participants’ emotions were closer to the surface when this issue was talked about, but it was nonetheless discussed calmly, albeit with a little edge noticeable in the participants’ voices. This was mimicked when the group was visited by a Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) officer working with legacy issues a few weeks later. When the officer talked about the difficulties involved in the job of investigating conflict-related deaths, one of the women from a CNR background said, somewhat mockingly, somewhat surprised, “so you have feelings?”. Given the historically fraught relationship between the police and the CNR community, such a comment might not be unexpected. Nonetheless, the comment did not provoke a disagreement or argument.

This comment introduces another key aspect related to shifting and listening, namely how differences in opinion and disagreements are dealt with. Whether disagreements are ignored, acknowledged or addressed through constructive dialogue can illuminate if participants are shifting

<sup>11</sup> On 30 January 1972, civilians were shot dead by British paratroopers during a peaceful civil rights march in Derry. When discussed in the women’s group in 2019, the decision to prosecute “Soldier F” had not been made.

to *embrace* difference, or merely *recognising* it. While agonism emphasises recognising difference and finding ways of disagreeing without demonising the Other, transversalism goes one step further and aims for embracing difference. In the legacy-based activities, disagreements were seldom, if ever, ignored. More common was acknowledging that there was a disagreement and dealing with it by “agreeing to disagree” and moving on. As Porter (2007, p. 65) states: “This can only occur where there is equivalence in difference, that is, an equality of respect for difference”. Most often, this entailed recognising, rather than embracing, difference. This does not necessarily preclude shifting from happening, but the likelihood is diminished if differences in opinion are merely stated and then dismissed. Acknowledging difference is not the same as understanding it or embracing it.

Respecting others’ views, even when one disagrees with them, and agreeing to disagree, was something that participants were well-versed in:

Sometimes I feel like screaming at some things people say, but I do not. There is no point in getting annoyed. [...] All the talking in the world was not going to change her opinion, and I find that I can get myself very angry and want to have a full-blown argument about that with her, but then I say to myself “there is no point, she really believes that [...] I can’t change her way of thinking”. (CNR interview)

That everyone is entitled to their opinions was reiterated by many participants. In one of the sessions, there was a discussion about the lack of CNR police officers. While some argued that this was due to discrimination within the PSNI, others argued that it was due to intimidation against CNR police officers from within their own community. As such, differing perspectives were voiced, with participants clearly disagreeing. There was a slight annoyance in the group, and then participants “agreed to disagree” and moved on from the topic.

Many participants also shared experiences of having a disagreement during the session and then being able to sit down and share a cup of tea and chat together. They argued that this stems from trusting that nobody in the group is deliberately saying things to hurt others, a trust that takes time to build. Sometimes disagreements led to constructive conversations that created space to shift and understand someone else’s perspective from their point of view. One participant said that differences

in opinion are generally spoken about: “we have discussed everything; you have to discuss it [...] but not to the point where you are going [to fight]” (PUL interview). Another participant said:

We do have heated discussions, we disagree with each other, but we don't fall out or fight. I can say “I understand your opinion and that is OK because I have mine and I am not trying to change yours”. (CNR interview)

This shows the importance of dialogue, but also the challenges involved. Disagreements can be dealt with constructively, but only to the degree that they do not lead to lasting animosity or disintegration of relationships.

Differences in opinion are not the only things that need to be addressed to facilitate shifting. It is also important to engage with identity difference in a meaningful way that allows participants to embrace it. This can be done in a dialogical process that creates space for “empathetic imagining”. Humour can also be useful:

We do have this really dark sense of humour, and I think that we have got a great ability to be self-deprecating and both communities do that. So, we can really poke fun at each other and at ourselves, and that works quite a lot. (PUL interview)

The importance of humour was also illustrated by Cockburn (1998, p. 86), who describes an event where CNR and PUL women “delighted everyone else by acting a skit featuring the Pope of Rome and the Reverend Ian Paisley [...] Each is fully capable of laughing at a caricature of her own community” (Cockburn, 1998, p. 86).

If one identity is prioritised over others, empathetic imagining can be difficult. For example, if participants only see each other in terms of ethno-national background, understanding each other would likely be difficult given the extensive formation of myths that accompany them. However, if participants recognise each other as women, as working-class, as middle age, etc., relational transformation becomes more likely. As such, an intersectional perspective is encouraged as it can help exploration of both commonalities and differences. In the legacy-based activities, this was embraced. Through the toolkit, participants were encouraged to reflect on their experiences *as women*, not only as members of a

specific ethno-national community. Participants shared and reflected on motherhood, discrimination against women and living in working-class areas, among other things. In other words, the intersections and variance of identities were discussed mostly in terms of the participants' own identities.

The toolkit encourages intersectionality without using the term (as it is not aimed at an academic audience, this is both understandable and appropriate). However, this means that an intersectional perspective might go unnoticed depending on how much a facilitator picks up on or understands it. Since the toolkit is flexible in its use, it is possible to go through the programme without focusing on any other identities than ethno-national ones. Naturally, participants choose how they fill in the worksheets and what to share. In my experience, this often means a focus on events or concerns that are important for the ethno-national communities, rather than as women or working-class. Given the deep ethno-national divide in NI, this is unsurprising. However, when prompted to think intersectionally, participants usually quite easily did so by adding personal experiences pertaining to being a woman, for instance. As such, when used, intersectional thinking was most often applied *within* the group, rather than projected onto society at large, representing a recognition of micro-level intersectional identities rather than a macro-level structural analysis. Additionally, legacy-based activities do not usually involve public engagement, unlike the feminist groups discussed in the following section. If faced with bringing their discussions to a public audience, the legacy-based groups might articulate a macro-level intersectional understanding of identity. As such, there is certainly potential to “scale up” the intersectionality of legacy-based activities.

### 5.3.3 *Feminist Activities*

Feminist cross-community activities present an interesting case in relation to transversalism especially. In short, the approach to rooting, shifting and dealing with difference varies depending on if the group *itself* is explored, or if one looks at the *public* work it does. Outwardly, there is an intersectional recognition and management of difference. Inwardly, there is a strategic avoidance of difference, explored in the following sections.

In terms of agonism, the feminist groups have not necessarily been examples of antagonistic conflict to start with (i.e., participants were never enemies) and members already see each other as something more than

“legitimate adversaries”. Even though they could benefit from agonistic dialogue, they have found ways of working together despite ethno-national difference (unlike, for instance, Stormont). Since the aim of these groups is to work on feminist issues, on which there is at least some lowest common denominator in terms of opinions and values, relational transformation of participants in terms of ethno-nationalism has not been emphasised. However, there is still space for recognition of difference and expressing different opinions.

### 5.3.3.1 *Inside Feminist Groups*

“Defining the agenda” is one strategy that cross-community groups in deeply divided societies employ to facilitate their activities. This entails defining the “matters on which it is safe to engage with each other, those that should be avoided if the group is to hold together and, most importantly, those that become possible as the group gains in ability to deal creatively with difference” (Cockburn, 1998, p. 227). Based on interview data, within feminist groups, there seems to be a clear definition of what is “safe” to talk about and matters that are avoided. Participants are very aware, like everyone in NI, that their society is divided. As such, they recognise difference, but do not discuss, embrace or affirm it. The membership of the feminist sector is, in a sense, unconsciously cross-community, like the educational/recreational activities discussed earlier. Unlike legacy-based cross-community activities where there is usually a balance of CNR and PUL participants (partly to live up to funding requirements, see Chapter 6), the mix comes together more organically in the feminist sector: those with an interest in feminist issues join, regardless of community background.

Compared with the women’s rights movement of the 1970s/80s, the feminist sector in present-day NI has found more ways to creatively deal with ethno-national difference. This can partly be explained by the space that has opened up since the GFA to explore different perspectives in a non-violent way. While the Northern Ireland Women’s Rights Movement (NIWRM) largely functioned on a strategy of “checking your politics at the door” and strategically avoiding difference, the feminist sector today does not require participants to leave their politics at home, but neither does it encourage discussing them. As such, they carefully tread the “narrow but [...] really felt line that divides ‘leaving your politics at home’ from bringing them to work albeit without actively debating

them there” (Cockburn, 1998, p. 86). The strategy employed by feminist groups is thus a version of strategic avoidance of difference, though not as strict as within the NIWRM or recreational/educational activities.

The feminist sector’s way of strategically avoiding difference is practised through focusing on one specific shared identity, a feminist identity and ignoring ethno-national difference by simply not discussing it. The work towards a shared goal is thus prioritised over dealing openly with difference. Personal experiences stemming from ethno-national background are not discussed, even though a macro-level intersectional analysis is employed in their public work. Elaine Crory (WRDA), who is involved in several feminist groups, confirmed this:

I would say you are 100 per cent on the button [...] that is exactly how it works. Yes, there is definitely a case of macro-analysis, talk about intersectionality, talk about international issues, do not—whatever you do—talk about issues right here. Yes, that is definitely the case [...] The only way that we have found so far is to take the national question, put it in a little box and hide it at the back of the metaphorical wardrobe where we do not have to deal with it yet, we can deal with all this other stuff first. (Expert interview)

This was echoed by another participant:

We don’t talk about national identity [...] we don’t talk about a border poll or whatever, because we have got more pressing things to deal with like abortion access and the fact that there is no childcare strategy [...] We have got real life material issues to work on. (PUL interview)

Some discussed potential problems with this approach:

I think a lot of it is checking [difference] at the door [...] there is first and foremost [focus on] our issues [...] I think [difference] is something that constantly needs readdressed because your politics, you can’t always check them at the door, they sneak in in little ways. (CNR interview)

This was also commented on by another participant:

It is automatically going to come up, especially when you come from NI. [It is] automatically, “where are you from? [...] what school did you go

to?” [...] It is easier just going “listen, I am a Protestant, end of”, just get it out there rather than sitting going around: “say h”. (PUL interview)

The issue of strategically avoiding discussions of difference also relates to the communities’ differing relationships with feminism. Historically, as discussed in Chapter 3, CNR women have had stronger links to feminism, while this has been more difficult for PUL women. Although differences are not as stark today, there is still a concern that PUL women face more barriers in becoming involved in feminist organising (as well as political activity at large). Elaine Crory touched on this, saying that she was not sure if strategically avoiding difference is “the wisest way of approaching it because I think it does continue to feed into not encouraging [U]nionist women to get involved in feminist activism [...] By not talking about [difference], it might just scare people back into their corners” (Expert interview). Not having constructive conversations about difference limits the possibilities of exploring both the commonalities and differences between the communities in terms of gender equality and feminism. The positionings of the communities in relation to the state (traditionally Unionism in defence, Nationalism challenging) still apply and limit PUL women’s access to feminist activism. This is not to say that there are no Unionist women in the feminist movement, there are, but there is also evidence that “sometimes those women feel a little bit isolated from their own communities for [being involved]. That in itself is an issue” (Expert interview).

There are several reasons for strategically avoiding difference. One, which has been touched on previously, is that there are more urgent issues to focus on. Related to this is also the fact that, although effective, the feminist sector is small. There is a large overlap of membership in organisations, and several are managed by a small number of highly engaged activists. For example, BFN has not had regular open meetings for the past few years, as the pro-choice campaign has taken up a great deal of focus and energy of its membership. Since many members are active in both BFN and AFC, the focus is shifted from one to the other as needed. Lack of time and resources to maintain several organisations at the same time is therefore an issue. This, in turn, has an impact on setting the discussion agenda. As it is difficult enough to manage time and energy to address pressing gender inequalities, discussing difference might not be the top priority:

If there was a funded residential weekend to do it properly and be facilitated, then yes. But that is not the way that we are working, it is a Facebook or a WhatsApp group chat or meeting in a café, it is not a programme. (PUL interview)

Another reason, similar to earlier women's rights activism, is the fear of splintering the organisations and harming the ability to work together:

We don't have frank discussions [...] I think part of it is because we have too much else to worry about and part of it is, it can be damaging to relationships, and I don't see that changing. (PUL interview)

If there is no perceived benefit of discussing difference through agonistic dialogue, it is unsurprising that it is avoided. Hampering activism through potential disagreements is seen as a real risk, especially given the small number of active participants.

### 5.3.3.2 *Feminist Public Engagement*

In the public campaigns and lobbying work of feminist groups, the picture looks a bit different as a macro-level intersectional analysis is strategically employed to address difference. This also incorporates other differences, such as class, ability, sexuality or age. The feminist groups have thus found a way of outwardly managing the fact that they exist in a deeply divided society, while not addressing certain issues within the groups themselves. In practice, this means being mindful of where meetings are held (preferably in a "neutral" area) and using neutral language so as not to alienate any community. As such, the intersectional perspective is limited and used as a tool more to minimise exclusion rather than to promote diverse inclusion. Elaine Crory talked about this, saying that some groups "speak the language of intersectionality despite not being especially inclusive" in terms of accommodating diverse participants (Expert interview). However, some make efforts to increase their diversity, looking to include more migrant, working-class and PUL participants.

An example of how difference is managed rather than embraced in the sector's public engagement is the use of the two slogans for the abortion rights campaign: "now for NI" (catering more to a PUL constituency) and "the North is next" (catering more to a CNR constituency). Elaine Crory said that using both was not a difficult decision, "it was just a simple thing to do [...] out of respect" (Expert interview). Another

participant also commented: “If we had only used one of them, we would have had people annoyed and we still do get people annoyed with using both [...] some people are saying ‘pick a side’” (CNR interview). The International Women’s Day rally is another example of how intersectionality is used to include diverse speakers. In 2019, Belfast Lord Mayor Deidre Hargey (Sinn Féin), a trade union representative, a young woman from East Belfast Youth Action and a representative from AFC, among others, spoke, with topics ranging from lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer (LGBTQ) issues and breastfeeding to abortion and refugees.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the women’s rights movement was plagued by disagreements over how to address Republican female prisoners. Study participants were asked if there have been any similar disagreements within the contemporary feminist sector that have threatened to splinter it. One example relates to whether BFN should take a stand on Israel/Palestine and make a statement supporting Palestine<sup>12</sup>. Curiously, this issue has been “adopted” by the ethno-nationalist groups in NI. The Nationalist/Republican movement has since the late 1970s been sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, identifying both struggles as part of the same anti-imperialist movement (Hill & White, 2008). In 2002, as tensions rose during the second intifada, there was a marked increase of Palestinian flags in CNR neighbourhoods and a corresponding, yet unprecedented, appearance of thousands of Israeli flags in PUL areas (Guelke, 2012; Hill & White, 2008).

Similarly, in 2023/2024 as the Israeli war on Gaza raged after the Hamas attack, an increase in Israeli flags was once again seen in PUL areas (Carton, 2024) and Palestinian flags in CNR areas (Irish News, 2023). The political symbolism of this has led pro-Palestinian politics to be seen as Nationalist/Republican, while a pro-Israel stance is linked to Unionism/Loyalism. This is an example of how NI’s ethno-national cleavage manages to “[determine] political alignments on matters seemingly unconnected to the struggle” (Guelke, 2012, p. 29). This has also made it a difficult issue in the feminist movement. Elaine Crory said: “on paper, it has nothing to with NI, but the implications caused a little bit of consternation [in BFN]” (Expert interview). She emphasised that it was nothing close to the rift in the 1970s/80s, but there was unease

<sup>12</sup> Interviews took place in 2019–2020, years before the October 7 attack and subsequent Israeli war on Gaza.

around whether taking a pro-Palestine stance would be interpreted as pro-Republican. Instead, it was also discussed as a human rights issue to pull attention away from its local political connotations.

Feminist groups thus often must navigate and manage the fact that their campaigns are interpreted along ethno-national lines. This was something the sector faced when they protested Ulster Rugby in the aftermath of the “rugby rape trial” in 2018<sup>13</sup>:

The protests at Ulster Rugby, they were seen as anti-Protestant. And then we were asked why we were not protesting at Cliftonville<sup>14</sup>. We were not protesting [there] because the trial was still ongoing. [...] It was definitely interpreted as [...] “you just hate Protestants because you protested at Ulster Rugby” [...] [Also], the protest at Ulster Rugby was not about the trial, it was about the culture within the club. (PUL interview)

The issue of abortion rights has also been portrayed as a sectarian issue, as discussed in Chapter 4. In response to a comment from a Democratic Unionist Party Member of Parliament (MP) about abortion rights and equal marriage being partisan (i.e., Nationalist/Republican) issues, AFC produced a video, #EqualityProds, to showcase PUL people supporting equality (see Alliance for Choice, 2019).

The feminist cross-community groups use intersectionality to the extent that it helps them communicate their message without unnecessarily alienating any group. Intersectionality has in some ways helped the movement frame issues as human rights concerns, but this remains difficult in a deeply divided ethno-national society where most things are interpreted through an Orange-and-Green framework. The feminist sector tends to be more intersectional in theory than in practice. As Elaine Crory states:

<sup>13</sup> Ulster Rugby players Paddy Jackson and Stuart Olding were charged, but acquitted, of raping a woman (BBC 2018; McKeown 2018; Simpson 2018). Following the 2018 trial, there were protests all over Ireland and BFN staged a rally outside the club to protest its sexist culture (Ferguson 2018; McDonald and Greenfield 2018).

<sup>14</sup> In November 2018, Cliftonville footballer Jay Donnelly pleaded guilty to distributing an indecent image of a child and was sentenced to prison in 2019. BFN refrained from commenting during the trial but after criticised the club for playing Donnelly (BBC 2019; Little 2018).

We are very good on the theory: here is how to be intersectional. [But we are] very limited in our ability to carry that out, whereas the women's centres are the complete opposite—they would not talk about intersectionality, but they practise it all the time. (Expert interview)

## 5.4 BUILDING COALITIONS

In transversal politics, one of the central tenets is the ability of diverse groups to work together based on shared values and goals. The idea is to build coalitions across difference. In agonism, there is a strong scepticism against any consensus politics. All attempts to make consensual political decisions are seen as temporary, partial and fragile. In agonistic feminism specifically, Murphy (2024, p. 264) argues, women form coalitions based on strategic action, rather than focusing on points of commonality by overcoming their differences.

This section discusses the challenges of building alliances on the basis of gender equality. Even though there is a high degree of agreement among women from different community backgrounds on what the key issues are that need to be dealt with, it remains difficult to build sustainable coalitions. Section 5.4.1 identifies shared concerns and goals among study participants, while 5.4.2 discusses the challenges of building alliances based on those issues.

### 5.4.1 *Identifying Shared Issues and Goals*

According to transversal politics, shared issues and goals can be a basis for cross-community alliances. Many study participants expressed a shared understanding of political issues and goals. As a thought-experiment, participants were asked if they would participate in a woman-only cross-community activity to learn about and address a specific political issue (anything from education and welfare to drug addiction and Brexit). In such a project, the work would then, in different ways, be fed into formal political life, for instance through a lobbying campaign to raise awareness and increase political will to address the issue. Most participants were very interested in taking part and some had experienced similar initiatives involving issues such as childcare and peace walls:

If [...] they were especially looking for females to come along and either voice an opinion or listen or get involved, yes, I think I would be genuinely interested in that, especially if I thought it was going to move the peace process on a bit. (PUL interview)

Participants were asked to list the three most important political issues for themselves or their communities. “We come from all different areas [...] and realised that we actually have the same problems and the same issues”, one participant said when discussing shared political issues in her cross-community group (CNR interview). This sentiment was shared by many participants, who argued that overall, the issues they face in their daily lives are the same regardless of ethno-national background. One participant said: “you have so much more in common than people realise [...] ordinary everyday issues is the same right across the board” (CNR interview), while another participant talked about how this is something that helps bring women closer (PUL interview). As Table 5.1 shows, the answers from PUL and CNR participants were very similar in terms of important issues.

Many of these issues are addressed in the Women’s Manifestos produced by the Women’s Policy Group (WPG) and all are discussed in the Covid-19 Feminist Recovery Plan, also authored by WPG (Women’s Ad Hoc Policy Group Northern Ireland, 2010; Women’s Policy Group Northern Ireland, 2016, 2019, 2020). These documents, filled with policy areas where progress is needed, are presented by women in civil society to political parties at each election (Galligan, 2013). Nonetheless, building cross-community coalitions based on shared concerns remains difficult. Some of the challenges that such coalitions face are discussed below.

**Table 5.1** Study participants’ shared key political priorities

<i>Issues</i>	<i>CNR</i>	<i>PUL</i>	<i>TOT</i>
Education	4	4	8
Suicide and mental health	3	4	7
Health care	3	3	6
Women*	4	2	6
Welfare**	3	3	6

\*Women’s health, abortion, women’s centres, women’s issues, reproductive justice

\*\*Welfare issues, austerity, benefits

### 5.4.2 *Challenges of Building Coalitions*

This section explores some of the social and political forces that challenge cross-community coalitions: (1) the relationship between the state, the communities and feminism; (2) cross-community work failing to challenge injustices and (3) the gap between the women's and feminist sectors.

The *first* challenge, the relationship between the state, feminism and the ethno-national communities, has been discussed in Chapters 3–4, as well as earlier in this chapter. This remains one of the difficulties in sustaining successful cross-community coalitions, in addition to the barrier that power-sharing poses to cross-communal alliances on the basis of gender politics (Stapleton & Wilson, 2014). Even though CNR and PUL women identify similar issues that need to be addressed politically, this does not mean that they would promote the same solutions. In the struggle for abortion rights, this became evident when some CNR people saw Westminster's involvement as British law being imposed on NI. Emma Campbell (AFC) commented on this:

People in Westminster did not understand why not everyone in NI was going “Yeah, Westminster are getting involved!”. [They] did not understand why we had to try and really, really convince people to come along, and especially obviously in the Nationalist community. Even when Sinn Féin and People Before Profit were supporting Westminster in intervening, [it] did not always translate to women on the ground in those communities supporting it. (Expert interview)

To complicate things even further (nothing in politics is ever simple in NI), some PUL people also viewed Westminster's involvement as an undemocratic imposition: “everything was topsy turvy because the DUP were the party that were opposing the Westminster intervention and Sinn Féin were asking for it” (Expert interview). Local PUL women's groups argued that the same (abortion) law should be applied everywhere in the union, in opposition to the wishes of the DUP (Democratic Unionist Party) who tried to block the decriminalisation of abortion in NI.

As also touched on earlier in this chapter, there is a specific set of challenges for PUL women engaged in activism on human rights and equality. Not only is there limited space to express what is perceived to be “CNR-politics”, there is also still a certain level of paramilitary control in some PUL areas. As Elaine Crory argued:

That leads sometimes women to be afraid [to express] something that is very explicitly anti-establishment. It is particularly relevant in [PUL] communities [...] where they are told [...] “don’t you be attending those rallies and marches, that is for Nationalist women”. [...] There are still women’s centres in Belfast where paramilitary control is tight enough that some of these women are afraid [to attend anything] other than the [recreational classes]. [...] [Some] people call it the “home wreckers’ centre” [...] because they will talk about [...] what might be going on in the home. (Expert interview)

Coupling paramilitary control with misogynistic, anti-feminist views, it is understandable, although not acceptable, that it is difficult for PUL women to get involved. There is a clear separation of private and public spheres, and the expectation of women to not step into the “wrong” sphere or bring concerns such as domestic violence to the public sphere. This is heightened in cross-community settings with a “danger of cross-contamination of views”, i.e., women learning from each other (Expert interview). As such, it presents a clear challenge to maintaining cross-community coalitions. Another reason why it is difficult to build such coalitions is that “people [in both communities] are afraid [...] They don’t want to upset the applecart and potentially begin conflict again” (Expert interview).

CNR women have often had to frame their activism in a Nationalist lens to be taken seriously within the Nationalist movement. If unable to do so, “they have been told ‘get back to the back of the queue, we will get a united Ireland and then we will come to women’s rights’” (Expert interview). Similarly, in Unionism/Loyalism women have been told “when the union is safe, then we will talk about your issues” (Expert interview). Elaine Crory argued that the ethno-nationalist groups have

successfully put everything on the back burner for a century. That makes it easy to dismiss people who will stand up and speak about [equality] issues. Feminist issues are seen as being a total distraction by people on both sides of the divide. (Expert interview)

Additionally, participation in community groups, “particularly those with a ‘cross-community’ or ‘reconciliatory’ focus, may help to reproduce an image of women having the wrong sorts of qualities for the business of politics” (Roulston, 1996, p. 142).

The *second* challenge relates to the restrictions superficial cross-community engagements place on coalitions. As Rooney (2003, p. 155) argues:

much of what claims to be “peace work” in the north of Ireland operates on a conservative “community relations” formula. It is about getting “Catholics” and “Protestants” to make contact. It avoids the causes of the conflict. Some people might feel better as a result of this work, but it will not bring about peace with justice.

This critique was also brought up by community activists who argued that such activities are “cosmetic, in the spirit of ‘Let’s get 25 Catholics and 25 Protestants and bring them to the Icebowl and they’ll have a lovely time skating around.’ It seemed to them depoliticizing” (Cockburn, 1998, p. 69). It implies that the deep-rooted issues in NI can be solved simply by people from different ethno-national communities spending more time together, which denies the structural inequalities at the heart of the conflict. The educational/recreational cross-community activities represent such “community relations” work. Such superficial engagement can potentially also take place in legacy-based activities if they focus on issues that are so far in the past that there is little to no cost for participants to engage, such as the 1690 Battle of the Boyne. Not acknowledging and dealing with injustices is thus a key challenge to building lasting coalitions. Cockburn (1998, p. 226) also found this to be important and argued that NI, like other deeply divided ethno-national societies, is “not just [a site] of war between peoples who for some inexplicable reason hate each other”, but rather “[a society] founded on terrible wrongs”. Therefore, building an alliance

is a painful process. [...] Only when that self-sensitizing work is taken onboard by project members that are identifiable as a member of an oppressor group does the next, and equally difficult step become possible. Then, those of the societally subordinated group may find they can acknowledge and understand the oppressor group’s deep-seated fears, the memories of suffering that have been allowed (and often unscrupulously exploited) to justify acts of repression and aggression. They may also be able to acknowledge the threat the aggressor/oppressor perceives (Cockburn, 1998, p. 226).

One of the participants in Cockburn's study articulated a similar argument:

Everybody's experience of death is tragic [...] but there are fundamental issues to do with the structure of the state where I'm going to disagree [with someone who's saying "let's all be nice about it, let's meet in the middle"]. And if you're going to understand each other's position, then those issues have to be on the table (Claire Keatinge cited in Cockburn, 1998, p. 81).

This issue also came up in toolkit sessions, especially in relation to reconciliation. In one group, participants argued strongly for justice being needed for reconciliation. Not dealing with injustices and power asymmetries, both in society at large and within the group itself, severely limits the potential of building a sustainable cross-community coalition on shared issues. Another risk associated with not challenging underlying ethno-nationalist and sectarian attitudes is that they can be projected onto a new Other. Identifying and challenging hate in terms of CNR/PUL sectarianism might decrease the likelihood of racist, Islamophobic or homophobic manifestations. This is also related to the dominance of Orange-and-Green issues, and as such, the neglect of other communities in NI. This also shows the importance of transversalism that not only recognises but embraces difference.

The *third* challenge in building coalitions on shared issues relates to the gap that exists between the women's and feminist sectors. Even though organisations like WRDA work in both sectors, the participants rarely overlap. Elaine Crory elaborated on this:

The women in the women's centres tend to be older, not exclusively by any means but the average age is much older, whereas women actively involved in feminist activity [...] the overwhelming majority would be under 40 or maybe in the early 40s [...] class is another [difference] because [...] the women's centres themselves are geographically located mostly in working-class communities. (Expert interview)

While women in the women's sector have learned feminist principles "by doing", they seldom articulate and theorise them as such—which is done in the feminist sector. In a sense, this means that certain lived experience and practical expertise are concentrated in one sector, while feminist and theoretical expertise and policy know-how are concentrated

in the other. There is great potential for knowledge exchange between the sectors as well as potential for cooperation. If they were to do so, building coalitions among women on shared issues might both be eased and yield better (political) results. This is further discussed in Chapter 6.

## 5.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown how women build trust, respect and solidarity across an ethno-national divide and find common ground on shared identities and issues, as well as limitations and challenges to building cross-community alliances. Transversalism and agonism were explored in relation to three types of women's cross-community activities in contemporary NI: recreational/educational; legacy-based and feminist. The activity types represent different levels of transversal and agonistic politics, summarised in Table 5.2. The strategic avoidance of difference in recreational/educational activities manifests none of the transversal or agonistic tenets, except for a recognition that difference exists. Feminist work represents the next level, with a version of strategically avoiding difference within groups and strategically managing difference in public work. There is space for recognition of difference and for expressing different opinions along agonistic lines. The third level, which corresponds closest to transversalism and agonism, is represented by legacy-based activities that both recognise and affirm difference to a degree.

### 5.5.1 *Building Alliances, Trust and Shared Identities*

Looking at how identities were used to build solidarity some differences emerged between the cross-community activities. In the women's sector, two identities stand out: maternal and class identity. Being a mother and having family responsibilities was used to spark conversations and find common ground, however, it was not expressed as an essentialised or exclusionary identity. As many women's centres exist in working-class areas, it is not surprising that working-class belonging is important. Working-class identity sometimes carries more weight than family responsibilities in terms of building solidarity, but usually in connection to experiences of being a woman. Feminist identity was discussed by some participants, most shared an ambivalence towards it with confusion over its meaning and stigma attached to identifying as feminist. However,

**Table 5.2** Women's transversal and agonistic cross-community activities

<i>Type of cross-community activity</i>	<i>Transversal and agonistic tenets</i>				
	<i>Rooting &amp; self-reflection</i>	<i>Shifting &amp; agonistic listening</i>	<i>Recognising/embracing difference</i>	<i>Sharing values &amp; goals</i>	<i>Identity basis</i>
Recreational/educational	Rooting without reflection	No	Recognising	No	Women, mothers, working-class
Feminist (in)	Rooting without reflection	No	Recognising	Shared values and goals	Feminism
Feminist (out)	Yes, on a macro-level	Limited	Recognising, limited embracing	Shared values and goals	Feminism, intersectional
Legacy-based	Yes, on a micro-level	Agonistic listening, some shifting	Recognising, embracing to a degree	Shared values and often shared goals	Women, mothers, working-class, intersectional

several women had come to identify as feminists because of their participation in women's centres. Overall, though, feminist identity was not prioritised or emphasised as common ground on which to build solidarity. Motherhood and being working-class were both recognised as important identity facets, but at the same time, not respectively treated as the sole reasons for uniting as women. This can be interpreted as an intersectional perspective, i.e., in the understanding of how one's identity as a mother/carer intersects with one's identity as working-class. The other part of intersectional theory, that systems of oppression intersect, was not prevalent among participants' reasoning. On the whole, different identities were acknowledged and discussed, but there was no deep intersectional analysis of the consequences of the intersections.

In the feminist sector, political identification as a feminist and/or socialist stands out as a basis for solidarity. Participants in this sector come together as *feminists*, many also with a socialist analysis. The feminist sector tends to be more middle-class in general than the women's sector, but many still acknowledge and retain a working-class analysis. There also

seems to be an intersectional understanding of how class interacts with patriarchy. One could argue that since the feminist identity overshadows other identities, the activities may be limited by the emphasis on this one identity. On the other hand, a feminist identity can in itself be pluralistic—it should not require one to conform to a specific set of identities in order to identify with it (although historically it has done so), especially not when the feminism is intersectional. When exploring the range of issues discussed in feminist groups and the analysis of those issues, there is a strong indication that there is an intersectional awareness among participants. Identities such as motherhood, class and gender are not discussed as separate issues but are included in most discussions to the extent it is possible.

The interview data showed that PUL and CNR participants identified similar political issues: many argued that, in general, they face the same issues in their daily lives. Participants also talked about the importance of amplifying the cross-community work being done by women's centres, emphasising the lessons that can be learned from building solidarity across a divide. The majority were both willing and interested in participating in women-only cross-community activities to address political issues and argued that it would be a good way to move forward together as one community. Several challenges to building cross-community coalitions were also explored. For one, alliances are restricted because of the relationship between the CNR and PUL communities and the state. This also relates to paramilitary control and challenges in identifying as feminists. Second, the risk of superficial cross-community engagement that fails to challenge injustices was discussed. Without acknowledgement of power asymmetries, problematic and destructive perceptions are left unchallenged. Third, the gap between the women's and feminist sectors also poses a challenge to maintaining sustainable, long-term coalitions. The sectors would both benefit greatly from increased overlap in membership and cooperation on key gender equality issues.

### 5.5.2 *Dealing with Difference*

Building respect and trust in cross-community groups comes into play in relation to both transversalism and agonism, as it is important for participants to feel comfortable to share (all) their identity facets. Interestingly, some PUL participants expressed difficulties in staying rooted in relation

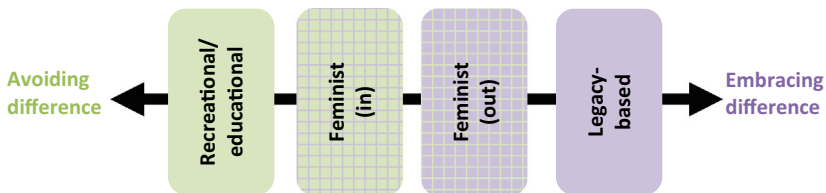
to members from their “own” community, especially when they had identities that challenged the expectations of a “proper” community member. Dealing with judgements from within one’s community made participants uncomfortable to openly acknowledge those parts of their identities. Overall, participants demonstrated how their community backgrounds do not equate to a set of fixed ideas; positionings and personal values cannot be conflated. Participants also showed how they used strategic silences to enable both rooting and shifting, specifically in legacy-based activities. There was a conscious effort among a majority, if not all, participants to not offend others, to show empathy and understanding. To do this, they were mindful about what to say (and not to say), how to say it and when to say it, which requires skill and time. This indicates a general understanding of and reflection on how one’s own rooting might differ from others.

Agonistic listening and shifting entails actively listening, dealing with disagreements and/or different perspectives in a constructive dialogue, and embracing difference, ideally through intersectionality. This allows participants to empathically imagine and position themselves in the perspective of the other participants (cf. Yuval-Davis, 2006), as opposed to merely acknowledging difference. In recreational/educational activities, and within feminist groups shifting did not occur. Recreational/educational activities operate on the policy of “checking your politics at the door”. Some participants saw this as a way to censor conversations and belittle participants; while others argued that even if issues are “off-limits”, they tend to come up anyways—so attempts to avoid them might not have the desired effect. At the same time, participants recognised that this was sometimes necessary, and that certain settings are not ideal for difficult conversations. There are also real consequences of discussing difference if participants are not prepared to do so. Experiences of discrimination or conflict can trigger or re-traumatise. Within feminist groups, the focus is the issues at hand—not unsimilar to the cross-community alliances created during the Troubles. Overall, material issues are prioritised over engaging with ethno-political difference because of resource constraints, and because it can damage relationships. However, a certain level of agonistic listening was present in feminist groups.

While all the activities recognised difference (along agonistic lines), only legacy-based and feminists’ public activities attempted to embrace

and affirm difference, along transversal lines (see Fig. 5.1). In the legacy-based activities, active agonistic listening was evident, as well as a certain degree of shifting. The main focus of participants was on “agreeing to disagree”, although sometimes disagreements led to constructive conversations that created space for shifting and embracing difference. In the feminist groups’ public engagements there was also evidence of limited shifting, but in a much more strategic way. Attempts to embrace difference was used to manage the ethno-national divide of society rather than to be inclusionary. The groups use intersectionality to navigate the realities of existing in a deeply divided society, but in a limited way. Differences are as such recognised far more than they are embraced. This is a macro-level analysis of society, not depending on an analysis of their own members’ backgrounds, identities or experiences. In legacy-based activities, the data points to the opposite: participants’ identities and experiences are discussed openly—representing a micro-level intersectionality—but lacks a broader macro-analysis of society.

Transversal cross-community activities not only engage women in various ways, but they also have the potential to inform a gender-just citizenship that recognises and encourages women’s participation. As such, several lessons can be learned that can act as models for democratic participation in deeply divided societies. For instance, transversal coalitions demonstrate the importance of spotlighting intersectional identities to mitigate the saliency of ethno-national belonging. By incorporating various identities in cross-community settings, the destructive ethno-national divide can be counterbalanced. This can be done by building alliances on identities other than ethno-nationalism, for instance by emphasising commonalities and shared issues based on gender or class.



**Fig. 5.1** Women’s cross-community activities in post-Agreement Northern Ireland (*Note* The figure is based on the groups and activities studied in this book)

It can also be done by emphasising society's richness of belongings, for instance, the growing group of people that do not identify as either CNR or PUL. Transversal and agonistic activities in this study show that (strategically) ignoring difference may create space for alliances but are in the long run limiting for inclusivity and political reach. These, and other, links between transversalism, agonism and citizen participation are further explored in the next chapter.

## REFERENCES

- Alliance for Choice. (2019). '#EqualityProds' [Video]. 2019-07-09. Belfast: Alliance for Choice. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/Alliance4Choice/videos/454913168641974/> (Accessed: 2024-07-28).
- BBC. (2018). *Paddy Jackson and Stuart Olding Not Guilty of Rape*. BBC. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-43571066>. Accessed 2020-10-15.
- BBC. (2019). *Cliftonville Player Jay Donnelly Jailed for Four Months*. BBC. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-46822351>. Accessed 2020-10-15.
- Carton, A. (2024). 'Why Unionists tend to Support Israel...' *Slugger O'Toole*. 2024-04-15. Available at: <https://sluggerotoole.com/2024/04/15/why-unionists-tend-to-support-israel/> (Accessed: 2024-11-10).
- Cockburn, C. (1998). *The space between us: Negotiating gender and national identities in conflict*. Zed.
- Cowell-Meyers, K. (2003). 'Women legislators in Northern Ireland: gender and politics in the new Legislative Assembly'. Belfast: Centre for Advancement of Women in Politics, School of Politics, Queen's University Belfast.
- Deiana, M.-A. (2013). Women's citizenship in Northern Ireland after the 1998 agreement. *Irish Political Studies*, 28(3), 399–412.
- Donahoe, A. E. (2017). *Peacebuilding through Women's Community Development: Wee Women's Work in Northern Ireland*. Cham: Springer International.
- Ferguson, A. (2018). *Belfast feminist network to stage rally at Ulster Rugby Game*. The Irish Times. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/belfast-feminist-network-to-stage-rally-at-ulster-rugby-game-1.3459993>. Accessed 2020-10-15.
- Galligan, Y. (2013). Gender and politics in Northern Ireland: The representation gap revisited. *Irish Political Studies*, 28(3), 413–433.
- Guelke, A. (2012). *Politics in deeply divided societies*. Polity Press.
- Göker, Z. G., & Çelik, A. B. (2022). Women's dialogic encounters: Agonistic listening and emotions in multiple-identity conflicts. *Third World Quarterly*, 43(6), 1251–1269.

- Hill, A., & White, A. (2008). The flying of Israeli flags in Northern Ireland. *Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 15(1), 31–50.
- Irish News. (2023). Ireland's support for Palestine: An explainer. Irish News. [https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2023/10/23/news/ireland\\_s\\_support\\_for\\_palestine\\_an\\_explainer-3720414/](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2023/10/23/news/ireland_s_support_for_palestine_an_explainer-3720414/). Accessed 2024-11-18.
- Kahanoff, M. (2018). Collective trauma, recognition and reconciliation in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. In Y. Meital & P. M. Rayman (Eds.), *Recognition as key for reconciliation: Israel, Palestine, and beyond* (pp. 59–92). Brill.
- Kaufman, J. P., & Williams, K. P. (2007). *Women, the state, and war: A comparative perspective on citizenship and nationalism*. Lexington Books.
- Little, I. (2018). *Cliftonville faces protest threat by women's group over child image player*. Belfast Telegraph. <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/cliftonville-faces-protest-threat-by-womens-group-over-child-image-player-37579691.html> Accessed 2020-10-15.
- Maddison, S. (2015). Relational transformation and agonistic dialogue in divided societies. *Political Studies*, 63, 1014–1030. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12149>
- McDonald, H., & Greenfield, P. (2018). *Rugby Unions Revoke Paddy Jackson and Stuart Olding's Contracts*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/apr/13/belfast-feminists-rally-ulster-rugby-match-rape-acquittal>. Accessed 2020-10-15.
- McKeown, L.-A. (2018). 'It's That Schoolboy Rugby Attitude Times a Million'—*Rape trial hears of text exchange*. The Independent. <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/courts/its-that-schoolboy-rugby-attitude-times-a-million-rape-trial-hears-of-text-exchange-36605126.html> Accessed 2020-10-15.
- Meehan, E. (2003). *'From Government to Governance, Civic Participation and new Politics': The Context of Potential Opportunities for the Better Representation of Women*. Belfast: Centre for Advancement of Women in Politics, School of Politics, Queen's University Belfast.
- Murphy, E. (2024). Gender as an analytic lens for agonistic peace: Insights from Colombia's Truth Commission. *Peacebuilding*, 12(2), 260–277.
- Murtagh, C. (2008). A transient transition: The cultural and institutional obstacles impeding the Northern Ireland women's coalition in its progression from informal to formal politics. *Irish Political Studies*, 23(1), 21–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07907180701767948>
- Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. (2019). 'Economic Inactivity in Northern Ireland'. Available at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/sites/nisra.gov.uk/files/publications/Economic%20Inactivity%20in%20Northern%20Ireland.pdf> (Accessed: 2020-03-24).
- Opsahl, T., & Pollak, A. (1993). *A citizens' inquiry: The Opsahl report on Northern Ireland*. Lilliput Press.

- Persic, C. (2004). The emergence of a gender consciousness: Women and community work in West Belfast. In L. Ryan & M. Ward (Eds.), *Irish women and nationalism: Soldiers, new women and wicked bags* (pp. 167–183). Irish Academic Press.
- Porter, E. (2007). *Peacebuilding: Women in international perspective*. Routledge.
- Rooney, E. (2002). Community development in times of trouble: Reflections on the community women's sector in the north of Ireland. *Community Development Journal*, 37(1), 33–46.
- Rooney, E. (2003). Critical reflections and situated accounts: Women on war and peace. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 22(2), 151–156.
- Rooney, E. (2012a). 'Transitional Justice Grassroots Toolkit'. Belfast: Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University and Bridge of Hope, Ashton Community Trust.
- Rooney, E. (2012b). 'Transitional Justice: Grassroots Engagement'. Belfast: Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University and Bridge of Hope, Ashton Community Trust.
- Rooney, E. (2013). 'Transitional Justice Grassroots Programme: Executive Summary 2012–2013'. Belfast: Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University and Bridge of Hope, Ashton Community Trust.
- Rooney, E. (2014). 'Transitional Justice Grassroots Toolkit: User's Guide'. Belfast: Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University and Bridge of Hope, Ashton Community Trust.
- Rooney, E. (2016). 'Transitional Justice Grassroots Toolkit: Trainer's Manual'. Belfast: Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University and Bridge of Hope, Ashton Community Trust.
- Roulston, C. (1996). Equal opportunities for women. In A. Aughey & D. Morrow (Eds.), *Northern Ireland Politics* (pp. 139–146). Longman.
- Simpson, M. (2018). *Jackson and Olding Rugby Rape trial hears text details*. BBC. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-42905648>. Accessed 2020-10-15.
- Stapleton, K., & Wilson, J. (2014). Conflicting categories? Women, conflict and identity in Northern Ireland. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 37(11), 2071–2091.
- Strömbom, L., & Bramsen, I. (2022). Agonistic peace: Advancing knowledge on institutional dynamics and relational transformation. *Third World Quarterly*, 43(6), 1237–1250.
- Strömbom, L., Bramsen, I., & Stein, A. L. (2022). Agonistic peace agreements? Analytical tools and dilemmas. *Review of International Studies*, 48(4), 689–704.
- Voet, R. (1998). *Feminism and citizenship*. Sage.
- Werbner, P., & Yuval-Davis, N. (1999). Women and the new discourse of citizenship. In N. Yuval-Davis & P. Werbner (Eds.), *Women, citizenship and difference* (pp. 1–38). Zed Books.

- Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group Northern Ireland. (2010). *'Manifesto: Westminster Elections 2010'*. Belfast: Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group Northern Ireland.
- Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland. (2016). *'Women's Manifesto: Northern Ireland Assembly Elections 2016'*. Belfast: Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland.
- Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland. (2019). *'Northern Ireland Women's Manifesto: General Election 2019'*. Belfast: Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland.
- Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland. (2020). *'Covid-19 feminist recovery plan'*. Belfast: Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). Human/women's rights and feminist transversal politics. In M. M. Ferree & A. M. Tripp (Eds.), *Global feminism: Transnational women's activism, organizing, and human rights* (pp. 275–295). New York University Press.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





## CHAPTER 6

---

# Moving Forward—Trajectories Towards Gender-Just Transversal Citizenship in Northern Ireland

While Chapter 4 identified a gap between the formal political system and women’s grassroots work, Chapter 5 explored women’s cross-community activities through agonism and transversalism, including differences between the women’s and feminist sectors. This chapter discusses ways of moving forward—both in terms of channelling women’s voices and work into formal politics, and by bridging the gap between the feminist and women’s sectors. As such, the chapter addresses how women’s cross-community activities can inform a gender-just citizenship that recognises and encourages women’s public, political participation in Northern Ireland (NI).

## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

Given women’s broad political activism during the conflict and their involvement in the peace negotiations (largely through Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition (NIWC)), the failure to fully consolidate the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement’s (GFA) transformative potential in terms of women’s equal participation is disappointing (Byrne & McCulloch, 2012; Rouse, 2016). The way political activity has been constituted in NI limits recognition of women’s participation, often located at community level. The informal and formal political spheres thus “remain considerably autonomous” with gendered participation (Murtagh, 2008, p. 24).

Part of this can be understood in terms of the elite-focus of consociationalism, which limits attention paid to grassroots work, including women's cross-community activities. Civil society input is restricted in formal decision-making processes, despite the fact that the community and voluntary sector "for decades fulfilled the tasks that the state could not" (Donahoe, 2017, p. 112). There is a need to ensure both an increase in women's descriptive and substantive representation in formal politics, as well as ways of channelling women's grassroots issues and activities into formal politics. In addition to a gap between formal and informal politics, there is also one between the women's sector and feminist sector, both in terms of membership and approaches to cross-community work as explored in the previous chapter. Since the sectors have approached cross-community work, transversalism and agonism in different ways, there is great potential for the sectors to learn from each other. Finding ways to do this is therefore of importance.

This chapter explores ways of further combining and strengthening the women's and feminist sectors, as well as avenues of feeding their expertise into formal politics. This entails re-imagining what political activity and citizen participation can mean in a gender-just manner that recognises women's concerns and participation in grassroots organising. As discussed in Chapter 2, citizenship is conceptualised as a multi-tier, transversal practice that captures participation at different societal levels and incorporates notions of difference into democracy. The need for women's substantive representation, the channelling of grassroots work into formal politics and a strong combined women's and feminist sector has become even more important given recent years' developments, specifically Brexit (see discussion below) and the constitutional future for NI (see 6.2.1). Section 6.2 explores how to bridge the gap between the women's sector and the feminist sector, while 6.3 focuses on how to bridge the gap between the grassroots sector and the formal political system. The different routes of bridging the formal/informal political divide are evaluated in terms of their potential for gender-just citizenship through their capacity to accommodate (a) multi-tier intersectional identities, (b) multi-sited citizen participation and (c) coalitions across difference. But first, a quick introduction to Brexit's impact on women's rights.

### 6.1.1 *Brexit and Women's Rights in Northern Ireland*

In March 2017, British Prime Minister (PM) Theresa May triggered Article 50 of the European Union's (EU) Lisbon Treaty, initiating the 2-year negotiation period between the United Kingdom (UK) and the EU to enable Brexit. After extensive formal negotiations, several draft agreements being rejected by the British Parliament and tailored solutions regarding NI,<sup>1</sup> the UK left the EU on 31 January 2020. Since the 2016 Brexit referendum, there has been an under-representation of women's voices in the debate and negotiations and a lack of gender issues on the agenda (Human Rights Consortium, 2018; Wright et al., 2024). This can partly be explained by Stormont not being up and running for most of the Brexit negotiations, making it harder for *any* voices from NI to be heard<sup>2</sup> (Human Rights Consortium, 2018). In fact, the Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA) was only restored 20 days before Brexit took force. In general, there has been an absence of both women and actors working for gender equality in the negotiation, which was reflected in the UK and EU not prioritising consultation meetings with civil society groups (Wright et al., 2024). As of October 2022, 71 per cent of NI women disagreed or strongly disagreed with Brexit being a good thing for the UK, compared with 53 per cent of men (Wright et al., 2024).

In addition to this, there are worrying developments specifically in terms of women's rights. The GFA included citizen rights intertwined with European citizenship (Wright et al., 2024). As such, many of the UK's long-established social protections for women are based on

<sup>1</sup> The 2018 Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol (the "Irish Backstop") aimed to keep the Irish border open for trade and travel between north and south even after Brexit. In 2019, it was renegotiated with a de facto customs border in the Irish Sea and came into effect on 1 January 2021.

<sup>2</sup> In February 2023, a new UK-EU agreement was reached regarding NI, the Windsor Framework. Among new trade and market policies, it seeks to address the democratic deficit, revising the previous Protocol and inserting a "Stormont Brake". This is when 30 Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) from at least two parties can notify the UK if they wish to stop the application of an amended or replacement EU law in NI. The Framework also allows MLAs to grant their democratic consent to the application of core provisions regarding movement of goods and customs every 4–8 years (depending on if consent is cross-community or not) (Phinnemore and Whitten 2024; United Kingdom 2023b). If MLAs do not consent, NI would no longer be a de facto part of the EU customs territory and internal market, prohibiting the free movement of goods across the Irish border (Phinnemore and Whitten 2024).

EU law, such as parental leave, sexual harassment regulation, equal pay and anti-discrimination laws (Haridasani Gupta, 2020; Human Rights Consortium, 2018). This has made the EU very important for gender equality policies in the UK. Protections for women guaranteed by EU membership could, due to Brexit, be repealed and there is no guarantee they will advance at the same pace as the rest of the EU (Haridasani Gupta, 2020; Women’s Policy Group, 2021). However, the NIA can choose to voluntarily align with EU developments on issues such as gender pay transparency, work-life balance and violence against women (Wright et al., 2024). Whether this will happen in an assembly that historically has had difficulties in legislating to protect women’s rights is highly uncertain. A concerning decision by the UK government was also to not continue to follow case law of the European Court of Justice and to remove the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights from all applications in UK law (Women’s Policy Group, 2021).

## 6.2 UNITING THE FEMINIST AND WOMEN’S SECTORS

This section explores ways of sharing knowledge between the feminist sector and the legacy-based cross-community activities of the women’s sector by looking at approaches of combining their strengths. The strength of the feminist sector is their understanding of intersectional and feminist theory, as well as their lobbying and campaigning expertise. The strength of the legacy-based women’s sector is their expertise in practicing intersectionality, transversal dialogue and agonism in practice. In other words, in terms of intersectionality, the feminist sector focuses on the macro-level and the women’s sector focuses on the micro-level. The hope is that, by further linking them together, they can learn from each other and enrich the overall women’s movement. The feminist sector, which engages with big-P politics, might be able to attract more women to join their campaigns with enhanced cooperation, while the women’s sector, which has valuable transversal and agonistic experience, could encourage feminist discussions on difference. This could facilitate a cross-community feminist movement that works on the basis of shared values and goals, but also practices intersectionality, agonism and transversal citizenship.

Feminist organisations, such as Reclaim the Agenda and Belfast Feminist Network (BFN), have “the potential to make women and feminist concerns visible in the broader social and cultural context that shapes understanding and practices of citizenship” (Deiana, 2013, p. 410). BFN,

for instance, represents a new trajectory of civic activism that brings feminist politics to the fore, and thereby “challenges the exclusive focus on ethno-national belonging as the one and only dimension of citizenship” (Deiana, 2016, p. 107). Reclaim the Agenda also plays an important role in re-imagining citizenship by maintaining links between different generations of feminists and between trade unions, women’s centres and community groups through its focus on reclaiming a feminist agenda (Deiana, 2016). As such, collaboration between the women’s and feminist sectors is not a new idea. However, there is room for expansion to enable inter-sector learning. Creating space for a diverse transversal women’s movement that uses intersectionality in both theory and practice can facilitate re-imagining what citizen participation and political activity entails. Such alliances would be engaged in the public sphere, addressing both big-P and small-p issues, recognising the importance of active citizenship in different arenas—in the local ethno-national community, in the feminist and/or women’s sector, in the local formal political system (e.g., local councils), and in the national formal political system (e.g., Stormont, Westminster).

Although this study argues for women’s transversal cross-community work to serve as a model for citizenship, it is important to *not* place the burden of constructing a gender-equal citizenship on women. Constructing inclusive citizenship and participation is not the responsibility of women solely and women’s cross-community activities are not a substitute for state policies addressing gender inequality and barriers to participation, but rather a source of insight and knowledge in how gender-equitable citizenship can be practised. Additionally, women are not simply vessels to be filled with “cross-community knowledge” and then “sent out” into their (most often) segregated communities to teach gender equality, intersectionality and lessons from “crossing the divide”. This places an unnecessary and unfair burden on the women who do cross-community work, especially in activities that attempt to embrace difference through transversal and agonistic dialogue. As such, it would remove responsibility for building solidarity across divides from men and the majority of women who do not participate in cross-community work. It is problematic to expect a small group of women to do all the heavy lifting, even though they are fully capable of leading the way.

Even though it is the aspiration of transversal cross-community work to unpack ethno-nationalisms and critically examine prejudices, no one (men

or women) is necessarily immune to ethno-nationalism—especially societies that are permeated by such ideas and practices. (Some) women, like (some) men, promote and uphold ethno-nationalist practices that reinforce the divide. Women as a group do not automatically stand above ethno-nationalism and are, as such, not “naturally” inclined to work together on a set of interests they all “naturally” share. Participants in transversal, agonistic, feminist cross-community activities actively choose to work together and explore potential shared values and goals. This work is not without its challenges and limits. As Byrne (2013, p. 112) argues:

While transversalists acknowledge that nationalism remains politically relevant, particularly for women from non-hegemonic communities, and while power asymmetries are difficult to negotiate in transversal encounters, intersectional praxis and a feminist attention to reflexivity, empathy and mutual respect help women identify ways to build cross-community alliances.

By using intersectionality, reflexivity and respect, cross-community coalitions continue to be built among women in NI. The next section (6.2.1) explores inter-sector coalitions, while funding issues and the shrinking community space for women’s organising are discussed in 6.2.2 and 6.2.3.

### 6.2.1 *Organising Together*

In recent years, there have been several large rallies in NI that have successfully gathered women from both the women’s and feminist sectors. An example is the annual International Women’s Day rally in Belfast and side events organised by Reclaim the Agenda (see Belfast Times, 2019; News Letter, 2020). Elaine Crory (Women’s Resource and Development Agency (WRDA)) gave this as an example of a successful way in which the feminist movement reaches out to the women’s sector:

[the rally] is led by one of the women’s centres and it rotates between them. They bring their women out to this event, and it is explicitly feminist. [...] We try to blend together the explicit feminist activism with the women’s centres and the formal women’s sector. [...] There is so much potential, so many potential members, so many potential organisers, but if they feel they cannot or do not know how to set up a group or get

involved with an existing group then we are wasting that potential. (Expert interview)

Another set of successful rallies was held after the “rugby rape” trial (see 5.3.3.2). Up to 1,000 people demonstrated outside Belfast’s Laganside courts (McDonald & Greenfield, 2018) and BFN organised a “Stamp out Misogyny” demonstration to protest the club’s sexist culture (Ferguson, 2018b). There have also been large pro-choice rallies over the past years. In 2017, several hundred marched demanding a change to NI’s abortion law, the second “Rally for Choice” held in Belfast (BBC, 2017). In response to the Republic of Ireland’s (ROI) referendum to repeal their abortion ban in 2018, several hundred people rallied outside Belfast City Hall (Ferguson, 2018a). A smaller, although widely publicised, rally took place where campaigners took what they said were abortion pills in defiance of NI’s strict termination law (The Guardian, 2018).

These examples show that the women’s and feminist sectors can organise together in combined events like rallies. Is there also potential for co-organisation within longer term projects and initiatives? The shared learning that can be achieved through combined workshops is explored in Sect. 6.2.1.1. Then, in 6.2.1.2, using UNSCR 1325 as a lobbying tool and framework for cooperation is discussed.

#### 6.2.1.1 *Shared Learning: Legacy-Based Issues and Constitutional Futures*

The two sectors can learn from each other in several ways. One way is for the legacy-based cross-community activities in the women’s sector to include participants from feminist groups. This could open space for meaningfully engaging with difference and practising intersectionality in the feminist sector. Another way is for the feminist sector to expand its engagement with the women’s sector on feminist issues, intersectional theory and political campaigning. This could open space for the women’s sector to use their cross-community experiences and cooperation to influence public policy and formal politics. Both sectors would benefit from such mutual learning and working together on issues that are largely new to each of them.

In terms of legacy-based cross-community work, the toolkit programme, as discussed previously, provides a great basis for exploring conflict-related issues through transversal and agonistic dialogue. Conducting a toolkit programme with women from both sectors would

most likely generate new perspectives for discussion. The programme has previously demonstrated how “the collective nature of reflection on women’s gendered conflict experience” was one of its core strengths (Rooney, 2013, p. 3). Including both lived experience and feminist expertise in such conversations could prove highly rewarding. Although there was a reluctance among some participants in legacy-based work to identify as feminists and misconceptions over feminism, most expressed feminist-type ideas and recognised gender inequalities. This shows both the importance of inter-sector conversations and the potential to build further coalitions.

An additional, and very timely issue, that could form the basis for inter-sector cooperation and shared learning is the ongoing discussion about the constitutional future of NI and women’s roles in it. Brexit provoked a deepened debate and intensified academic exploration of the prospect of a United Ireland<sup>3</sup> (Ashe, 2024). These discussions have also opened “opportunities for women to challenge existing gender inequalities and to shape any reformed or new constitutional arrangement” (Ashe, 2022, p. 1). However, as of 2024, the narrative of inclusion in constitutional debates still centres on the ethno-national communities, especially in terms of political unionism (Ashe, 2024). As Ashe (2024, p. 490) argues, “the strength of the ‘nation first’ standpoint in the region means that women’s political interests can be easily side-lined or assimilated into the collective vision of constitutional rights and nationalist goals”. Yet another reason why a strong women’s and feminist sector is needed.

Despite this, there have been attempts to build a more inclusive debate. Over the past few years, a cross-border research project has met with local women and gender experts to explore an inclusive constitutional future for the island. The research aimed to learn how to have genuine, well-informed, participatory conversations, specifically including the views and experiences of people living in disadvantaged communities (Rooney et al., 2020). By using conversation cards (see Rooney et al., 2020), discussions were encouraged about sensitive political issues relating to the future of the island (Ashe, 2022). Based on this project, a Women’s Charter was published in 2024, arguing for the importance of including women in both constitutional debates and change, setting out principles to make it

<sup>3</sup> A unification of the north and south requires the (British) Secretary of State for NI to call for referendums in NI and ROI, both of which must yield a positive result.

a reality (see Ashe et al., 2024). The Charter acknowledges how important grassroots women have been as leaders but that their contribution to current debates has been undervalued (Ashe et al., 2024).

Similarly, at a meeting in 2023,<sup>4</sup> women from both communities called for opportunities for active engagement in the shaping of a future Ireland and recognised that many issues are shared by the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican (CNR) and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist (PUL) communities (Sinn Féin, 2023). They also articulated the feeling that a unity referendum has the potential of creating something new and better, rather than simply merging north and south (Sinn Féin, 2023). At a follow-up meeting, an independent Belfast Women’s Assembly was created to continue the constitutional conversations (Belfast Media, 2023; O’Loughlin, 2023), a structure that could be used by both the women’s and feminist sectors to further their cooperation and shared learning.

In terms of feminist sector outreach to the women’s sector, organisations like Alliance for Choice (AFC) and projects like Raise Your Voice (RYV) already organise workshops all over NI. AFC hosts workshops on outreach, values and destigmatisation, as well as “Happy Activist Workshops” that include “Abortion 101” and activist self-care (Alliance for Choice, 2020). Raise Your Voice Against Sexual Harassment is a project that tackles sexual harassment and violence “through working in the community, increasing public awareness, educating organisations on best practice and lobbying for legislative advances” (Raise Your Voice Against Sexual Harassment, 2020). It runs workshops for girls, women and non-binary people to explore victim blaming, consent, sexual harassment and violence (Raise Your Voice Against Sexual Harassment, 2020). Both these are examples of activities that could facilitate conversations about the lived experiences of women *as* women, issues that are seldom confronted in legacy-based cross-community work. It would also allow feminist expertise to be shared, both in terms of a factual understanding of the issues and lobbying experience.

<sup>4</sup> This was organised in Belfast as part of Sinn Féin’s Commission on the Future of Ireland and its effort to undertake grassroots consultations (Sinn Féin 2023). It convened over 100 grassroots women and campaigners, discussing important issues concerning a possible United Ireland *and* a continued union with Great Britain.

### 6.2.1.2 *Shared Lobbying: UNSCR 1325 as a Tool*

Despite the transformative potential of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and United Nation's Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, it has not been implemented in NI. Until recently, the UK's National Action Plans (NAPs) have set out implementation internationally without any plans to implement it within NI (Pierson, 2019). The CEDAW Committee has repeatedly criticised the UK on this and its "consistent attention [...] has proven important in supporting and sustaining local women's advocacy for an improved and better-coordinated state response" (O'Rourke & Swaine, 2018, p. 187). However, in their latest NAP, the UK does recognise the WPS agenda's applicability in domestic contexts (Wright et al., 2024) and has included input from the Northern Ireland Office (United Kingdom, 2023a). In it, however, NI is most often mentioned in terms of recognising and championing the expertise of women peacebuilders in the region, rather than how to implement WPS resolutions in NI (United Kingdom, 2023a). As such, the UK continues to argue that the Troubles does not constitute an armed conflict as defined under international law (Hayes, 2017).

A range of women's groups lobby for implementation, act to raise awareness and produce research for an NI NAP (Hinds & Donnelly, 2014). The NIA has also established an All-Party Group on WPS (Pierson, 2019). Unfortunately, the group lacks statutory powers, and attendance has been low (Hayes, 2017). In terms of ROI, lobbying has been more successful as its NAPs include NI (Pierson, 2019). For instance, its 2019–2024 NAP argues that "women from all communities and backgrounds at every level of society in Northern Ireland were and continue to be agents for change and peacebuilders" (Department of Foreign Affairs Ireland, 2019, p. 21). ROI also sets out funding for civil society groups that promote gender equality and the WPS agenda in the North (Department of Foreign Affairs Ireland, 2019).

One reason implementation in NI would be beneficial is that this could fulfil the negotiated commitment to women's right to full and equal political participation (Rooney & Swaine, 2012). It could also lead to an increase in women's participation in civil society transitional justice projects (Rooney & Swaine, 2012) as well as in various institutions that address conflict legacy. As an international gender mechanism, its full implementation would be an important step to strengthen women's claims as citizens (Deiana, 2013). To be effective as a "tool for political manoeuvring", 1325 "needs continuous supplementation from women's

lived experiences of conflict and post-conflict transformation”, including feminist activism that engages with small-p politics outside the formal political system (Deiana, 2016, p. 110).

Both women’s and feminist groups have used the WPS agenda as a tool to lobby for women’s participation in decision-making at all political levels. Activists have articulated that the agenda can be used in “conversations within communities about women’s role in peace-building”, while also providing “a framework and a vocabulary to make the argument for greater inclusion of women” (Pierson, 2019, p. 65). After a project about women and peacebuilding that engaged about 800 women, a strategic guide and toolkit was published, with the aim to assist the public sectors in north and south to strengthen protections of women’s rights and improve gender equality (Hinds & Donnelly, 2014). The publication includes constructive and evidence-based recommendations around which future lobbying campaigns can be constructed, not only in relation to Stormont, but including all levels of NI society. The strategies emphasise the importance of bottom-up processes to ensure the inclusion of a diversity of women’s voices.

### 6.2.2 *Secure and Sustainable Funding*

Side (2009, p. 82) argues that “establishing a solid base of support and funding for the activities of women in voluntary and community sector organisations” is an “inclusive route for expanding women’s political citizenship rights”. However, sustainable and secure funding remains one of the major challenges for both the women’s and feminist sectors. In 2015, the block grant to NI from the Treasury was reduced by about £600 million, triggering a change in funding allocation rules and decisions were made to prioritise private sector investments, leaving the women’s and community sector hard hit (Galligan, 2019). For instance, funding for educational training was rerouted from women’s organisations to the higher education sector, forcing many women’s groups “to make redundant valuable education and training workers” (Galligan, 2019, p. 379). As such, a funding crisis was triggered for an already struggling sector, compounded by austerity measures, public spending cuts and welfare reform, in addition to the lack of government action due to Stormont’s three-year suspension (cf. Deiana, 2016). In some ways, this created a “perfect storm” that increased the need for resources and support from the women’s sector as an increasing number of women

were referred there, while simultaneously cutting their funding. This also forced organisations to compete for resources, sometimes solved through joint applications, and at other times has led to strengthening rivalries between them (Donahoe, 2017).

Brexit has also had negative effects on the funding of the feminist and women's sectors. As an EU-member, NI benefited from a range of programmes and funds, including those dedicated to specifically support NI's transition through the PEACE programme (O'Connell & Cunningham, 2022; Wright et al., 2024). The PEACE programme has funded women's activities, a baseline study on UNSCR 1325 and engaged policy-makers and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on peace and security issues (Wright et al., 2024). EU funding has also had a significant impact on women's lives through the Rural Development Programme for NI (Human Rights Consortium, 2018). As of 2021, the UK is no longer eligible for structural funding from the EU, but the PEACE-PLUS programme will be delivered until 2027 (Wright et al., 2024). Additionally, in March 2023, funding from the European Social Fund to hundreds of community organisations was halted (Haslam, 2023). To mitigate this loss of funding, the UK announced several new funding programmes, such as the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) (Haslam, 2023; Wright et al., 2024). However, there are indications that women's organisations have not yet received sufficient funding from the SPF to replace the lost EU funds (Wright et al., 2024). Many organisations have been rejected, such as the Kilcooley Women's Centre whose £900,000 EU funding has not been replaced (Haslam, 2023). Other examples include the Training for Women Network, which lost a quarter of its funding, and the Women's Centre in Derry, which had to make six staff members redundant (Haslam, 2023). As a result of the cuts, the share of funding for women's services has effectively been cut from 8 to 3.7 per cent (Haslam, 2023).

The project-based funding approach is another factor impeding the sustainability of women's grassroots activities. As Morgan (2003, p. 255) argues, for women's organisations,

without ongoing external financial support, the great majority of [their staff posts] cannot be sustained and many organisations are under constant pressure to balance their budgets and secure further, usually short-term, allocations of funding.

The same uncertainty is also an issue in the feminist sector: “we don’t know from one year to the next [whether funding is continuing]” (PUL interview). In response, Northern Ireland Women’s European Platform (NIWEP) has urged the government to set out a specific funding stream for women’s organisations, with a specific focus on training and education (Deiana, 2013).

Funders also often have strict administrative requirements without necessarily including administrative tasks in their resource allocations (Hegarty, 2001), which puts additional pressure on women’s organisations. Funding efforts are also hampered by “the multiple levels of funding programmes and apparatuses that make it difficult to determine suitable funding opportunities and eligibility” (Side, 2009, p. 82). With limited resources, this puts a strain on the sector (Side, 2009). One participant commented on this, saying that for women’s centres

it is so ridiculous: they won’t give money for wages, but they want this stuff done. Yet, with all that [...] there is no long-term [perspective] [...] There is no security at all. (PUL interview)

Elaine Crory (WRDA) echoed this:

you do end up with women’s sector workers [...] run ragged because you have got obligations to so many different projects in order to make up your salary. It means you are working 14 hour-days some weeks. (Expert interview)

As such, applying for and administering funds requires a great deal of work, “leaving little time to pursue the activities that are being funded” (Donahoe, 2017, p. 132).

Another issue is the often-occurring requirement for cross-community participation. While this is how the cross-community work of the women’s sector is often funded, such as the activities discussed in this book, the privileging of cross-community projects places an overall strain on the sector. One participant commented that funders “fire money” at cross-community work while it is much more difficult to get other courses funded (PUL interview). Similarly, Bernadette McAliskey (quoted in Hall, 2002, p. 21) argued:

The work that you're doing in your own community, which is valuable work, has to be twisted and turned and changed upside down to meet the [cross-community] needs of the funders.

Many NGOs have to rely on such cross-community funding, which can bring together groups in a tactical way to ensure survival (Rooney & Swaine, 2012). There are, however, several problems with this. For one, it makes it more difficult to secure funding for single-identity work (McIntyre, 2004). It also limits the ability of organisations to fund services they provide, such as counselling or educational training. As such, this funding requirement does not allow groups the autonomy to decide when cross-community work is, and is not, appropriate, or make decisions about what the most appropriate use of the money is, regardless of community participation (McCoy, 2000). To take advantage of such funding, groups have to “collaborate, even superficially across the ‘political divide’ on projects of mutual interest, whilst, paradoxically, setting politics aside” (Rooney, 2002, p. 39). As such, it tends to encourage tokenistic projects, getting a number of women from CNR and PUL backgrounds in the same room without necessarily engaging with difference (cf. McCoy, 2000).

Meeting the requirements of funders, instead of local circumstances, can also limit projects' potential to build lasting respect (Rooney, 2014). As Chapter 5 showed, recreational/educational cross-community activities strategically avoid difference. The cross-community aspect of such activities thus does little to further “community relations”, other than bringing women from different communities together in the same physical space. So, having a cross-community requirement for a literacy class, for example, which is not going to transform communities in a substantive way, seems unnecessary and might prevent organisations from focusing on their priorities. However, in legacy-based activities where transversal politics and agonistic dialogue are facilitated, there is greater potential for more substantive change to take place. For such projects the cross-community funding requirement seems more appropriate.

### 6.2.3 *Sharing Community Space with Men?*

Donahoe (2017, p. 8) writes about “Big Lads” which she defines as “men who are to some degree in charge of the neighborhood [...] limit[ing] social interaction”. In some cases, these “Lads” are post-paramilitary members who have taken on the work of community development

(Donahoe, 2017). As paramilitaries decommissioned in the aftermath of the GFA, agreements were made that allowed ex-combatants to transform into community workers (Donahoe, 2017). Thus, since the GFA and the release of (mostly male) political prisoners, grassroots women have “noted a retraction of space for their participation, as such work has become male dominated” (Pierson & Radford, 2016, p. 17). Community positions that were held by women in an unpaid capacity have become “filled by men and have subsequently become paid employment” (Pierson & Radford, 2016, p. 17). This has resulted in lower status, lack of recognition and decreased visibility for women’s community participation (Pierson & Radford, 2016). Men have thus “become framed as the experts; those who are listened to, those who have authority to speak” whereas “[w]omen’s voices, perspectives and activism become smothered” (Ashe, 2009, pp. 309–310). One participant commented on this:

I think it is laughable sometimes, the paramilitaries [...] come out of jail and go into [society] [...] Men are paid a really good wage [...] and it is for something that women have been doing [all along] and not even getting recognition for it. (PUL interview)

This was also brought up in the toolkit session (mentioned previously) when the women’s group was visited by three ex-combatants, some of whom were now involved in community development and cross-community work. One of the ex-combatants stated that they are now doing the work “that women have always done” while also implying that now male ex-combatants are taking over without considering the work done by women or including women in the work. As Morgan (2003, p. 257) states,

the skills that [women] have developed may be being utilised in both the voluntary and statutory sectors, but this does not mean that they will automatically be accepted as equal partners in planning for the future.

There are also some indications that the retraction of space for women is connected to a resurgence of paramilitary control in some areas (WRDA referenced in Pierson & Radford, 2016). Some ex-paramilitaries call themselves community workers and are legitimated by it, but nonetheless continue to operate like paramilitaries, pursuing illegitimate or criminal

acts and intimidating communities (Donahoe, 2017). As such, highly male-dominated paramilitary-run organisations act as community organisations, many of which receive public funding (Women’s Policy Group, 2022). These organisations sometimes

act as gatekeepers within their communities, choosing favoured organisations to work alongside and choking off support to groups that may challenge or question paramilitary influence (Women’s Policy Group, 2022, p. 7).

This leads to women’s voices being silenced or pushed out of the public sphere. These organisations continuously contribute to both women’s lack of power and their marginalisation (Northern Ireland Women’s European Platform, 2014).

### 6.3 CHANNELLING WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES AND PARTICIPATION IN FORMAL POLITICS

This section explores ways of channelling women’s grassroots experiences and political participation into the formal political system. The gap between formal politics and community organising is of particular relevance in terms of gender, as these two political arenas show a gendered participation imbalance with men constituting a majority in one and women in the other. According to the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA), women represented 71.4 per cent of paid staff in the voluntary and community sector (NICVA, 2020).

The idea is not to supplant women’s community activism, but rather to improve the links between the formal and informal sectors to strengthen women’s descriptive and substantive representation. Creating space for informal modes of politics in the formal political system could also serve to enhance and legitimate grassroots participation as acts of citizenship (Lister, 2003). The goal is therefore to find pathways of feeding the knowledge and activism of a transversal feminist movement with the ability to practice agonistic dialogue (consisting of the women’s and feminist sectors) into the formal political system. The following sections identify several possible party-political (6.3.1) and civic routes (6.3.2) through which women’s experiences, concerns and activism might be harnessed, specifically insights from the legacy-based cross-community work of the women’s sector and feminist cross-community organising. These routes

are evaluated in terms of how likely they are to accommodate a transversal citizenship that advances women’s political participation. As such, they are explored in terms of their ability to recognise and accommodate multi-tier intersectional identities’, encourage multi-sited citizen participation and facilitate coalitions across (ethno-national) difference.

### 6.3.1 *Party-Political Routes*

Many obstacles for women’s descriptive and substantive representation in formal politics were discussed in Chapter 4, among them ethno-national consociationalism that limits other forms of identity and gender equality issues. The consociational system results in votes from MLAs registered as Other carrying less weight than votes from Nationalist or Unionist MLAs resulting in the favouring of ethno-nationally aligned parties ahead of cross-community ones (Byrne, 2013). Additionally, the enforcement of group vetoes<sup>5</sup> “makes it more rewarding to be a member of one of the two named communities” (Horowitz, 2002, p. 195). Non-aligned parties are thus “relegated to the periphery in terms of decision making” and in certain decisions, their votes do not count (Murtagh, 2008, p. 29). As such, power-sharing does not accommodate more intersectional identities. In a consociational setting like NI, in the long run, the political system must be transformed if it wants to enable contestation and engagement of all political parties (Bramsen, 2022). Proportional representation and single transferable vote (STV) have also proven problematic for non-ethno-national parties:

[By] [r]equiring relatively low numbers of votes to secure seats this system proved extremely conducive to the interests of the major parties [...] privileg[ing] nationally-aligned parties at the expense of smaller, newer and non-aligned parties (Murtagh, 2008, p. 36).

This system makes the transfer of votes between ethno-national and non-aligned parties highly unlikely, as well as across ethno-national blocs (Murtagh, 2008). STV also tends to benefit “more hardline political

<sup>5</sup> The Petition of Concern allows 30 MLAs to veto decisions by requiring cross-community support. The aim was to ensure contentious legislation was supported by both communities. However, it has often been used to block legislation on socially liberal issues (Galligan 2019).

factions” and does not encourage parties to seek a cross-community voter base (Ashe, 2019, p. 67). Despite such structural obstacles for non-aligned parties, the party-political system remains a key arena for organisation and participation. It is therefore key to explore if it can accommodate transversal citizenship. As such, this section explores three party-political routes to transversal gender-just citizenship: ethno-nationally aligned parties, a women’s party and caucus and non-ethno-nationally aligned parties.

### 6.3.1.1 *Ethno-National Parties*

As the ethno-nationally aligned parties tend to emphasise ethno-national belonging, they are not likely to accommodate intersectional identities or facilitate coalitions across the divide. In terms of valuing gender as an important facet of identity, the parties have different approaches. As discussed previously, neither the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) nor the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) agree with the use of quotas to increase women’s representation, while Sinn Féin (SF) and Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) use gender quotas *within* party structures (i.e., not for candidates standing for office) (Side, 2009). As such, no political party has implemented the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates NI) Act 2002 which permits parties to adopt measures to increase the number of female candidates (Gilmartin, 2017; Rouse, 2016; Side, 2009). This shows “the lack of political will on behalf of political parties in [NI] to implement available legislative redress” for the under-representation of women in politics (Side, 2009, p. 79), which limits women’s political citizenship.

The parties also differ in their level of gender analysis. As the manifesto analysis (see 4.4.2.2) showed, the Unionist parties had none or very little substantial gender analysis in their manifestos. While the Nationalist parties fared better, their emphasis also remains largely on ethno-national identities. Even a party like SF, which is “widely hailed for its relatively progressive stance on women and its sustained commitment to gender equality” (Gilmartin, 2017, p. 278), has somewhat changed direction post-GFA. This can be illustrated by the changes to its Women’s Department: by the mid-1990s it was subsumed into a new Equality Department: “what was once a radical tool for Republican feminism was replaced with [...] gender-neutral terminology [...] removing the gender specifics of women’s struggle” (Gilmartin, 2017, p. 286). This can be

understood in terms of SF's move from challenging the state to becoming part of its institutions (Gilmartin, 2017).

In terms of encouraging multi-sited citizen participation, the 2017 political manifestos showed that both Unionist and Nationalist parties tended to have a narrow understanding of participation, mostly focusing on voting. However, the Nationalist parties have increased their focus on citizen participation, specifically in the form of promoting citizens' assemblies (see 6.3.2.1). Part of bridging the gap between formal politics and women's community sector work lies in expanding the definition of participation to include more than just electoral politics. It is therefore a positive sign that some of the ethno-nationalist parties (i.e., SF and SDLP) are starting to embrace more routes of citizen participation than just voting.

There is a group of politicians, albeit small, who challenge a narrow understanding of political activity and bridge different sites of political participation by being both activists and elected officials. For instance, Donahoe (2017, p. 115) argues that many of the female politicians she has interviewed in NI "described themselves as being recognized for their work in the community and selected for larger roles in their party because of that", particularly in SF.

Continued links with a vibrant wider women's movement outside help [feminists in formal politics] to remain in touch with their feminist roots. Such links are important [...] in promoting both accountability to and the influence of the wider women's movement on the formal political process. (Lister, 2003, p. 162)

Most participants in this study saw "activist politicians" as something positive:

The most successful political actors are people [...] who have a thought-out vision about what is going on in society, how that might be made better and maybe have some of that political training [...] but also having the on-the-ground knowledge and [...] understand what people need. (PUL interview)

Perhaps this is a sign of some parties recognising the importance of community organising.

### 6.3.1.2 *Women's Party and Caucus*

One way of challenging the ethno-national focus of formal politics is by building alliances on other facets of identity, such as gender. Doing so could create space for incorporating a broader definition of citizenship, along the lines of transversalism. This section explores the potential of a women's political party to accommodate transversal citizenship, illustrated by the post-GFA attempts of the NIWC to bridge the formal/informal political gap. The section then explores the newly established women's caucus in the NIA.

NIWC was built on a recognition of intersectional identities, facilitating cross-community alliances within the party and encouraging multi-sited citizen participation. However, it was dissolved ten years after its establishment: it lost its NIA seats in 2003, its local council seats in 2005 and was dissolved in 2006 (Ashe, 2012, 2019; Murtagh, 2008). Following this, "the ability to advance women's political citizenship rights reverted back to means that had previously existed, including to other political parties and to women's civil society organising" (Side, 2009, p. 77). Consociationalism, in addition to its restrictive electoral formula, contributed to the demise of the NIWC (Byrne, 2013; Horowitz, 2002). The Coalition demonstrates how transversal space was opened during the early years of the transitional phase but progressively contracted since then (Murtagh, 2008). NIWC was marginalised and disempowered, made to seem unable to be an effective agent for change (Murtagh, 2008).

Being associated with compromise and non-violence also contributed to the interpretation of the NIWC as powerless in NI's political climate (Wilford 1996 referenced in Murtagh, 2008). In addition, the NIA's voting system and community designations weakened the Coalition and pushed them to the "margins of the political deliberations and decisions" (Ashe, 2019, p. 68). When politics became more polarised, the mandate of the Coalition decreased and its political space "effectively shrank beneath the feet of its members" (Murtagh, 2008, p. 37). In the aftermath of the 2002 Stormont suspension, many voters "de-aligned" from the NIWC in the belief that only the major ethno-national parties would be able to rectify political order (Murtagh, 2008). Despite, or perhaps because of, promoting transversal, intersectional politics and challenging the traditional ethno-national focus of politics, NIWC lost its influence.

When asked about the NIWC and the possibility of creating such a cross-community women's party today, some study participants were

cautiously positive. One participant said: “I suppose [it] [...] wouldn’t be a bad idea, if they were all singing off the one hymn sheet” (CNR interview). Another participant was more overtly positive but when asked if they would have a chance in today’s political landscape, responded “I wouldn’t really be sure” (CNR interview). Some participants expressed negative views: “I really never had much interest in them, because I always thought they were middle-class women trying to be working-class politicians” (CNR interview). There was no consensus among participants on whether creating a new women’s party would increase women’s participation and elevate their voices. Given consociationalism’s marginalisation of small parties, a new political party is probably not the most effective way to build gender-equitable citizen participation. Nor is it very likely to be established in contemporary NI.

Another way to facilitate cross-community coalitions within the formal political system is through a women’s caucus. In the past, this has been made difficult by the ethno-national focus of SF, SDLP, DUP and UUP. This can be illustrated by the challenges of establishing a cross-party women’s caucus within the NIA. During NIWC’s tenure, there was a hope that their presence would encourage women from different parties “to come together as women”, which did not happen (Cowell-Meyers, 2003). Nonetheless, there have been several attempts to do so, for instance through an Assembly Women’s Network established by APNI MLA Eileen Bell and the 1996 NI Women’s Political Forum (Ward, 2002).

Recently, however, some progress has been made. In 2016 a cross-party Assembly Women’s Caucus was established by female MLAs and the organisation Politics Plus with the vision to, among other things:

ensure there is cross-party collaboration on ideas; to form collective platforms on particular policies. [...] The Caucus will be concerned primarily with the review of policy and legislation from a gender perspective [...] advocating gender equality on a local, national and international level. (Politics Plus, 2020)

Some of its objectives are to champion the implementation of UNSCR 1325, facilitate training for women MLAs and support women to become involved in politics (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2024a). The caucus also aims to “promote the idea of gender-equality in political representation as essential and achievable” (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2024a). With

such an agenda and cross-community participation it provides “a unique opportunity to tackle the under-representation of women” (Politics Plus, 2020).

In 2018–2022, the caucus received briefings from a range of actors (e.g., RYV, WRDA, and WSN) on issues such as gender inequalities in public participation, sexual violence and CEDAW (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2022). In March 2022, the caucus even brought a successful motion to the floor calling on MLAs to adopt an action plan to create a gender-sensitive NIA, in line with recommendations from the Assembly and Executive Review Committee (Assembly & Executive Review Committee, 2015; Northern Ireland Assembly, 2022). The committee argues that the NIA should learn from other legislatures’ experiences of gender-sensitive parliaments, for example, by using voting mechanisms to facilitate family-friendly sittings, including gender analysis in the Code of Conduct and developing a gender action plan to help MLAs balance family life and careers (Assembly & Executive Review Committee, 2015).

In addition to an up-and-running women’s caucus, the NIA hosted a Women’s Parliament in 2022 and will host another one in February 2025 (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2024b, 2024c). These sessions give women the opportunity to raise issues that affect, impact and concern them directly with MLAs, with the idea for MLAs to make sure women’s needs are considered when policies and laws are made (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2024c). During the autumn of 2024, women were encouraged to identify issues of importance by responding to a survey in which it was possible to choose between already identified issues or add one’s own: issues ranging from women’s public participation and violence against women to minority women and human rights legislation (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2024c).

The work of the caucus is promising. However, time will tell if the briefings they receive and their action plan for a gender-sensitive NIA will make substantive, tangible change for women and their possibilities to engage with public sphere politics. Based on their work so far, it seems like the caucus at least acknowledges the need for multi-sited citizen participation, given the weight they place on listening to grass-roots voices. The caucus’s ability to build coalitions across difference will depend largely on which issues are put on the agenda, given the strong hold of ethno-national identities and politics. Reforming the NIA to be more women-friendly and championing female politicians might

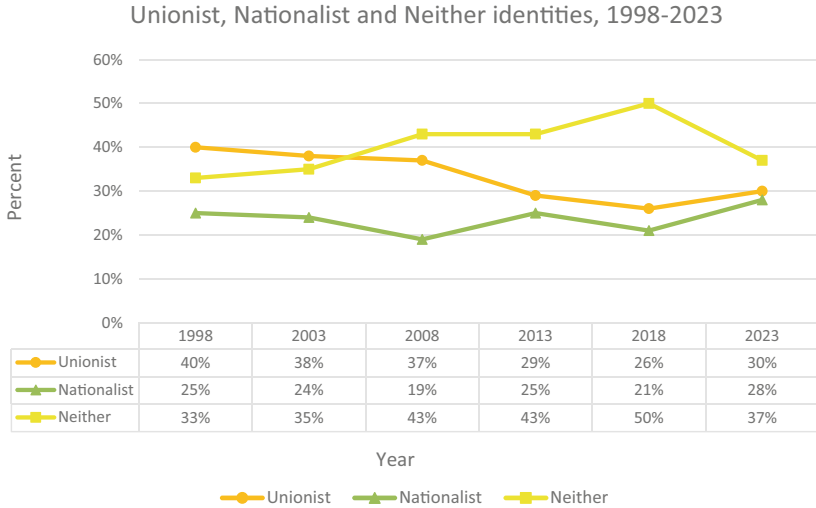
be a good first step for female MLAs to work together. Even though the caucus will most likely recognise similar issues as important (such as the cost-of-living crisis), its members still have ideological and ethno-national roots stipulating different solutions, making coalition politics more difficult. However, any progress made to bring attention to gender equality issues and putting them on the political agenda is welcome. In terms of multi-tier intersectional identities, the caucus has taken steps in the right direction by listening to diverse voices, clearly understanding women not to be homogenous. Through the Women’s Parliament, issues such as age, disability, motherhood and sexuality, among others, were on the agenda. Even though this might not signify a deep intersectional understanding, it is a promising step towards recognising and embracing multi-tier identities.

### 6.3.1.3 *Increasing “Other” Electorate and Vote*

Showing that there are more than two communities is another way of challenging the ethno-national focus of formal politics, exemplified by the increase in people identifying outside the CNR/PUL binary and the increased voter preference for non-aligned parties such as Alliance Party Northern Ireland (APNI). Since 1998, the percentage of people who identify as neither Unionist nor Nationalist has risen (see Fig. 6.1). In 2018, this group (the “Neithers” or “Others”) was larger than the groups identifying as Unionist or Nationalist put together. However, this has since changed: in 2023 the percentage of people identifying as “Neither” has dropped while there has been a slight increase in both Unionist and Nationalist identities. Perhaps this can be partly explained by the increased political polarisation in terms of Brexit and discussions of a United Ireland over the past few years. This might have encouraged people to more readily identify with one of the ethno-national identities who have clear stances on both issues. When broken down by gender, the same trend emerges (see Fig. 6.2). A greater percentage of women consistently identify as Neither compared with men.

The percentage of seats held in the NIA and local councils by parties who designate as Other has also increased since 1998. The overall trend, illustrated in Fig. 6.3, which if continued, has the potential to challenge ethno-nationalist centred politics.

One participant commented on this:



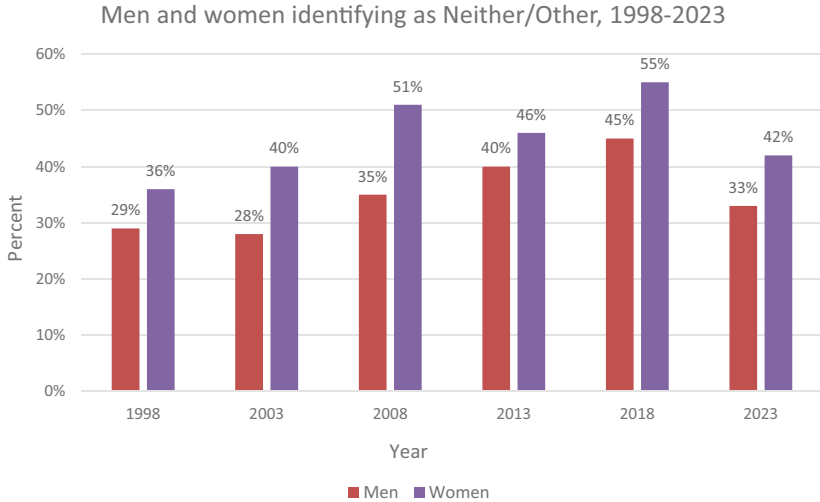
**Fig. 6.1** Unionist, Nationalist and Neither identities, 1998–2023 (*Sources* NI Life and Times Survey 1998–2023 (ARK, 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014, 2019, 2024a))

There has been an improvement in visibility of the ‘Other’ group and a gathering momentum where people who do identify as ‘Other’ are more willing to talk about that, and to challenge this dynamic of ‘there is two communities and there is [only] two ways of thinking’. (PUL interview)

Another participant echoed this, saying:

I think there is going to be a bigger swathe of people thinking ‘we are getting nowhere here’. I would like to see that actually [...] a turn away from the entrenched parties to the likes of [the cross-community parties] who are willing to sit and talk. Maybe that is exactly what [NI] needs, a party who has power that is willing to see both sides. (PUL interview)

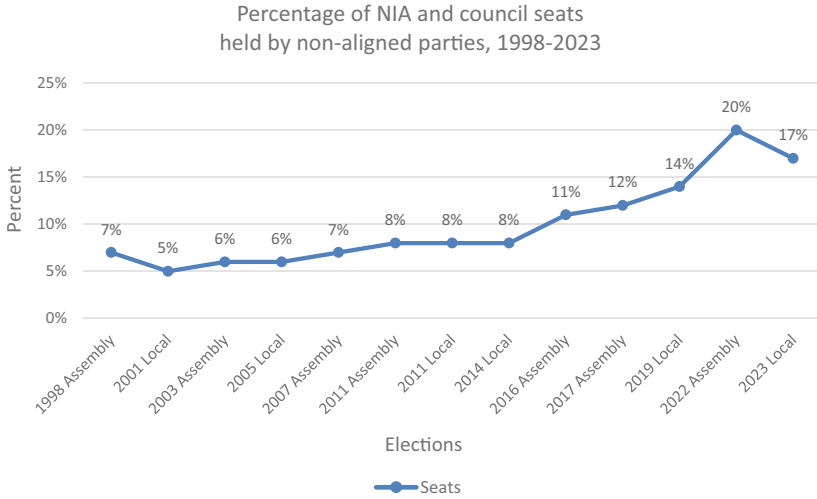
APNI exemplifies this trend: it has increased its percentage of seats in the NIA and local councils since 1998, with a slight dip in 2023 (see Table 6.1). The increase in people who identify as Other might have helped the growth of APNI (Tonge, 2020). By 2019, it was the third



**Fig. 6.2** Men and women identifying as Neither/Other, 1998–2023 (*Sources* NI Life and Times Survey 1998–2023 (ARK, 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014, 2019, 2024a))

largest party in the NIA. In terms of recognising intersectional identities, especially gender, APNI shows some promise based on the manifesto analysis. APNI also has potential to facilitate coalitions across difference. The fact that it is a cross-community party opens space for greater diversity in identities and building coalitions across difference. Whether such coalitions allow for rooting and shifting and agonistic listening, or just a strategic avoidance of difference is, however, difficult to say. In terms of encouraging multi-sited citizen participation, APNI’s manifestos demonstrate an understanding of the importance of civic participation by promoting active citizenship in the voluntary and community sector and arguing for government support for such participation (see 4.3.1).

The rise of APNI is significant as it has the “potential to recast” the ethno-nationalist electoral competition through “the establishment of a strong third electoral bloc of the non-aligned” (Tonge, 2020, p. 462). Given the significant barriers to small, non-aligned cross-community parties in NI, Alliance’s growth is noteworthy and can, perhaps, continue to create new space. Given the results of the manifesto analysis in Chapter 4, this could have positive outcomes in terms of gender equality.



**Fig. 6.3** Percentage of NIA and council seats held by non-aligned parties, 1998–2023 (Note APNI, NIWC, People Before Profit and the Green Party are included in the category “non-aligned” (Source ARK, 2024b))

**Table 6.1** Percentage of APNI seats in NIA and local councils, 1998–2023

<i>Election year</i>	<i>APNI seats (%)</i>
1998 Assembly	5.6
2001 Local	4.8
2003 Assembly	5.6
2005 Local	5.2
2007 Assembly	6.5
2011 Assembly	7.4
2011 Local	7.5
2014 Local	6.9
2016 Assembly	7.4
2017 Assembly	8.9
2019 Local	11.5
2022 Assembly	18.9
2023 Local	14.5

Source (ARK, 2024b)

The manifestos both demonstrated a commitment to gender equality and a gender analysis that underpins it. If the party follows through on its political programme, it might mean that the ethno-national parties will have to engage with new issues in a way they might not have felt obliged to previously.

However, despite the increase in people who identify as Other and the electoral gains of non-aligned parties, there are still many obstacles to expanding their ability to shape political discourse. Consociationalism, ethno-national vetoes and STV continue to limit the political impact of smaller, non-aligned parties. Even though the percentage of Other votes has grown, ethno-national parties still receive the greatest number of votes and the turnout of Others at the polls has been significantly lower (cf. Figure 4.3). As such, identifying as Other does not necessarily translate into a vote for a non-aligned party. The ongoing, and intensified, discussions of the constitutional future of the region can be a challenge for a party such as APNI that has not taken a stand on the constitutional issue. This might be something that (once again) drives voters towards the ethno-nationally aligned parties.

### 6.3.2 *Civic Routes*

Organisations continuously feed research from the women's sector into formal politics through reports, policy reviews and Women's Manifestos. Recently they have also briefed the NIA women's caucus. The most urgent issues affecting the lives of women are thus repeatedly articulated to politicians. In addition to this, there are other possible civic routes in harnessing women's community experiences and activism. Two such pathways are explored below regarding their potential to accommodate gender-just transversal citizenship: a Civic Forum/Citizens' Assembly/Civic Advisory Panel and Section 75 consultations.

#### 6.3.2.1 *Civic Forum, Civic Advisory Panel and Citizens' Assembly*

An opportunity for a broader political agenda including gender equality to be fed into the formal political system was realised with the establishment of the Civic Forum in 2000, campaigned for by the NIWC. It was established with the goal to share its views on social, economic and cultural matters with the Executive ('Northern Ireland Act 1998,' art. 56). It worked as a consultative second chamber to the NIA, and had 60

members drawn from civil society, including the community and voluntary sector (Kilmurray, 2017). Members were selected through a rigorous and equality-proofed process consisting of eleven sub-sectoral panels (one focusing on women) organising a selection procedure (Kilmurray, 2017). Women formed 37 per cent of the Forum (Meehan, 2003), a number far exceeding the number of female MLAs at the time. The Forum was a way to include the third sector in formal politics and to minimise the drawbacks of consociationalism (Guelke, 2003). As a non-party-political structure, it gave “institutional recognition to the [...] stakeholders in civil society” (Cochrane & Dunn, 2002, p. 180). It allowed marginalised voices to be heard: “women from the most socially and economically deprived areas, young women, women from ethnic minority backgrounds and those from the LGBT community” (Pierson, 2019, p. 67). It also represented an opportunity for the community sector to be guaranteed policy-making input (McCoy, 2000). As such, it provided “an unparalleled opportunity to ensure that women could impact on the decision-making process” (Rouse, 2016, p. 238), bridging civil society and formal politics.

The Forum met for two years before it was suspended together with the Executive in 2002 (Kilmurray, 2017). When the Executive was resurrected in 2007, there was little or no political motivation to reinstate the Forum (Byrne, 2009; Kilmurray, 2017). In 2013, the Assembly voted to recall it, but nothing was done to revive it between 2013 and 2017 when Stormont was suspended again (Pierson, 2019). As such, the space for the contribution of civil society in formal politics was heavily decreased. Kilmurray (2017, p. 299) argues that this was in part a result of “newly ascendant politicians garner[ing] and guard[ing] political power seeing ‘the chattering classes’ of deliberative democracy [as] a distraction”. Some saw the Forum as a “piece of consultative window-dressing”, while others saw its potential to be a real deliberative body that could make a difference in policy outcomes (Meehan, 2003, p. 16). Ashe (2019, p. 82) argues: “There was a clear Irish [N]ationalist/[U]nionist split in terms of support for the Forum”. The lack of an Orange Order representative made the DUP argue that the Forum was not representative (Ashe, 2019). Lack of political support and time to develop made it difficult for the Forum to influence policy (Ashe, 2019). All in all, the Forum held the potential of accommodating some tenets of transversal citizenship. As a varied range of sectors and groups were represented, it possibly recognised and accommodated intersectional identities. Since it was created to bridge

different societal layers, it encouraged multi-sited citizen participation. If given enough time to develop, it could perhaps even have facilitated coalitions across difference.

As previously discussed in Sect. 4.4.3, the Stormont House Agreement (SHA), Fresh Start and New Decade New Approach (NDNA) deals detailed the establishment of a Civic Advisory Panel to advise the Executive. The NDNA invites the Panel to propose “the most appropriate model of engagement for specific issues [identified by the Executive], including one Citizens’ Assembly a year” (‘New Decade, New Approach 2020,’ p. 23). A Panel was set up in December 2016 but only met four times as the devolved institutions collapsed shortly after and the Covid pandemic then delayed the establishment of a new panel (Simpson, 2023). While members of the Panel are appointed by the First and Deputy First Ministers (Rouse, 2016), participants in a Citizens’ Assembly are picked randomly. The risk of a Panel selected by politicians is that it might become yet another arena for ethno-national debate, “a mirror of Stormont except without all of the rules and regulations to govern the terrible hate speech that can go on” (Expert interview). As such, the Panel holds little potential of accommodating transversal citizenship. Overall, as it is quite small, who the participants are would be key. Since they are appointed by ethno-nationalist parties, it seems unlikely they would facilitate coalitions across difference or accommodate intersectional identities. If the members have a background in community organising, a multi-sited citizen participation might be encouraged.

Even before the NDNA there were already advanced plans to organise a Citizens’ Assembly (CA) made up of 100 randomly picked people to reflect the composition of NI society (Hughes, 2018; Walker, 2018). Its mandate would be to debate political and constitutional issues that politicians have failed to agree on and come up with conclusions after hearing from expert witnesses (Walker, 2018). A CA was piloted in late 2018 to discuss reform of the social care system for older people, with 27 recommendations being passed on to the Department of Health (Involve, 2020). Unlike its counterpart in ROI,<sup>6</sup> this CA had no official status and was funded by the Building Change Trust and think-tank Involve in the hope that the NIA will establish an official CA to support their

<sup>6</sup> In 2016, ROI established a CA that has reported to the Houses of the Oireachtas with recommendations on for example abortion, gender equality and climate change (Hughes 2018; McCartney 2023; ROI CA 2018).

decision-making (Hughes, 2018; Involve, 2020; Walker, 2018). If a CA is established through the Civic Advisory Panel, its legitimacy and status would likely increase. For it to make substantial change, a CA needs to be established on a statutory footing (Shirlow quoted in Simpson, 2023).

Depending on which issues the CA is invited to discuss,<sup>7</sup> there is potential for a broader equality agenda to be deliberated and a diversity of voices, views and experiences to be heard. This could have positive consequences for gender equality, women's rights and political participation. A CA could thus help mitigate the consociational consequences for women's participation by offering an opportunity to channel women's concerns and experiences into formal political processes. Looking at the progressive outcomes of the CA in the South, this holds promise. It might create space for civil society participation in formal politics, or at least open space for citizen participation. Elaine Crory commented on this:

a platform that allowed [...] women of all backgrounds to speak [...] would be extremely valuable. [...] Especially if they had the power then to compel [debate and decisions in the chamber]. [...] That kind of direct connection between the [CA] and the chamber as opposed to just giving another valve for people to let off steam would be incredibly valuable, especially if it is genuinely representative. (Expert interview)

Pierson and Thomson (2018) argue that “there are additional gendered benefits to a political framework which allows for more deliberative types of democracy”, such as a CA or Civic Forum. Setting up such a structure “would be a key way in which to get more women's voices into public discussion and to highlight women's issues more prominently in public debate” (Pierson & Thomson, 2018). Recommendations from such fora can “provide legitimacy for politicians to suggest legislative change” (Pierson & Thomson, 2018). A CA thus has the potential to accommodate a transversal citizenship. Based on its cross-community participation, it could create space for recognising and accommodating intersectional identities and possibly facilitate coalitions across difference. As participants bring with them experience from different societal spheres and with varied grassroots issues, a CA might also encourage multi-sited citizen participation. However, for it to have a wider political impact, the

<sup>7</sup> There have been recent calls for a CA to discuss Irish Unity (McCartney 2023).

NIA has to be held accountable to listen to its recommendations and discuss them, not merely be briefed.

### 6.3.2.2 *Section 75 Consultations*

Another possibility to feed women’s experiences into formal politics is through Section 75 consultations. In NI, the gender mainstreaming duty depends largely on civic participation in consultations: public bodies must consult with those who will likely be affected by policy changes (Ashe, 2019). This has meant that “public authorities are now required to establish and develop relationships with civic actors and groups, who are then treated as equality ‘experts’ to be consulted with on policy developments” (Donaghy, 2004b, p. 55). As such, policy-making has been opened up to groups previously under-represented or excluded (Donaghy, 2004b). Consultations can be understood as “participation as expertise”, which entails expert individuals and groups translating women’s interests into policy implementation (O’Rourke, 2014). However, the participatory model adopted by public authorities is resource-intensive for consulting groups. The greatest limitation of this approach is that consulting groups are not offered any financial compensation and funding allocations seldom cover policy consultation, limiting the long-term sustainability of this type of democratic participation (Donaghy, 2004a, 2004b). Given the women’s sector’s funding crisis, discussed previously, the lack of remuneration and impact assessment of consultations for participating groups are significant issues. The will of community organisations to contribute is therefore often at odds with the available resources at their disposal (Donaghy, 2004a).

Various equality schemes are usually posted in the same time period, requiring consultees to review long documents all with the same deadline (Donaghy, 2004b). Being over-consulted is thus a problem. Another key issue is the “consultation fatigue” of the women’s sector, relating to “being contacted too late in the process to have a meaningful impact on the outcomes and seeing very little change as a result” (Turtle, 2018, p. 13). Sometimes the time frame is so short that participating groups have no chance to respond. This has been the case for the WRDA, which has expressed serious concerns that the Executive Office issues consultations with a deadline that does not allow for meaningful engagement, requiring a response within three days (WRDA, 2021). Their recommendation is to provide a minimum of 12 weeks for an adequate response (WRDA, 2021).

Consultations are thus often burdensome, requiring “responses in a format which was both laborious and time-consuming”, limiting the “exchange of expertise between civic groups and policy makers” (Donaghy, 2004b, p. 57). Unsurprisingly, some groups argue that staff could spend their time better doing other work (Donaghy, 2004b). The demands that consultation places on women’s sector groups are “significant and unsustainable”, which has resulted in a decreased participation rate (Donaghy, 2004a, p. 404). As Donaghy (2004b, p. 58) argues: “It seems unlikely that profit-orientated [private sector groups] would have been expected to provide that same depth and quality of consultations *pro bono* on a continuing basis”. Additionally, Section 75 has received criticism for its “failure to be responsive to intersectionality of discrimination in the lives of women and, in particular, its failure to acknowledge the distinct interplay of gender, religious belief and political opinion” (Rouse, 2016, p. 235). The consultation process also often fails to turn the input into substantive change (Ashe, 2019).

For consultations to be meaningful, public institutions should aim to include diverse participants, offer a range of participation options, initiate consultations as early as possible, change in response to feedback and follow up with consultees on how their input was taken on board (Turtle, 2018). However, women are often overlooked as a group to create specific consultation space for and excluded due to a failure of addressing the barriers they face (Turtle, 2018). In addition, the focus on the adverse equality impacts a policy might produce means that “many policies get screened out of equality impact assessment processes and opportunities are therefore missed to use policy as a vehicle for creating a more equal society” (Turtle, 2018, pp. 22–23).

In theory, consultations could have the potential to recognise and accommodate intersectional identities if a wide range of groups are consulted and their responses are taken seriously. Since the consultees are often civil society groups, consultations encourage multi-sited citizen participation to some degree. However, participation in consultations is a restricted form of policy engagement; it is not a co-designed process, and the final decisions are made by the public authority, regardless of input from other layers. In terms of facilitating coalitions across difference, consultations have limited potential to do so. This depends on which groups are invited to consult, whether they encourage cross-community participation and how the consultations are facilitated. As the aim is to

respond to a specific policy, not build trust and solidarity within the group, the potential of building alliances is very limited.

## 6.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has addressed two significant gaps: between the women's sector and feminist sector and between formal and informal politics. The aim has been to explore ways in which political activity and gender-equitable citizenship can be restructured to acknowledge, validate and legitimise women's community participation as acts of citizenship. A multi-tier transversal citizenship was used to conceptualise a citizenship that recognises and accommodates intersectional identities, encourages multi-site participation and facilitates coalitions across difference. The first step is to strengthen the ties between the women's and feminist sectors to develop a combined transversal feminist grassroots movement capable of challenging the public/private divide. The second step is to find routes of channelling the work, experiences and concerns of such a movement into formal political structures.

### 6.4.1 *Transversal Grassroots Feminism*

This chapter has considered ways of strengthening the ties between the women's and feminist sectors. It identified successful inter-sector events and initiatives, such as large rallies organised by feminist groups attended by a wide diversity of women. It also argued for the potential for shared learning in inter-sector workshops in which women's sector legacy-based cross-community groups could contribute with intersectional and transversal practice, while feminist groups could contribute with intersectional feminist theory and campaigning skills. The WPS agenda and the constitutional future of the island were identified as issues around which to collaborate. Uniting the strengths of the two sectors offers potential to carve out space for women's participation and challenge the narrow, gendered understanding of political activity of the public/private divide. The fact that women in NI have tended to participate in grassroots activities to a greater extent than in high-level formal politics should not be construed as an encouragement to solely promote such participation. It should rather serve as a constructive example of participation and inspire ways of both bridging the gap between different political levels

and finding ways of promoting women's participation in higher political levels. Recognising and making use of the wealth of experience and knowledge of women's participation in communities is key to building a gender-equitable citizenship.

Several obstacles to a united feminist and women's sector were also discussed, showing the continuous difficulties for women organising as women. In particular, the funding crisis and narrowly defined funding requirements is a major problem which inhibits cooperation and transversal citizenship. Sustainable funding is thus a key requisite for further progress and a strong movement to develop, which has been further hampered because of Brexit. The reduced community space for women's participation was also discussed in terms of limiting women's political influence. Outsourcing the task of re-imagining citizenship to local women's and feminist groups, while simultaneously cutting their funding, limiting their community influence and not recognising their work as political participation is not acceptable. Additionally, despite conversations between women's sector lobbyists, feminist activists and political parties, there is still only slow progress in terms of gender equality and women's participation. This points to the need to find effective pathways to bridge the gap between the formal political system and the informal politics of women's grassroots activities. This would entail acknowledging, legitimising and validating the ways women (already) do participate in the community arena and beyond, as well as recognising such participation as acts of citizenship and meriting for public office. As such, the idea of what constitutes the public sphere should be re-defined to also include women's grassroots cross-community work. This kind of citizenship work has already been initiated by the feminist and women's sectors through intra- and inter-sector campaigns.

#### 6.4.2 *Bridging the Formal/Informal Political Divide*

This chapter has discussed different ways to challenge and mitigate some of the obstacles the formal political system places on integrating diverse grassroots voices. To different degrees, the explored routes attempt to bridge the gap between formal and informal political activity in a way that holds the formal political system accountable. The routes were evaluated in terms of their potential to accommodate a transversal citizenship that promotes and advances women's public, political participation. As

such, this chapter has presented a theoretical discussion of the compatibility of transversal citizenship and differently aligned political parties and civic institutions. The aim has thus not first and foremost been to evaluate the *likelihood* of such institutions being established or their ability to successfully transmit transversal citizenship ideas to the wider formal political system. Despite some of the routes showing transversal potential, this does not mean that the formal political system is eager to be transformed. NI's consociational system continues to suffer from democratic deficits, especially in terms of gender equality and women's participation. However, the greater the number of actors, parties and institutions that promote a political system that is inclusive of a broad range of identities, experiences and modes of participation, the greater the likelihood of inclusive political space being created and legitimised, even in a deeply divided ethno-national society.

In terms of party-political routes, a woman's party, the women's caucus or a non-aligned party offer the most potential for accommodating a transversal citizenship that promotes women's participation. Unsurprisingly, ethno-national parties are unlikely to recognise intersectional identities due to their focus on community belonging and show limited potential of facilitating coalitions across difference. While the CNR parties utilise internal gender quotas, none of the parties have implemented the Sex Discrimination Act to promote women's participation. There is a limited encouragement for multi-sited participation through activist politicians. NIWC, as an example of a women's party, and APNI, as an example of a non-aligned party, on the other hand, both show potential regarding transversal citizenship. As they are both cross-community parties, their membership is by default broader in terms of community belonging. Although this does not necessarily entail the ability to accommodate intersectional identities or facilitate cross-community coalitions, both NIWC and APNI have shown potential to do so through their political programmes and work. Both also encourage multi-sited citizen participation: NIWC grew out of grassroots women's organisations and emphasised the importance of maintaining that connection, while APNI encourages active citizenship in and support for the voluntary and community sector.

Even though NIWC showed how transversal citizenship can be translated from theory to practice, it is also illustrative of the limited space for gender-based cross-community coalitions to sustain an influence on the political agenda. Consociationalism's tendency to restrict alliances on

other facets of identity than ethno-nationalism, as well as its lack of focus on gender equality and women's rights inhibit the potential of non-aligned parties to promote their political agendas, including transversal citizenship ideas. The STV system, the petition of concern and community designation additionally limit the impact of non-aligned, cross-community parties on decision-making. Non-aligned parties, although increasing their number elected officials, remain smaller than the ethno-national parties. Furthermore, the voter turnout for people who identify outside the CNR-PUL binary tends to be significantly lower than for people who identify with one of the main communities, which shows that an Other identity does not necessarily translate to a vote for a non-aligned party.

The establishment of a women's caucus in the NIA is a positive development for potential cross-community cooperation on key issues. Perhaps this group will be able to make progress where earlier attempts have failed. Over the past few years, the caucus has been briefed by grassroots women and organisations from both the women's and feminist sectors, showing promise in terms of validating multi-sited citizen participation. The diversity of voices and perspectives in those briefings is also promising in terms of acknowledging intersectional identities and systems of oppression. Whether the caucus will be able to build (transversal) coalitions across difference is uncertain, much dependent on which issues are put on the agenda. Any coalitions will be hampered by the ethno-national and ideological ties of MLAs. Rooting, shifting and agonistic listening are unlikely to take place in such an arena where there is an intrinsic need to differentiate one's political stance from others. However, there is potential for the caucus to push for change in terms of gender equality and women's political participation given that women now make up nearly 40 per cent of the NIA.

In terms of civic routes, a Citizens' Assembly shows the greatest potential to accommodate a transversal citizenship. The likelihood of a CA transferring transversal citizenship ideas to the formal political system increases if the NIA is held accountable to its recommendations, which will hopefully be the case if initiated by the Civic Advisory Panel. By including participants representative of NI's overall population, the potential to recognise intersectional identities and facilitate coalitions across difference increases. The fact that participants are encouraged to bring their own experiences and backgrounds to discussions of the issue at hand and that different perspectives are presented by experts

before deliberations, increases the potential of accommodating intersectional identities. Cross-community coalitions may be facilitated through a shared understanding of issues and working together to find solutions. Multi-sited participation is also encouraged through the core idea of a CA: having citizens learn about, discuss and deliberate key political issues that are then, whether official or not, fed into the formal political system.

The Civic Forum, during its short tenure, showed some potential for accommodating intersectional identities given the range of sectors represented in it. The Forum also had a relatively high number of women participants, strengthening the possibility of gender equality being added to its political agenda. The Forum, like the CA, encourages multi-sited participation through its constitution of representatives from the community and voluntary sectors. The potential to facilitate coalitions across difference was limited in the Forum given the short time it met. The fact that it has not been reinstated, despite being part of the GFA, shows the limited space the formal political system grants civic participation. In comparison to the Forum, the Civic Advisory Panel is unlikely to accommodate intersectional identities and facilitate cross-community coalitions given its small size and its members being nominated by ethnographically aligned parties. The Panel will also be limited in the issues it addresses, as these require political approval. Additionally, it is up to panellists to engage with key stakeholders, which at best limits, at worst makes unlikely, multi-sited participation.

Lastly, Section 75 consultations are also limited in their potential to accommodate transversal citizenship. While consultations entail a possibility of recognising intersectional identities in theory, they have been criticised for not doing so in practice. They place a large burden on consultees' resources and not all groups are sufficiently represented and included in the process. For instance, women are often overlooked and the barriers to their participation are not paid enough attention to. In addition, the potential to encourage multi-sited participation and enable cross-community coalitions are limited and largely depends on which groups are consulted and how consultations are facilitated.

## REFERENCES

- Alliance for Choice. (2020). *Get involved*. <http://www.alliance4choice.com/get-involved> Accessed 2020-08-16.

- ARK. (1999). *Northern Ireland life and times survey 1998*. <https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/1998/> Accessed 2020-10-10.
- ARK. (2004). *Northern Ireland life and times survey 2003*. <https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2003/>. Accessed 2020-10-10.
- ARK. (2009). *Northern Ireland life and times survey 2008*. <https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2008/> Accessed 2024-07-25.
- ARK. (2014). *Northern Ireland life and times survey 2013*. <https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2013/>. Accessed 2020-10-10.
- ARK. (2019). *Northern Ireland life and times survey 2018*. <https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2018/> Accessed 2020-10-10.
- ARK. (2024a). *Northern Ireland life and times survey 2023*. <https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2023/> Accessed 2024-10-31.
- ARK. (2024b). *Who won what when and where? .* <https://www.ark.ac.uk/elections/>. Accessed 2024-11-22.
- Ashe, F. (2009). From paramilitaries to peacemakers: The gender dynamics of community-based restorative justice in Northern Ireland. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 11(2), 298–314.
- Ashe, F. (2012). Gendering war and peace: Militarized masculinities in Northern Ireland. *Men and Masculinities*, 15(3), 230–248.
- Ashe, F. (2019). *Gender, nationalism and conflict transformation: New themes and old problems in Northern Ireland Politics*. Routledge.
- Ashe, F. (2022). *Gendering constitutional conversations*. Transitional Justice Institute.
- Ashe, F. (2024). Gendering constitutional change in Northern Ireland: Participation, processes and power. *Political Studies*, 72(2), 486–504.
- Ashe, F., Finnegan, N., McMinn, J., Rooney, E., Broderick, C., Garrido Castellano, C., et al. (2024). *The women's charter for inclusive constitutional futures*. Critical Epistemologies Across Borders.
- Assembly and Executive Review Committee. (2015). *Report on women in politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly*. Belfast: Northern Ireland Assembly.
- BBC. (2017). *Hundreds Attend Belfast Abortion Rally*. BBC. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-41623397> Accessed 2020-08-16.
- Belfast Media. (2023). *Independent Women's Assembly to be established to discuss Irish unity*. *Belfast Media*. <https://belfastmedia.com/independent-women-s-assembly-to-be-established-to-discuss-irish-unity>. Accessed 2024-11-12.
- Belfast Times. (2019). *International Women's Day Events in Belfast*. Belfast Times. <https://www.belfasttimes.co.uk/international-womens-day-events-in-belfast/>. Accessed 2020-08-16.
- Bramsen, I. (2022). Agonistic interaction in practice: Laughing, dissensus and hegemony in the Northern Ireland Assembly. *Third World Quarterly*, 43(6), 1324–1342.

- Byrne, S. (2009). *Beyond the ethnonational divide: Identity politics and women in Northern Ireland and Israel/Palestine*. Queen's University Kingston.
- Byrne, S. (2013). Troubled engagement in ethnicized conflict: Negotiating difference among feminist activists in Israel/Palestine and Northern Ireland. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 16(1), 106–126.
- Byrne, S., & McCulloch, A. (2012). Gender, representation and power-sharing in post-conflict institutions. *International Peacekeeping*, 19(5), 565–580.
- Cochrane, F., & Dunn, S. (2002). *People power? The role of the voluntary and community sector in the Northern Ireland conflict*. Cork University Press.
- Cowell-Meyers, K. (2003). *Women legislators in Northern Ireland: gender and politics in the new Legislative Assembly*. Belfast: Centre for Advancement of Women in Politics, School of Politics, Queen's University Belfast.
- Deiana, M.-A. (2013). Women's citizenship in Northern Ireland after the 1998 Agreement. *Irish Political Studies*, 28(3), 399–412.
- Deiana, M.-A. (2016). To settle for a gendered peace? Spaces for feminist grassroots mobilization in Northern Ireland and Bosnia-Herzegovina. *Citizenship Studies*, 20(1), 99–114.
- Department of Foreign Affairs Ireland. (2019). *Women, Peace and Security: Ireland's Third National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 and Related Resolutions 2019–2024*. Dublin: Department of Foreign Affairs Ireland.
- Donaghy, T. B. (2004a). Applications of mainstreaming in Australia and Northern Ireland. *International Political Science Review*, 25(4), 393–410.
- Donaghy, T. B. (2004b). Mainstreaming: Northern Ireland's participative-democratic approach. *Policy & Politics*, 32(1), 49–62.
- Donahoe, A. E. (2017). *Peacebuilding through Women's Community Development: Wee Women's Work in Northern Ireland*. Cham: Springer International.
- Ferguson, A. (2018a). *Belfast Abortion Rally: 'It's the Start of a New Campaign Here'*. The Irish Times. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/belfast-abortion-rally-it-s-the-start-of-a-new-campaign-here-1.3511688> Accessed 2020-08-16.
- Ferguson, A. (2018b). *Belfast Feminist Network to Stage Rally at Ulster Rugby Game*. The Irish Times. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/belfast-feminist-network-to-stage-rally-at-ulster-rugby-game-1.3459993>. Accessed 2020-10-15.
- Galligan, Y. (2019). Brexit, gender and Northern Ireland. In M. Dustin, N. Ferreira, & S. Millns (Eds.), *Gender and queer perspectives on brexit* (pp. 363–385). Springer.
- Gilmartin, N. (2017). Feminism, nationalism and the re-ordering of post-war political strategies: The case of the Sinn Féin Women's Department. *Irish Political Studies*, 32(2), 268–292.

- Guelke, A. (2003). Civil society and the Northern Irish peace process. *Voluntas: International journal of Voluntary and nonprofit Organizations*, 14(1), 61–78.
- Hall, M. (Ed.). (2002). *Citizenship in a modern society. Report of a public debate organised by springfield inter-community development project*. Island Publications.
- Haridasani Gupta, A. (2020). *With brexit looming, experts worry women may be hit hardest*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/17/world/europe/brexit-women-impact.html>. Accessed 2024-11-28.
- Haslam, A. (2023). *European Social Fund: Groups face cuts to services despite £57m UK cash*. BBC News NI. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-65123873> Accessed 2024-11-27.
- Hayes, B. C. (2017). *Female electoral turnout in Northern Ireland: The democratic deficit among protestant women*. LSE blog. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/female-electoral-turnout-in-northern-ireland/> (Accessed: 2020-08-10).
- Hegarty, M. (2001). *Policies and priorities: Findings from women's sector research North and South*. North-South Collaboration Group.
- Hinds, B., & Donnelly, D. (2014). *Women, peace and security: Women's rights and gender equality. Developing and applying women, peace and security practice in Northern Ireland/Ireland. Strategic guide and toolkit*. Community Foundation for Northern Ireland.
- Horowitz, D. L. (2002). Explaining the Northern Ireland agreement: The sources of an unlikely constitutional consensus. *British Journal of Political Science*, 32(2), 193–220.
- Hughes, B. (2018). *Citizens' Assembly Proposal for Northern Ireland Secures Funding*. Irish News. <http://www.irishnews.com/news/2018/01/19/news/citizens-assembly-proposal-for-northern-ireland-secures-funding-1236058/> Accessed 2018-01-30.
- Human Rights Consortium. (2018). *Rights at Risk: Brexit, Human Rights and Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Human Rights Consortium.
- Involve. (2020). *How Can Northern Ireland Break the Deadlock on Contested Issues?: Citizens' Assembly for Northern Ireland*. <https://www.involve.org.uk/our-work/our-projects/practice/how-can-northern-ireland-break-deadlock-contested-issues> Accessed 2020-10-18.
- Kilmurray, A. (2017). *Community action in a contested society: The story of Northern Ireland*. Peter Lang.
- Lister, R. (2003). *Citizenship: Feminist perspectives*. New York University Press.
- McCartney, B. (2023). *Citizens' Assemblies: Gimmick or Gambit?* Sluggie O'Toole. Available at: <https://sluggerotoole.com/2023/02/21/citizens-assemblies-gimmick-or-gambit/> (Accessed: 2024-11-22).

- McCoy, G. (2000). Women, community and politics in Northern Ireland. In C. Roulston & C. Davies (Eds.), *Gender, democracy and inclusion in Northern Ireland* (pp. 3–23). Palgrave.
- McDonald, H., & Greenfield, P. (2018). *Rugby Unions Revoke Paddy Jackson and Stuart Olding's contracts*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/apr/13/belfast-feminists-rally-ulster-rugby-match-rape-acquittal>. Accessed 2020-10-15.
- McIntyre, A. (2004). *Women in Belfast: How violence shapes identity*. Praeger Publishers.
- Meehan, E. (2003). *From government to governance, civic participation and 'new politics: The context of potential opportunities for the better representation of women*. Belfast: Centre for Advancement of Women in Politics, School of Politics, Queen's University Belfast.
- Morgan, V. (2003). The role of women in community development in Northern Ireland. In O. Hargie & D. Dickson (Eds.), *Researching the troubles: Social science perspectives on the Northern Ireland conflict* (pp. 245–257). Mainstream Publishing.
- Murtagh, C. (2008). A transient transition: The cultural and institutional obstacles impeding the Northern Ireland women's coalition in its progression from informal to formal politics. *Irish Political Studies*, 23(1), 21–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07907180701767948>
- New Decade, New Approach 2020. (2020). Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/856998/2020-01-08\\_a\\_new\\_decade\\_\\_a\\_new\\_approach.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/856998/2020-01-08_a_new_decade__a_new_approach.pdf) (Accessed: 2020-10-13).
- News Letter. (2020). *Thousands expected to gather for Women's Day*. News Letter. <https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/uk-news/thousands-expected-gather-womens-day-2218449>. Accessed 2020-08-16.
- Northern Ireland Act 1998. (1998). *United Kingdom*. Available at: [https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/47/pdfs/ukpga\\_19980047\\_en.pdf](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/47/pdfs/ukpga_19980047_en.pdf) (Accessed: 2018-03-05).
- Northern Ireland Assembly. (2022). *Northern Ireland Assembly Women's Caucus Legacy Report 2017–2022*. Belfast: Northern Ireland Assembly NIA 188/17-22.
- Northern Ireland Assembly. (2024a). *Assembly Women's Caucus*. <https://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/assembly-womens-caucus/> Accessed 2024-11-21.
- Northern Ireland Assembly. (2024b). *The Women's Parliament*. <https://www.niassembly.gov.uk/womens-parliament> Accessed 2024-11-21.
- Northern Ireland Assembly. (2024c). *Women's Parliament 2022*. <https://www.niassembly.gov.uk/visit-and-learning/get-involved/womens-parliament/womens-parliament-2022/> Accessed 2024-11-21.

- Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action. (2020). *State of the sector: Workforce*. Available at: <https://www.nicva.org/stateofthesector/workforce> (Accessed: 2020-08-16).
- Northern Ireland Women's European Platform. (2014). *An inquiry into the position of women in Northern Ireland since the peace agreement: Summary report*. Belfast: Northern Ireland Women's European Platform.
- O'Connell, R., & Cunningham, T. (2022). *Impact of Brexit on Section 75 Equality Groups in Northern Ireland: EU Funding*. Belfast: Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.
- O'Loughlin, G. (2023). *Belfast women establish independent assembly to discuss Irish Unity Friends of Sinn Féin*. Available at: <https://friendsofsinnfein.com/belfast-women-establish-independent-assembly-to-discuss-irish-unity/> (Accessed: 2024-11-17).
- O'Rourke, C. (2014). 'Walk[ing] the Halls of Power'? Understanding women's participation in international peace and security. *Melbourne Journal of International Law*, 15(1), 128–154.
- O'Rourke, C., & Swaine, A. (2018). CEDAW and the security council: Enhancing women's rights in conflict. *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 67(1), 167–199.
- Phinnemore, D., & Whitten, L. C. (2024). *The Protocol/Windsor Framework and the 2024 Democratic Consent Vote*. Queen's University's Post-Brexit Governance NI—Explainer. Queen's University 16. Available at: <https://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/post-brexit-governance-ni/ProjectPublications/Explainers/TheProtocolWindsorFrameworkandthe2024DemocraticConsentVote/> (Accessed: 2024-11-21).
- Pierson, C. (2019). Gendering peace in Northern Ireland: The role of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. *Capital & Class*, 43(1), 57–71.
- Pierson, C., & Radford, K. (2016). *Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland and the women's sector: An overview of reports and programmes*. Institute of Conflict Research.
- Pierson, C., & Thomson, J. (2018). Allies or opponents? Power-sharing, civil society, and gender. *Nationalism & Ethnic Politics*, 24(1), 100–115.
- Politics Plus. (2020). *Assembly women's caucus*. <https://politicsplus.com/programmes/women/assembly-womens-caucus/>. Accessed 2020-10-20.
- Raise Your Voice Against Sexual Harassment. (2020). *Raise your voice against sexual harassment*. <https://www.raiseyourvoice.community/>. Accessed 2020-08-16.
- Republic of Ireland Citizens' Assembly. (2018). *The Citizens' Assembly of the Republic of Ireland*. <https://www.citizensassembly.ie/>. Accessed 2018-03-15.

- Rooney, E. (2002). Community development in times of trouble: Reflections on the community women's sector in the north of Ireland. *Community Development Journal*, 37(1), 33–46.
- Rooney, E. (2013). *Transitional Justice Grassroots Programme: Executive Summary 2012–2013*. Belfast: Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University and Bridge of Hope, Ashton Community Trust.
- Rooney, E. (2014). *Transitional Justice Grassroots Toolkit: User's Guide*. Belfast: Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University and Bridge of Hope, Ashton Community Trust.
- Rooney, E., O'Connell, R., Ashe, F., Gormley-Heenan, C., Harvey, C., O'Donoghue, A., et al. (2020). *Deliberating constitutional futures*. Transitional Justice Institute.
- Rooney, E., & Swaine, A. (2012). The 'Long Grass' of agreements: Promise, theory and practice. *International Criminal Law Review*, 12(3), 519–548.
- Rouse, M. (2016). In need of a fresh start: Gender equality in post-GFA Northern Ireland. *Northern Ireland Legal Quarterly*, 67(2), 233–240.
- Side, K. (2009). Women's civil and political citizenship in the post-good friday agreement period in Northern Ireland. *Irish Political Studies*, 24(1), 67–87.
- Simpson, C. (2023). *Good Friday Agreement: Civic Forum 'didn't have a snowball's chance*. The Detail. <https://thedetail.tv/articles/good-friday-agreement-civic-forum-didn-t-have-a-snowball-s-chance>. Accessed 2024-11-22.
- Sinn Féin. (2023). *Report of the Belfast Women's Assembly 27 June 2023*. Northern Ireland: The Commission on the Future of Ireland.
- The Guardian. (2018). *Activists Take 'Abortion Pills' During Pro-Choice Rally in Belfast*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/31/pro-choice-activists-take-abortion-pills-belfast-protest>. Accessed 2020-08-16.
- Tonge, J. (2020). Beyond unionism versus nationalism: The rise of the alliance party of Northern Ireland. *The Political Quarterly*, 91(2), 461–466.
- Turtle, K. (2018). *Women at the Heart of Public Consultation: A Guide for Public Authorities and Women's Organisations*. Belfast: Women's Resource and Development Agency.
- United Kingdom. (2023a). *UK Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan 2023–2027*. United Kingdom.
- United Kingdom. (2023b). *The Windsor Framework: A New Way Forward*. United Kingdom.
- Walker, S. (2018). *Citizens' Assembly Looks Set for Northern Ireland*. BBC. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-42735548>. Accessed 2018-01-30.
- Ward, R. (2002). Invisible women: The political roles of unionist and loyalist women in contemporary Northern Ireland. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 55(1), 167–178.

- Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland. (2021). *NI COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan: Relaunch—One Year On*. Northern Ireland: Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland.
- Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland. (2022). *WPG NI response to Westminster Northern Ireland affairs committee call for evidence: the effect of paramilitaries on society in Northern Ireland*. Northern Ireland: Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland.
- Women's Resource and Development Agency. (2021). *Women's Resource and Development Agency Response to The Executive Office Call for Views on the 'Building Forward: Consolidated COVID-19 Recovery Plan'*. Northern Ireland: Women's Resource and Development Agency.
- Wright, K. A. M., McAreevey, R., & Donaldson, R. (2024). *The Impact of Brexit on Women in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





## Conclusion

This chapter explores the main findings concerning several themes: defining political participation (7.1); gender equality backlash and progress in women's political representation (7.2); agonism and transversalism in cross-community dialogues (7.3) and transversal citizenship politics (7.4). The chapter is then concluded with some final remarks in Sect. 7.5.

### 7.1 CITIZENSHIP AS POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM AS ACTS OF CITIZENSHIP IN AN ETHNO-NATIONAL SOCIETY

This study contributes to knowledge by highlighting the negative consequences of a narrow understanding of politics and political activity for women's modes of political participation. The study has shown that when politics is thought of in terms of the formal party-political system in a deeply divided ethno-national society, it also becomes associated with ethno-nationalism. Study participants also often related "politics" to close-mindedness and paramilitary activity. Political participation is therefore often understood narrowly as engagement with the formal, principally ethno-national, party-political system. This view was largely endorsed by ethno-nationally aligned political parties, which tended to emphasise passive engagement through voting. This helps explain why

study participants, despite being active in a range of arenas and activities, seldom identified as politically active.

As political participation is viewed generally as activity in party politics, and party politics is intertwined with ethno-nationalism, there are consequences for political citizenship, especially for women. When citizenship intersects with ethno-national belonging, women's participation is often obstructed due to gendered constructions in which women are associated with passivity, motherhood and the ("apolitical") private sphere. Women are thus often constructed as standing outside or above ethno-national political debate and lacking the "correct" credentials and experience for political decision-making, making their views and participation seem superfluous. Who is listened to and taken seriously affects what issues make it onto the political agenda. This was echoed by many participants, who felt that women's voices are not seen as valid in Northern Ireland (NI) society. It also exemplifies the consequences of upholding the gendered public/private divide.

Furthermore, when participation in formal politics is the sole legitimised act of political citizenship, other forms of participation are rendered invisible, which also has gendered consequences. While the formal political system continues to be male-dominated, despite an increase in the number of female politicians, women more often engage in a varied range of informal community-based political activities. As grass-roots engagement is seldom recognised as citizen participation, women's main avenue of public, political activities is overlooked. It can also act to bolster the construct of women as apart from formal politics and be interpreted as evidence that women are neither interested in nor part of discredited ethno-nationalist politics. This impedes community-active women from entering the corridors of formal power. Being perceived as standing outside politics thus limits their influence.

Women's community participation, especially when it is cross-communal, also influences the space they are afforded in political discourse. They are often portrayed as having a "natural" ability and willingness to work together across divides to pragmatically solve problems. Constructing women as peacemakers, especially when maternal tropes are utilised, can afford women some public space to engage, but also limit their engagement to the local level. While maternal discourses might be a way to achieve certain goals, increase women's participation and thus temporarily challenge the public/private divide, it also tends to reinforce ideas of women as non-political beings and to re-establish the

public/private divide. The tendency to characterise women as “superior” political participants possessing many traits desirable to see in politicians (hard-working, willing to compromise, level-headed, etc.) has not been translated into the formal political system as women’s descriptive representation is still relatively low. Additionally, research has shown that women in NI are less likely to support political parties and less likely to vote. They are also more likely to identify as neither Unionist nor Nationalist, i.e., identifying outside the binary political system.

Having said this, there are differences between the ethno-national communities. The manifesto analysis found a lack of substantive gender analysis and commitments to gender equality in the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) manifestos. They also have a poor track record in terms of female candidates and elected officials, although this has improved. Feminism and gender equality have tended to be seen as “Catholic/Nationalist/Republican (CNR) ideals” and therefore automatically suspicious. This, in addition to defending the status quo and the state, has made it more difficult for women to push for a feminist agenda in the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist (PUL) community. Neither has there historically been a great strategic or ideological need for women’s participation. Research participants demonstrated the difficulty of combining a PUL identity with a political identity (feminist/socialist/liberal). While CNR participants identified with both ethno-national and political identities, PUL participants tended to prefer political identification over ethno-national ones. As such, PUL participants were less likely to identify with PUL parties. This correlates with data showing that PUL women are least likely to vote. Several PUL participants also talked about the difficulty of voicing disagreement with their community traditions and identities.

In the CNR community, women have built on a historical connection with feminism and advanced feminist demands. This was partly in response to women’s marginalisation within the CNR community and Republican feminists’ marginalisation within the women’s rights movement. Sinn Féin (SF) and Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) were thus pushed to implement gender equality measures: they set up women’s sections, implemented internal gender quotas and have consistently had higher numbers of women involved compared with PUL parties. However, women have had to frame gender equality in terms of Nationalism to be taken seriously. Since SF has become part of the state, the space for radical feminist politics has diminished in the party.

Nonetheless, the CNR parties continue to have more women in public office compared with the UUP and DUP.

## 7.2 GENDER EQUALITY: PROGRESS OR BACKLASH?

Despite restricted political space and violent conflict, women worked together to campaign for women's rights and gender equality throughout the Troubles. Since the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement (GFA) was signed, NI has seen both positive progress and negative pushback in terms of gender equality. Discursive space was opened by the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) during the peace negotiations to promote women's rights, and women's participation in formal politics has increased at all levels since then. However, the possibilities to challenge conservative ethno-national gender politics have not necessarily improved as the public/private divide has partly been reasserted during the transition. The lack of legislated gender equality enforcement mechanisms has, in addition to consociational and material barriers to women's participation, enabled this development.

This section discusses indications of a gender equality backlash in post-GFA NI in relation to women's descriptive and substantive representation. Backlash is evaluated in relation to gender gains made during the conflict. If such gains are negotiated off the political agenda or invalidated during the transitional phase, backlash can be said to have occurred. However, this does not mean that backlash requires a complete reversal of women's rights to pre-conflict levels (if that is even possible) as this is merely the discursive, ideological narrative on which arguments are based. Transitional pushback against progress, shrinking space for women's participation or unwillingness to address gender equality is thus sufficient for backlash to be recognised. The aim has thus been to explore whether gains made during the Troubles have been restricted in post-GFA NI.

In terms of descriptive representation (see Table 7.1), there has been an increase in the number of women engaged in formal politics, including reaching a critical mass in the Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA), and prominent female party leaders and ministers over the past few years. This development has taken place despite a party-political resistance to increase women's party-political representation (see Gilmartin, 2017; Rouse, 2016; Side, 2009). However, there has been a consistent lack of women in institutions designed to deal with conflict legacy. The formal

political environment also shows sexist double standards, female politicians treated as tokens and the glass cliff phenomenon (see Donahoe, 2017; Exeter Psychology Department, 2020; Ward, 2000). In addition, persistent barriers to participation remain, ranging from a narrow understanding of participation and ethno-national politics, to the lack of childcare provisions, high rates of domestic violence and poverty. Building on the long history of grassroots activism, women continue to be active in informal community politics. However, there are indications that their space for participation has been shrinking since the GFA, largely due to the ex-paramilitaries reclaiming space in the community arena and a severe funding crisis. This has also led to a decrease in recognition of women's work as community development becomes professionalised.

In terms of substantive representation in formal politics (see Table 7.1), there is a lack of political focus on gender equality and women's rights. An increase in the number of women has not necessarily entailed progressive gender equality politics or progress for women's rights. Gender equality

**Table 7.1** Women's descriptive and substantive representation in formal and informal politics, 1998–2024

<i>Arena</i>	<i>Signs of progress</i>	<i>Signs of backlash/pushback</i>
Formal politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GFA commitment to women's full and equal participation</li> <li>• Increase in female politicians and political leaders at all levels</li> <li>• NIA Women's Caucus and All-Party Group on Women, Peace and Security (WPS)</li> <li>• Section 75 gender mainstreaming</li> <li>• Growth of Other parties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Persistent material and symbolic barriers to participation</li> <li>• Lack of political attention to gender equality issues</li> <li>• Lack of women and gender analysis in conflict-legacy institutions</li> <li>• Restricted civil society input</li> <li>• Lack of mechanism to ensure women's political participation</li> </ul>
Informal politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued engagement in community organising</li> <li>• Large women's sector and growing feminist sector</li> <li>• More avenues of feeding expertise into formal politics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shrinking space and less recognition of work</li> <li>• Funding crisis and restrictive funding requirements</li> <li>• Diminishing influence in community organising</li> <li>• Increased need for services without corresponding funding</li> </ul>

issues have largely been filtered out from the political agenda or been stopped from progressing. As such, they continue to be a low political priority. There are many examples of this. For instance, despite commitments in the GFA, there is still no Bill of Rights or any mechanism to ensure women's full and equal participation. The fact that a Gender Equality Strategy was published is positive, but its impact was low, and no new strategy has been published since. Section 75 gender mainstreaming has transformative potential but does not live up to it. It is criticised for neglecting intersectional perspectives, overlooking women as a group in consultations and placing a heavy burden on consultees without remuneration (see Donaghy, 2004a, 2004b). Abortion is now legal, but Stormont has proved their inability to protect women's reproductive rights through slow and inadequate implementation of abortion provisions.

The elite-focus of consociationalism restricts civil society engagement in politics, which disproportionately impacts women (see Donahoe, 2017; Guelke, 2003; Kilmurray, 2017; Meehan, 2003). In addition, consociationalism pushes non-aligned, cross-community parties to the fringes of political discourse and decision-making through its system of designating Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), allowing ethno-nationalist vetoes and the Single Transferable Vote (STV) electoral system (see Byrne, 2013; Horowitz, 2002; Murtagh, 2008). This also limits the space for gender-based cross-community coalitions influence on politics. Hopefully, the Women's Caucus in the NIA will be able to create new space for agonistic contestation regarding women's political rights. Despite a history of armed conflict, United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 has still not been implemented in NI. An All-Party Group on WPS has been established in the NIA, but the post-GFA agreements and institutions dealing with the legacy of the conflict boast little to no gender analysis nor commitments to gender justice. As such, there is an overall lack of understanding in formal politics that gender equality and justice are key to conflict transformation.

In informal politics, women's substantive participation has continued in both the women's and feminist sectors. However, to some extent, their influence in community organising has diminished due to the participation of ex-paramilitaries in community development. Another significant negative development is the funding crisis and restrictive funding requirements that community organisations are facing. However, there are now more avenues open to grassroots organisers to feed their expertise into formal politics, for instance through briefing the Women's Caucus or

attending the Women's Parliament. Given how limited women's political citizenship was two decades ago, some significant developments have taken place in terms of women's political participation. However, there are also varying levels of backlash in terms of gender equality and women's participation across the formal and informal political arenas. Additionally, there has been an increase in the reported cases of domestic and sexual violence (see Pierson, 2018; Powell, 2020; Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland, 2019), also a sign of backlash.

As such, there are numerous indications of pushback against women's descriptive and substantive representation in post-GFA NI. However, this backlash has largely manifested itself as consistent obstacles to and pushback against progress, rather than a reversal of rights. As such, progressive gender equality developments have been impeded by ethno-political unwillingness to address women's rights (especially from Unionist parties), restrictive consociational structures, material barriers to political activity and lack of recognition of women's political participation. In some areas, progress has been decidedly limited, and women's political citizenship continues to be infringed. The backlash has also been worsened by lengthy suspensions of devolved government, Brexit, welfare reform and extensive austerity measures, including public funding cuts. A key part of this has been the inability of the formal political system to harness the political work many women do at a grassroots level, as well as the various impediments to building a united feminist women's movement.

The backlash has been mitigated by the influence Great Britain (GB) has on the region, as they have in limited ways attempted to and sometimes succeeded in checking NI's more conservative gender politics. In recent years, progress on issues such as reproductive rights and same-sex marriage in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) have also influenced NI. The European Union (EU) has also played a significant role in pushing gender equality legislation forward, something that is now at risk of being reversed due to Brexit. International feminist frameworks, such as Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the WPS agenda, have also been helpful in terms of holding NI and the United Kingdom (UK) accountable, even if progress has been uneven.

### 7.3 TRANSVERSAL AND AGONISTIC DIALOGUE IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Agonism and transversalism both aim to navigate political conflict in divided societies without denying difference. Both focus on relational transformation, although place different emphasis on the necessity of conflict. While agonism promotes a continual contestation of political ideas within a democratic framework, presupposing that (non-violent) conflict can be productive, transversalism sees conflict as an opportunity for dialogue, focusing on creating a shared space for negotiation, rather than conflict for its own sake. For transversalists, conflict is an expression of power, often based on inequalities, which should be challenged. Both agonism and transversalism argue for the creation of inclusive spaces where differences are both expressed and contested in a respectful, non-violent and democratic manner. Neither aims to reconcile, suppress or erase difference. Rather, difference should be acknowledged, and marginalised voices must be included in dialogue. Both perspectives argue that democratic politics should aim to transform power relations so that they become compatible with democratic values and inclusive political practices. In transversal politics, participants bridge differences in relational spaces where they can find common ground. As such, intersectional forms of oppression can be challenged by creating coalitions across difference. In agonism, on the other hand, engaging with legitimate political adversaries in a democratic arena is the way to contest hegemonic power. In other words, power can be managed and challenged through political struggle.

The perspectives differ most in terms of their desired outcomes. Agonism envisions a future of continued ideological contestation based on a recognition of political pluralism, given how conflict is intrinsic in any society. Transversalism, however, focuses more on social justice and challenging inequalities through building solidarity and political alliances across intersecting identities. As such, the use of consensus, common ground and coalition politics differs between the two. Even though contestation is key for agonism, a form of conflictual consensus can be reached to make political decisions; a consensus that is temporary, partial and fragile. The consensus in transversalism, on the other hand, is more sustainable in that it is built on shared values, shared goals and embracing difference. However, when values or goals are no longer shared, or difference only becomes acknowledged, not embraced, the consensus becomes

weaker or crumbles entirely. As such, the consensus in transversal politics is not unconditional, nor is it based on a strategic avoidance of difference or power inequalities.

Transversal and agonistic dialogue face similar challenges. First, both require participants to treat each other with respect, which is not at all self-evident in deeply divided societies transitioning from violent conflict. Second, acknowledging and challenging differences in a society where those differences have previously led to violence is not simple. This too requires a lot from participants. Third, while such dialogues can be more easily implemented on a small-scale basis with few participants, translating it into practice for a larger section of society is complex and very challenging. This is especially problematic in societies with deep power imbalances, ongoing conflict and influential actors protecting the status quo. In such societies, there is a risk that attempts to practise agonism and transversalism actually entrench, rather than challenge, deep divides and systematic inequalities. Additionally, if there is a resistance to recognising the intersectional nature of identities and oppression, transversalism and agonism will be difficult to achieve. For transversalism especially, the goal of building alliances can risk that some struggles become weaker at the expense of the coalition. This is also important to keep in mind, so that hegemonic power is not automatically replicated through transversal practice. As such, agonistic and transversal dialogue are not appropriate in all settings at all times.

In practice, transversal and agonistic dialogue can look quite similar, especially in a grassroots setting, as demonstrated in Chapter 5. In fact, the method of agonistic listening, with its focus on recognising the other, is central to the transversal process of rooting and shifting. Inclusive dialogues where participants recognise difference, sometimes by agreeing to disagree, and listen to each other with respect and empathy allow for relational transformation of identities in both transversal politics and agonistic peacebuilding. While agonism accepts conflict as inherent in political life, transversalism aims to transform and transcend such conflict through cross-community coalitions that address underlying power dynamics. In other words, transversalism takes dialogue one step further than agonism in order to facilitate practical political decision-making.

Even though both agonism and transversalism recognise difference, transversalism requires participants to *embrace* it, given that there is a shared value system among them. Not checking one's politics at the

door or merely recognising that differences exist, but rather embracing difference is what makes coalitions more durable as all identity facets are explored, discussed and encompassed with equality. However, this is also what makes transversalism even more difficult than agonism to enact, especially in formal political settings. While certain aspects of agonistic dialogue may be present in the NIA for instance (cf. Bramsen, 2022), it is difficult to imagine MLAs having the kind of truly transversal conversations present in the women's sector's legacy-based activities.

In women's cross-community groups, the legacy-based activities in the women's sector show the most transversal and agonistic promise as they enable agonistic listening, rooting and shifting, and encourage difference to be embraced (cf. Table 5.2). Within feminist groups, a version of strategic avoidance of difference is utilised, shying away from discussions on difference, while allowing participants to acknowledge their roots. Publicly, feminist groups use intersectional theory strategically to manage living in a deeply divided society and minimise exclusion. However, it is not necessarily used to increase inclusion or to affirm difference. Recreational/educational activities do not show signs of either transversal or agonistic dialogue. Based on the differing strengths of legacy-based activities and feminist groups, there is great potential for building a transversal women's movement that embraces agonistic listening, intersectional practice and enables coalitions across difference.

#### 7.4 TRANSVERSAL CITIZENSHIP: MAKING DEMOCRACY OUT OF DIFFERENCE

Transversalism serves as a valuable model for democratic politics in several ways. It promotes building trust and respect, as well as methods of democratic decision-making to ensure everyone's voices are heard. It emphasises building coalitions on shared values and political goals, rather than on ethno-national identity politics. Transversal citizenship thus recognises and accommodates intersectional identities, encourages active multi-sited citizen participation and facilitates coalitions across difference (see Deiana, 2018; Roulston, 2000; Yuval-Davis, 1999a, 1999b, 2011). Transversal citizenship is particularly valuable in deeply divided ethno-national societies, as it challenges the ethno-nationalist binary politics, and values societal plurality. It is also useful in transitional societies, as it has the potential to promote women's public, political participation and counteract gender equality backlash.

It represents a step towards gender-just citizenship and political participation by recognising and validating women's community activities as citizen participation. As such, it acknowledges that women are already politically active, even if the formal political system does not. Transversalism is based on a broad definition of political participation, which allows it to push the boundary of the public/private divide. It also celebrates intersectional identities, showing that membership in ethno-national collectivities is mediated by membership in multiple other groups. This facilitates an understanding of both identities and oppression as intersecting. It also allows women to build coalitions across ethno-national lines. As such, its strength lies in its method of encompassing difference and working together for a shared goal. This can enable deep and long-term cross-community relationships to be built in transitional societies, while at the same time challenging exclusionary and male-centred notions of citizenship and participation.

To be effective, transversal citizenship needs both civic and political space. This book has identified several ways to develop it in NI. First, a transversal feminist women's movement should be built by further uniting the feminist and women's sectors. Such a movement takes inspiration from and combines the legacy-based women's sector activities and their expertise in using intersectionality and transversalism in practice, and the feminist sector's expertise of intersectional and feminist theory and campaigning experience. Furthering the cooperation between the two sectors might encourage more women to join feminist campaigns *and* facilitate feminist discussions of difference. A broad, inclusive, cross-community movement based on shared values and goals can thus be promoted, one that practices both intersectionality and transversalism. A vital step to achieve this is to increase and reform the funding for the women's and feminist sectors. At the moment, the sectors are both facing a funding crisis that limits their work and the sustainability of their projects. Stable funding sources can help the sectors expand and further the collaborative work they already do. It can also allow for new inter-sector partnerships to be built.

Second, it is important to feed informal politics, especially the experiences and activities of a combined women's and feminist sector, into the formal political system. This could challenge formal politics so that it better accommodates a transversal citizenship that validates and advances women's political participation. Several party-political and civic routes to harness women's activism, experiences and concerns were explored

in Chapter 6. Three routes were identified as more likely than others to accommodate transversal citizenship: a woman's party (illustrated by the NIWC) or women's caucus, a non-aligned party (illustrated by Alliance Party Northern Ireland (APNI)) and a Citizens' Assembly. NIWC exemplified how transversal citizenship can be translated into practice. However, as it was dissolved in 2006, it also showed the limited space for transversalism in formal politics and it seems unlikely that such a party would be re-established today. The newly established Women's Caucus in the NIA, however, has the potential of bringing attention to gender equality issues and perhaps improving women's descriptive and substantive representation. The fact that the caucus has been able to work together on a limited basis shows some promise in terms of opening up space for cross-community collaboration of women.

Non-aligned parties have been making electoral advances over the past decades, as such challenging the political monopoly of ethno-nationalist politics. An increasing number of people identify as neither Nationalist nor Unionist, and this is also reflected in the increased political space for parties designating as Other. Since such parties have a cross-community membership, they have the potential to acknowledge intersectional identities and facilitate coalitions across difference. However, research has also shown that people who identify as Other are less likely to vote, which possibly impedes further advances. The consociational system also limits the political influence of non-aligned parties. In the last election a downward trend emerged for Other parties, perhaps a sign of increased political polarisation due to the impacts of Brexit and discussions of a United Ireland.

In terms of a Citizens' Assembly (CA), its potential depends on its status, i.e., whether it is officially sanctioned or not. The 2018 CA was not, but there is potential for future CAs to be initiated by the Civic Advisory Panel, making the NIA more likely to be held accountable in terms of its conclusions and recommendations. The strength of a CA lies in its randomly picked participants (without political involvement) and its deliberative process after expert input. This allows intersectional identities and experiences to be examined and opens space for cross-community coalitions to be built on shared values and goals. To a certain degree it also encourages multi-sited participation. However, CAs are limited in terms of the mandate they are given by the formal political system, i.e., what issues they discuss, how often they are organised and the impact their recommendations have. The formal political system has previously

shown its disinterest in a consultative chamber consisting of civil society groups in their reluctance to re-establish the Civic Forum. This may also restrict the potential of a CA.

Although transversal citizenship holds promise for women's political participation and more inclusive substantive representation for gender equality issues, it is not a quick fix. Nor is it appropriate to place the burden of restructuring citizenship on women or women's cross-community work. It is not a substitute for policy changes to promote women's participation, reduce women's poverty or lessen the barriers to participation. Nonetheless, it can be used as a vehicle to push for progressive change.

## 7.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This book has contributed to scholarship on gendered citizenship in deeply divided ethno-national transitional societies. It argues that the gendered underpinnings of citizenship and ethno-nationalism obstruct the process of building a gender-just citizenship. Finding ways to disrupt and challenge conservative gendered notions of citizenship and of ethno-national politics is therefore crucial to recognise, legitimise and encourage women's public, political participation. This becomes particularly important in transitional societies, as they tend to experience a backlash against gender equality and women's participation. The ultimate goal is to build a society based on equality and justice.

The book has explored transversal citizenship, inspired by women's grassroots cross-community activities, as a way to mitigate the negative consequences of gendered ethno-nationalist politics on women's public, political participation. Transversal citizenship has the potential to do so in several ways. First, it is underpinned by a broad definition of political participation that incorporates engagement in different arenas in society and in varied activities. This conceptualisation thus validates women's grassroots community activities as acts of political citizenship. As such, women are included in citizenship as both political agents and subjects. Second, it recognises and accommodates intersectional identities. Transversal citizenship celebrates plurality and acknowledges memberships in multiple collectivities. Third, it facilitates coalitions across difference, allowing alliances to be built on shared values and goals, transforming difference into a resource rather than an obstacle.

As such, this book contributes to the study of transversalism in two ways: by linking it to women's public participation and political citizenship and by analysing how it is used by women in practice. However, the study has also demonstrated the difficulties of building lasting transversal coalitions. It has explored the challenges of embracing, rather than acknowledging difference, even in groups committed to cross-community cooperation. It has also discussed the limited political space that is afforded to plural identities that lie outside or challenge the ethno-nationalist binary in deeply divided societies, especially those with consociational structures. In the coming years, it will be vital to facilitate inclusive dialogues that foster agonistic listening, embrace intersectional identities and promote women's substantive participation in both cross-community and cross-border settings on the island of Ireland. As NI now embarks on a journey towards an undecided constitutional future, transversal dialogue will be as important as ever.

## REFERENCES

- Bramsen, I. (2022). Agonistic interaction in practice: Laughing, dissensus and hegemony in the Northern Ireland Assembly. *Third World Quarterly*, 43(6), 1324–1342.
- Byrne, S. (2013). Troubled engagement in ethnicized conflict: Negotiating difference among feminist activists in Israel/Palestine and Northern Ireland. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 16(1), 106–126.
- Deiana, M.-A. (2018). *Gender and citizenship: Promises of peace in post-dayton Bosnia–Herzegovina*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Donaghy, T. B. (2004a). Applications of mainstreaming in Australia and Northern Ireland. *International Political Science Review*, 25(4), 393–410.
- Donaghy, T. B. (2004b). Mainstreaming: Northern Ireland's participative-democratic approach. *Policy & Politics*, 32(1), 49–62.
- Donahoe, A. E. (2017). *Peacebuilding through Women's Community Development: Wee Women's Work in Northern Ireland*. Springer International.
- Exeter Psychology Department. (2020). *Discovering the Glass Cliff: Insights into addressing subtle gender discrimination in the workplace*. University of Exeter. <https://psychology.exeter.ac.uk/impact/theglasscliff/> and <https://psychology.exeter.ac.uk/cic/about/theglasscliff/#a0>. Accessed 2020–02–29.
- Gilmartin, N. (2017). Feminism, nationalism and the re-ordering of post-war political strategies: The case of the Sinn Féin Women's Department. *Irish Political Studies*, 32(2), 268–292.
- Guelke, A. (2003). Civil society and the Northern Irish peace process. *Voluntas: International journal of Voluntary and nonprofit Organizations*, 14(1), 61–78.

- Horowitz, D. L. (2002). Explaining the Northern Ireland agreement: The sources of an unlikely constitutional consensus. *British Journal of Political Science*, 32(2), 193–220.
- Kilmurray, A. (2017). *Community action in a contested society: The story of Northern Ireland*. Peter Lang.
- Meehan, E. (2003) *From Government to Governance, Civic Participation and New Politics: The Context of Potential Opportunities for the Better Representation of Women*. Belfast: Centre for Advancement of Women in Politics, School of Politics, Queen's University Belfast.
- Murtagh, C. (2008). A transient transition: The cultural and institutional obstacles impeding the Northern Ireland women's coalition in its progression from informal to formal politics. *Irish Political Studies*, 23(1), 21–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07907180701767948>
- Pierson, C. (2018). *The Marginalisation of Women's Rights in Northern Ireland, 20 years After the Good Friday Agreement*. LSE Blog. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/the-marginalisation-of-womens-rights-in-northern-ireland-20-years-after-the-good-friday-agreement/> (Accessed: 2020-09-11).
- Powell, R. (2020). *Gender Inequality in Northern Ireland: Where Are We in 2020?*. Women's Resource and Development Agency. Available at: [https://wrda.net/2020/02/07/gender-inequality-in-northern-ireland-where-are-we-in-2020/#\\_edn1](https://wrda.net/2020/02/07/gender-inequality-in-northern-ireland-where-are-we-in-2020/#_edn1) (Accessed: 2020-09-25).
- Roulston, C. (2000). Democracy and the challenge of gender: New visions, new processes. In C. Roulston & C. Davies (Eds.), *Gender, democracy and inclusion in Northern Ireland* (pp. 24–46). Palgrave.
- Rouse, M. (2016). In need of a fresh start: Gender equality in post-GFA Northern Ireland. *Northern Ireland Legal Quarterly*, 67(2), 233–240.
- Side, K. (2009). Women's civil and political citizenship in the post-good friday agreement period in Northern Ireland. *Irish Political Studies*, 24(1), 67–87.
- Ward, M. (2000). *The Northern Ireland assembly and women: Assessing the gender deficit*. Democratic Dialogue.
- Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland. (2019). *Northern Ireland Women's manifesto: General election 2019*. Belfast: Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (1999a). The 'multi-layered citizen.' *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 1(1), 119–136.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (1999b). What is 'Transversal Politics'? *Soundings*, 12, 94–98.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (2011). *The politics of belonging: Intersectional contestations*. SAGE.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



# INDEX

## A

- A Fresh Start. The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan, 178, 181, 269
- agonism, 1, 3, 6, 7, 25, 27, 53–59, 61, 75, 197–200, 202, 208, 210, 211, 215, 217, 219, 226, 232–235, 237, 241, 242, 244, 285, 292, 293
- agonistic democracy, 53–55
- agonistic dialogue, 6, 7, 27, 55, 212, 220, 223, 245, 247, 254, 256, 293, 294
- agonistic listening, 27, 56, 60, 61, 199, 208, 210, 211, 213, 215, 233, 235, 236, 265, 276, 293, 294, 298
- agonistic peace, 1, 2, 24–26, 35, 53–55, 197, 202, 213, 293
- Alliance for Choice (AFC), 17, 18, 142, 156, 164, 167, 198, 204, 206, 222, 224, 225, 228, 249
- Alliance Party Northern Ireland (APNI), 101, 149–151, 165,

- 167–169, 173, 174, 181, 261, 263–267, 275, 296
- Anglo-Irish Agreement, 101
- Association of Loyal Orangewomen, 99

## B

- Belfast Feminist Network (BFN), 17–19, 198, 199, 222, 224, 225, 244, 247
- British Parliament (Westminster), 88, 149, 154, 155, 165, 228, 243, 245

## C

- Catholic identity, 6, 8–11, 13, 15, 16, 89, 91, 92, 104, 106, 107, 109, 123, 154, 204, 205
- citizens' assemblies, 150, 178, 259, 267, 269, 270, 276, 277, 296, 297
- Civic Advisory Panel, 267, 269, 270, 276, 277, 296

- Civic Forum, 121, 267, 270, 277, 297
- civil rights, 7, 90–92, 109, 111, 119, 216
- civil society, 5, 15, 26, 37, 56, 66–68, 119, 148, 150, 163–165, 176, 179, 182, 195, 196, 227, 243, 250, 260, 268, 270, 272, 289, 290, 297
- Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition, 178
- Commission on the Future of Ireland, 249
- consociationalism, 8, 24–26, 52, 53, 66, 101, 135–137, 143, 154, 158–162, 165, 179, 180, 182, 183, 228, 242, 257, 260, 261, 267, 268, 275, 288, 290, 291, 296, 298
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 148, 250, 262, 291
- cross-community activism, 2, 3, 7, 18–20, 23, 25–27, 53, 61, 66, 70, 90, 102, 106, 112–114, 117–119, 123, 124, 127, 139, 141, 174, 196–204, 207, 208, 210, 212, 219, 220, 225–228, 230, 232–236, 241, 242, 244–247, 249, 253–256, 260, 273, 274, 294, 297
- Cumann na mBan, 96
- D**
- dealing with difference, 71, 90, 93, 109, 113, 116, 126, 197, 199, 207, 208, 219, 234
- embracing difference, 25, 61, 62, 73, 117, 120, 197, 208, 215, 217, 218, 220, 233, 235, 236, 245, 259, 292–294, 298
- strategic avoidance, 27, 91, 97, 102, 113, 126, 198, 199, 209, 219, 221, 232, 265, 293, 294
- strategic silences, 27, 197, 199, 213, 235
- deeply divided societies, 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 24–27, 56, 63, 64, 66, 67, 71, 127, 136, 145, 159, 197, 198, 202, 220, 223, 225, 230, 236, 275, 285, 293, 294, 297, 298
- Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), 99, 100, 122, 145, 149–151, 154–157, 160, 161, 164, 165, 167, 168, 170, 171, 225, 228, 258, 261, 268, 287, 288
- Derry Peace Women (DPW), 106, 107
- Derry Women's Aid, 115
- E**
- European Union (EU), 149, 243, 244, 252, 291
- Brexit, 157, 161, 226, 242–244, 248, 252, 263, 274, 291, 296
- Northern Ireland Protocol, 243
- Windsor Framework, 243
- F**
- Falls Road Curfew, 104
- femininity, 3, 42, 71, 72, 103, 108, 125
- feminism, 4, 8, 11, 13–19, 26, 27, 37, 45, 46, 53, 58, 61, 73, 89, 90, 94, 95, 97–106, 108–118, 121–127, 143, 149, 156, 165, 172, 182, 183, 206, 207, 222, 226, 228, 233, 234, 244–246, 287, 291, 294, 295
- family feminism, 89, 105, 125

- feminist activism, 61, 90, 109, 112, 113, 125, 126, 197, 199, 204, 208, 222, 246, 251
- feminist sector, 18, 26, 27, 228, 231, 234, 241, 242, 245–247, 249, 251, 256, 273, 276, 290, 295
- formal politics, 2, 3, 5, 18, 27, 35, 37, 57, 66, 68, 69, 71, 74, 75, 88, 89, 95, 107, 127, 135–137, 141, 142, 144, 148, 149, 158, 161, 163, 164, 179, 181–183, 195, 196, 226, 241, 242, 245, 247, 251, 256, 257, 259–261, 263, 267, 268, 270, 271, 273–277, 285–291, 294–296
- Forum for Political Dialogue and Understanding, 119
- G**
- Gender Equality Strategy, 163, 164, 172, 181, 290
- gender-just citizenship, 1, 2, 3, 6–8, 24, 35, 38, 62–64, 66, 75, 236, 241, 242, 258, 295, 297
- coalitions across difference, 1, 3, 24–26, 53, 62, 63, 70, 76, 199, 226–232, 234, 236, 242, 246, 248, 257, 258, 261, 262, 265, 269, 270, 272, 273, 275–277, 290, 292–298
- multi-sited participation, 3, 38, 62, 63, 242, 257, 259, 260, 262, 265, 269, 270, 272, 275–277
- multi-tier citizenship, 26, 27, 64, 65, 242, 257, 263, 273. *See also* transversalism, transversal citizenship
- Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, 7, 8, 13, 21, 26, 87, 121, 149, 158, 159, 162, 163, 166, 175–178, 180, 181, 197, 220, 241, 243, 255, 258, 260, 277, 288–291
- H**
- Hillsborough Agreement, 177
- I**
- informal politics, 3, 5, 7, 25, 35, 89, 135, 136, 144, 148, 181, 195, 196, 241, 242, 256, 260, 273, 274, 286, 289–291, 295
- grassroots activism, 1, 2, 6, 7, 18, 20, 24, 26, 27, 62, 66–68, 70, 89, 95, 104, 127, 144, 164, 179, 182, 195, 196, 241, 242, 252, 256, 273, 274, 285, 286, 289
- intersectionality, 3, 4, 24, 26, 35, 59, 61–64, 71, 90, 113, 124, 126, 127, 141, 197–199, 202, 211, 218, 219, 221, 223–226, 233–236, 242, 244–247, 257, 258, 260, 263, 265, 268–270, 272, 273, 275–277, 290, 295
- Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), 96
- Irish Republican Army (IRA), 94, 96, 97, 106, 107, 215
- L**
- local councillors, 88, 100, 149, 155, 166
- Loyalism, 2, 6, 8, 9, 15, 16, 89, 92, 98, 99, 102, 118, 125, 142, 145, 204, 213, 224, 229
- Loyalist paramilitaries, 92, 98, 100–102, 104
- M**
- masculinity, 3, 38, 42, 43, 72, 103
- military, 4, 38, 43–45, 51, 74, 101, 106, 141, 174

British military, 92, 93, 97, 101, 104, 114  
 female combatants, 44, 101, 102, 124  
 militarism, 43, 44, 51  
 motherhood, 4, 11, 42–47, 62, 71–73, 103, 105–108, 125, 126, 139, 145, 203–205, 219, 233, 234, 286  
 activist mothering, 105  
 maternal activism, 89, 90, 102–106, 108, 109, 123–127  
 maternal citizenship, 71–73  
 maternal peace, 45, 106, 140  
 maternal politics, 26, 71, 73  
 political motherhood, 72, 140  
 strategic essentialism, 108  
 women as reproducers, 38, 42  
 Mothers of Belfast, 104  
 multi-cultural citizenship. *See*  
 nationalism, civic nationalism

## N

nationalism, 36, 38–42, 46, 74, 92, 93, 114  
 civic nationalism, 39, 41, 74  
 ethno-nationalism, 1, 2, 5, 7–9, 11, 15, 16, 21, 24, 26, 27, 35, 36, 39, 40, 42, 47, 49, 51, 52, 58, 61, 62, 64–67, 70, 71, 76, 87, 89–93, 95, 106, 109, 110, 113, 114, 117, 119–124, 126, 127, 136, 137, 140–145, 154, 158–165, 167, 168, 177, 179, 180, 182, 183, 196–199, 203, 205, 208–210, 212, 218–221, 224, 225, 227–232, 236, 245, 246, 248, 257, 258, 260–263, 267, 269, 275, 276, 285–289, 294, 295, 297  
 nation, 4, 38–44, 46, 47, 64

national identity, 10, 15, 39, 61, 221  
 nation-state, 38, 39, 64. *See also*  
 Nationalism (Irish Nationalism)  
 Nationalism (Irish Nationalism), 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 15, 16, 39, 40, 42, 44, 46, 89, 92–95, 98, 106, 114, 115, 118, 125, 142, 149, 150, 158, 161, 165–167, 172–174, 181, 183, 222, 224, 225, 228, 229, 257–259, 263, 264, 287, 296  
 New Decade, New Approach (NDNA), 164, 178, 181, 269  
 Northern Ireland Act 1998, 176  
 Bill of Rights, 177, 290  
 Section 75, 176, 177, 181, 267, 271, 272, 277, 289, 290  
 Northern Ireland Assembly (Stormont), 18, 88, 89, 99, 123, 139, 149–151, 154–156, 161, 163, 165, 166, 168–170, 176, 177, 179, 220, 243–245, 250, 251, 260–269, 271, 276, 288–290, 294, 296  
 Members (MLAs), 88, 95, 99, 100, 142, 144, 154, 155, 158, 161, 165, 166, 243, 257, 261–263, 268, 276, 290, 294  
 Women's Caucus, 258, 260–263, 267, 275, 276, 296  
 Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA), 91, 109  
 Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC), 177  
 Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network, 17  
 Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC), 112, 119–122, 127, 165, 175, 198, 241, 260, 261, 266, 267, 275, 288, 296

Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP), 17, 112, 253  
 Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement (NIWRM), 97, 110, 112, 114, 115, 220, 221

## O

Orange-and-Green, 159, 168, 225, 231  
 Orange Order, 99, 268  
 Othering, 43–46, 54, 56, 60, 200, 208, 215, 217

## P

peacebuilding, 46, 50, 53, 54, 75, 179, 198, 251  
   gender-just peace, 90, 116  
   peace activism, 44, 45, 89, 125  
   peace agreement, 5, 8, 51, 118, 121, 127  
   peace process, 52, 56, 95, 102, 112, 118–120, 122, 123, 127, 160, 162, 227  
 Peace Women, 106, 107, 111  
 political participation, 1–4, 6–8, 19, 24–26, 35–37, 41, 46–49, 58, 62, 63, 66–70, 73–76, 87–89, 93, 96, 99–101, 105, 106, 108, 119, 121, 124–127, 135–138, 147, 148, 157, 158, 163, 165, 172, 173, 175, 178, 180–183, 195, 241, 250, 256, 257, 259, 270, 274, 276  
 barriers to women's participation, 2, 4, 8, 25, 26, 62, 69, 70, 74, 75, 95, 115, 135, 137, 143, 144, 146, 158, 171, 173, 177, 182, 183, 201, 222, 245, 257, 258, 265, 267, 272, 274, 277, 288, 289, 291, 297

female politicians, 88, 89, 137, 139, 140, 154–158, 166, 171, 181, 182  
 running for office, 36, 119, 148, 181, 258, 274, 288  
 voting, 36, 148, 149, 151–154, 168, 181, 183, 195, 258–260, 262, 263, 267, 276, 287, 296  
 power-sharing. *See* consociationalism  
 Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), 100, 142, 165, 167  
 Protestant identity, 6, 8–11, 13, 15, 16, 88, 89, 91, 92, 99, 105–107, 115, 123, 142, 145, 154, 205, 213, 222, 225  
 public/private divide, 2, 4–6, 25, 26, 35–38, 41, 45–52, 55, 58, 62, 63, 66–76, 93, 94, 99, 103, 104, 107, 108, 122, 123, 125–127, 136, 140, 141, 143, 144, 146, 181, 183, 203, 219, 221, 223, 229, 232, 245, 256, 262, 273, 274, 286, 288, 295

## R

Raise Your Voice Against Sexual Harassment, 17, 249  
 Reclaim the Agenda, 17, 198, 199, 244, 246  
 Reclaim the Night, 17, 198  
 Relatives' Action Committee (RAC), 97  
 reproductive rights, 105, 146, 172, 173, 227, 290, 291  
   abortion, 19, 38, 88, 122, 123, 146, 164, 165, 167, 171, 204–206, 221, 223–225, 227, 228, 247, 269, 290  
   contraception, 95, 111  
   population control, 42  
 Republicanism, 2, 6, 8, 9, 11, 15, 16, 89, 92–98, 100–102, 105, 107,

114, 115, 118, 122, 125, 142,  
224, 225, 258, 287  
Republican feminism, 94  
Republican paramilitaries, 92, 93, 96  
political prisoners, 96, 97, 111,  
114, 115, 121, 224  
Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC),  
92, 101, 174

## S

sectarianism, 12, 67, 91, 98, 106,  
109, 115, 121, 124, 142, 164,  
174, 179, 180, 182, 204, 225,  
231  
single-identity activism, 20, 90, 92,  
102, 109, 118, 124, 198, 202,  
212, 254  
Sinn Féin (SF), 95, 142, 149–151,  
155, 160, 161, 164–169, 172,  
258, 259, 261, 287  
Social Democratic and Labour Party  
(SDLP), 95, 101, 122, 149–151,  
160, 165, 167, 169, 172, 258,  
259, 261, 287  
socialism, 16, 114, 143, 168, 206,  
233, 287  
Socialist Women's Group, 115  
socio-economic class, 4, 5, 9, 14–17,  
23, 36, 37, 40, 41, 45, 47, 59,  
64, 68, 94, 97, 102, 104, 105,  
108, 109, 111, 112, 115, 117,  
119, 121, 124, 141, 171, 182,  
196, 198, 203, 205, 206, 211,  
218, 219, 223, 231–234, 236,  
254, 261  
St Andrews Agreement and Act, 177  
Stormont House Agreement (SHA),  
177, 181, 269  
Sunningdale Agreement, 101

## T

Transitional Justice Grassroots  
Toolkit, 19, 20, 139, 157, 199,  
200, 202, 204, 210–213, 215,  
218, 219, 231, 247, 251, 255  
transitional societies, 2, 6–8, 24–26,  
35, 48–52, 66, 75, 127, 135,  
136, 158, 175, 178, 180, 181,  
198, 199, 211, 252, 260, 288,  
294, 295, 297  
gender equality backlash, 2, 6, 8,  
25, 26, 48, 50, 52, 53, 74,  
135, 136, 175, 180, 182, 183,  
285, 288, 289, 291, 294, 297  
gender justice, 25, 49, 119, 290  
transversalism, 3, 7, 25, 27, 53,  
58–65, 71, 73, 75, 76, 90, 91,  
116, 117, 120, 127, 197–200,  
202, 208, 210, 211, 213, 217,  
219, 226, 231–234, 236, 237,  
285, 292, 293, 295, 296, 298  
rooting and shifting, 48, 60, 61,  
76, 116, 120, 199, 208, 210,  
211, 215–219, 233, 235, 236,  
265, 276, 293, 294  
transversal citizenship, 24, 26, 27,  
35, 58, 62, 63, 65, 70, 71, 76,  
244, 257, 258, 260, 267–270,  
273–277, 285, 294–297  
transversal dialogue, 58, 60, 65,  
197, 244, 293, 298  
transversal politics, 1, 3, 7, 24–27,  
35, 53, 58, 59, 61–63, 73, 76,  
116, 117, 120, 197, 226, 254,  
292, 293  
the Troubles, 7, 12, 17, 23, 26, 87,  
89–93, 96, 102–104, 107, 110,  
116, 123–126, 139, 179, 196,  
204, 235, 250, 288

## U

- Ulster Defence Association (UDA),  
101
- Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), 101
- Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), 88,  
99–101, 149–151, 160, 165,  
167, 168, 170, 171, 258, 261,  
287, 288
- Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), 101,  
215
- Ulster Women's Unionist Council  
(UWUC), 99
- Ulster Workers' Council (UWC), 104
- Ulster Workers' Strike, 104
- Unionism, 2, 6–9, 15, 16, 88, 89, 91,  
92, 98–101, 114, 115, 118, 124,  
142, 149, 150, 158, 161,  
165–168, 171–174, 177, 181,  
183, 213, 222, 224, 225, 229,  
257–259, 263, 264, 287, 291,  
296
- United Ireland, 9, 11, 92, 168, 229,  
248, 249, 263, 296

## V

- violence against women, 22, 44, 51,  
97, 147, 163, 171–173, 244, 262
- domestic violence, 17, 38, 51, 95,  
97, 115, 121, 147, 148, 172,  
229, 289
- femicide, 147
- intimate partner violence (IPV),  
147, 148
- misogyny, 122, 148, 156, 157,  
183, 229, 247

- rape, 43, 146, 147, 206, 225, 247
- sexual violence, 43, 44, 46, 94, 97,  
146–148, 173, 178, 262, 291

## W

- Women Against Imperialism (WAI),  
97, 115
- Women Into Politics (WIP), 112
- Women, Peace and Security agenda,  
46, 247, 250–252, 261, 273,  
289–291
- Women's Aid Federation, 17
- Women's Information Group (WIG),  
112, 114
- Women's Platform. *See* Northern  
Ireland Women's European  
Platform (NIWEP)
- Women's Policy Group, 17, 227
- Women's Resource and Development  
Agency (WRDA), 17, 18, 112,  
144, 164, 167, 179, 204, 221,  
231, 246, 253, 262, 271
- women's sector, 17, 18, 109, 112,  
113, 144, 196, 199, 203,  
205–207, 231–233, 242,  
244–247, 249, 251, 253, 256,  
267, 271–274, 289, 294, 295
- women's centres, 16, 17, 20, 22,  
104, 105, 112, 113, 117, 196,  
198, 205, 207, 226, 227, 229,  
231–234, 245, 246, 253
- Women's Support Network (WSN),  
17, 117, 118, 164, 198, 262
- Women Together (For Peace), 106