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Advocates of the Peace, A Qualitative Study of Former Politically Motivated Female Prisoners and Conflict Resolution in Northern Ireland

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Declaration

I hereby certify that the material which is submitted in this thesis towards the award

of the **Masters (M.A.) in Criminology** is entirely my own work and has not been submitted

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Abstract

The Good Friday Agreement is extensively recognised and acknowledged as a successful model of conflict resolution. Prior to its implementation and in the aftermath of the agreement, former politically motivated female prisoners have been instrumental in securing support for the agreement and also sustaining the agreement in the grassroots communities in Northern Ireland. This study explores the roles in which former politically motivated female prisoners have undertaken in micro levels of conflict resolution and presents a gendered perspective of conflict resolution. Findings within this study reveal the grassroots activities of participants, which is aligned with preventing violence within interface communities in Northern Ireland. One of the main findings within the study point to the credibility of the participants as former politically motivated prisoners as being instrumental in their roles.

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1.1 Introduction

The conflict in Northern Ireland came to an end, on April 10th 1998, when the Good Friday Agreement was signed and implemented. The conflict or The Troubles as it became known as, reigned for almost thirty years and claimed the lives of over 3,600 people. The origins of the conflict can be traced back to the partitioning of Ireland, during the war of independence, which resulted in the creation of the Northern Ireland State. The central tenet of the conflict lay with the constitutional status of Northern Ireland and as a struggle between Unionists/Loyalists and Nationalists/Republicans. Unionists and Loyalists are committed to maintaining the union with Britain, while Nationalists and Republicans seek the reunification of Ireland. With different political ideologies and outlooks between Unionists and Nationalists, in the late 1960s, the rise of the civil rights movement paved the way for the birth of The Troubles. The stage was now set for three decades of armed hostilities and violence.

While numerous political initiatives failed to resolve the conflict in Northern Ireland, the political break through came in April 1998, when The Good Friday Agreement was signed and implemented by both Unionists and Nationalists politicians. While xnational and international attention focused on the leading male protagonists who secured and negotiated the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, behind the scenes of the newly formed political landscape, former politically motivated female prisoners undertook roles in micro levels of conflict resolution.

Prior to and in the aftermath of the Good Friday Agreement, former politically motivated female prisoners have been actively involved in securing support for the Good Friday Agreement and have been proactive in upholding the broader process of conflict resolution in local communities in Northern Ireland. In order to explore and frame the experiences and narratives of former politically motivated female prisoners in the sphere of conflict resolution, the aim and objectives of the study will be presented next.

1.2 Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to explore the roles of former politically motivated female prisoners in micro levels of conflict resolution in Northern Ireland.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The first objective will explore the individual motivations of former politically motivated female prisoners to disengage in conflict and to support the broader process of conflict resolution, which led to the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

The second objective will explore the individual roles of former politically motivated female prisoners have undertaken in micro levels of conflict resolution in Northern Ireland, prior to and after the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

The third objective explores the dimension of gender and conflict resolution experienced by former politically motivated female prisoners in Northern Ireland.

1.4 Rationale for the Study

In the context of the conflict in Northern Ireland, from armed conflict to the resolution of conflict, the role of men in these domains have been extensively analysed and scrutinized by academics and researchers alike. As a result, the experiences and narratives of women who have engaged in armed conflict, have to some extent remained invisible or overlooked in discussions regarding conflict resolution in Northern Ireland. Therefore, the rationale of this study is to highlight the roles and contributions of former politically motivated female prisoners towards conflict resolution in Northern Ireland.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study are concerned with the sample size of the participants who have taken part in the study. A sample size of five participants does not reflect or represent the experiences of the entire population of former politically motivated female prisoners in Northern Ireland.

Also, due to accessibility issues, it was only possible to interview former politically motivated female prisoners from the Republican community. In light of the time constraints of this study, it was not possible to recruit or seek access to former politically motivated female prisoners who were actively involved in the different negotiation teams which were instrumental in securing the terms and conditions of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

1.6 Chapters Summary

Chapter One: This chapter provides an overview of the context of the conflict in Northern Ireland in order to frame the context of conflict resolution in Northern Ireland. An introduction to the study is outlined, followed by the aims and objectives which underpins the study. The rationale and limitations of the study are also discussed.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter explores and examines the relevant literature, which was reviewed and analysed for the purpose of the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines and documents the methodology of the study and explores the ethical issues which were relevant to the study.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the study and explores the main themes which emerged during the course of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

This chapter discusses and develops the findings and themes of the study in relation to the aims and objectives of the study and of the literature review.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter concludes the findings of the study in relation to the aims and objectives of the study.

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the literature which underpins this study. The intersection of criminology and conflict resolution is explored first, followed by an exploration of psychological aspects which influence conflict resolution. The literature then explores the marginalisation of women in the sphere of conflict resolution, followed by an exploration of the roles of former politically motivated prisoners in macro and micro levels of conflict resolution. The final aspect of the literature review presents an exploration of gender and conflict resolution.

2.2 The Intersection of Criminology and Conflict Resolution

During the period of the Cold War in the 1950s, a growing interest in to the analysis of conflict began to emerge, which focused on the means and methods to resolve protracted social conflicts. The term conflict resolution has exhausted and acquired a number of definitions and meanings, one definition put forward by Tidewell (2001) notes that conflict resolution in its simplest form is a means to end a conflict. A more in depth definition offered by Ramsbotham, Miall & Woodhouse (2011) points to conflict resolution as a process which involves conflict settlement, at one of the spectrum and transforming conflict at the other end of the spectrum.

The intellectual components of conflict resolution is positioned within three distinct fields: international relations and peace studies, organisational development and management science and alternative dispute relations (Tidwell, 1998), all of which are directly connected to a number of criminological areas.

The field of international relations and peace studies presents specific key elements which reflect the intersection of conflict resolution and criminology. The first element is this context is aligned with Galtung's (1975) theory of structural violence, which posits that people resort to violence whenever they are disadvantaged by the political, economic and cultural structures in society. In line with Galtung's theory of structural violence, falls Burton's (1990) theory of Human Needs. Burton is commonly regarded as one of the founding architects in the field of conflict resolution. Burton's Human Needs theory is premised upon the idea that all human beings have basic needs.

Basic needs in this context are equated with identity, security, development, recognition in addition to the basic physical and physiological needs. Burton's empirical research on protracted social conflicts, observed how the neglect of human needs can lead groups to use violence in order to claim their rights and to satisfy their needs. Central to the resolution of conflict, according to Burton, is the fulfilment of such basic needs, as the source of conflict comes from the frustration and the prevention of basic needs satisfaction (Melchin & Picard, 2001).

The second element in this context is related to the timing of conflict resolution. In the case of protracted social conflicts, the timing or the ripeness of a conflict is central to the resolution of conflict, as this paves the way for criminological actors and criminological discourses to come in to focus. When a conflict has become ripe for resolution, there must be willingness from all quarters, inside and outside of the parameters of a conflict to engage and support the process of conflict resolution. Former conflicts in South Africa and Northern Ireland are useful in this context. When both conflicts in South Africa and Northern Ireland became ripe for resolution, this brought to the main key criminological actors and criminological discourses. As a result, issues such as policing, the early release of political prisoners and reform of the criminal justice system played a central role in the conflict resolution process (Mc Evoy & Newburn, 2003).

The second field to consider in relation to the intersection of conflict resolution and criminology is the area of business and management. The occurrence of conflict in the area of business organisation and management was originally perceived to be a negative entity, which was primarily the concern of management to address. However, a deeper analysis of conflict, influenced ideas of conflict as being a positive entity, which can aide problem solving and can contribute towards improving the overall health of an organisation (Mouzellis, 1981). Braithwaite (2002) points to the application of restorative diplomacy in conflict resolution, which is premised upon practical techniques and tools borrowed from the world of business management. In a similar vein, Tidwell (1998) notes that tools and practices such as mediation and arbitration which are used in the discussions of social and structural conflicts, originated from the sphere of labour relations which facilitated in making conflicts less costly and more efficient.

The final field to consider in relation to the intersection of conflict resolution and criminology is alternative dispute resolution. Alternative dispute resolution emerged in the United States of America during the 1970s, as a result of an increased dissatisfaction with the capacity of the formal justice system to deal effectively with a diverse range of conflicts (Goldberg, Frank & Rogers, 1992). The emergence of alternative dispute resolution in the United States of America, led to the establishment of the San Francisco Community Boards in 1976. The San Francisco Community Boards were set up in order to deal with a wide range of issues and disputes, such as environmental and family disputes, resolution and mediation. Some of these issues and disputes are centrally linked to the courts and have developed further afield in countries such as Australia and New Zealand (Carpenter & Kennedy, 1988).

Alternative dispute resolution ''places the community at the front and centre in the process of dealing with conflict and is an important source for discussions concerning the utilization of restorative justice theory and practice in dealing with conflict'' (Mc Evoy & Newburn, 2003, p. 10).

Mika & Zehr (2003) also contend that a number of a range of contemporary restorative justice techniques and practices can be traced to the movement of alternative dispute resolution in the United States of America. Examples reflected in the literature include post conflict 'truth' processes in the former Yugoslavia (Nikolic-Ristanovic, 2001), the Gachacha arbitration hearings, which were established in the aftermath of the massacres in Rwanda (ICRC, 2000) and finding alternatives to the issue of punishment beatings by paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland.

2.2 Psychological Aspects of Conflict Resolution

The participation of women in conflict is noted by Bloom (2011) who observes that women have undertaken different roles in conflict, such as being a sympathiser, mobilizer and as a perpetrator of conflict. While women occupy these roles in protracted social conflicts over prolonged periods of time, the incentive to disengage in conflict and to move towards conflict resolution may occur as a result of individual or collective influences.

2.3. 1 Individual Influences of Conflict Resolution

The individual influences of women to disengage in conflict are closely linked with the idea or notion of 'motherist motives' such as the role of women within the family sphere as wives or mothers and accidental activism (Kaufman & Williams, 2010). In a similar vein, Tessler, Nachtway, & Grant (1999) put forward the concept of 'moral motherhood', which posits that women are more orientated towards peace then men, replacing violence with conflict resolution, which is underpinned and influenced by maternal thinking and caring for others.

Fink (2011) suggests that by nature, women and through the experience of mothering and motherhood, are more likely to be opposed to violent responses to conflict. Fink (2011) also suggests that society carves out a role for women, which is aligned with being natural peacemakers. Ruddick (1999) also argues that women are socialised to nurture and prefer to settle conflict by peaceful means and methods.

Challenging this perception of presupposed maternalism and peacefulness, is the participation of women in acts of suicide bombings. Suicide bombings have become a common tactic used in violent conflicts worldwide, particularly in territories of the Middle East. Since the early 1980s, female participation in suicide bombings has increased in the landscapes of war and conflict, with more and more women being recruited for self sacrifice (Skaine, 2006).

2 3.2 Collective Influences of Conflict Resolution

Groups involved in protracted conflict, may become motivated to disengage in conflict due to the development of a number of underlying influences or factors. A particular strategy a group are employing to achieve their particular means may be considered inappropriate. Therefore, a perception may develop within the group that the conflict has become unwinnable and has reached a stalemate (Aquilar & Galluccio, 2010). Zartman (2000) points to the term 'mutually hurting stalemate ' to illustrate a situation in which both sides involved in a conflict, perceive the conflict as being unwinnable and too costly in terms of the loss of human life.

Further exploration by Giessman & Wils (2009) presents a number of factors which may provoke groups involved in protracted conflict to engage in conflict resolution. The first factor points to the political agenda of a group, which will result in a group engaging in conflict resolution in order to generate and increase political support.

The second factor in this context is aligned with enhancing the legitimacy of a group's own particular agenda and policies. A third factor points to international pressure, a group may engage in conflict resolution to relive international pressure and to gain international recognition for their efforts (Giessman & Wils, 2009).

National identity is also regarded as an influential factor in steering groups involved in protracted conflict towards conflict resolution. Muller-Klestil (2009) notes the importance of national identity, as it can essentially give strength to sustain and escalate a conflict and will also be central to any processes of conflict resolution. In protracted conflicts, national identity is underpinned by a group's historical connection and ties with the land. Each group perceive that the land and its history belongs solely to them and view their adversary's claim and connection with the land as illegitimate. Therefore, in this context, there is little opportunity for conflict resolution to occur. When both groups accept the possibility of a shared identity, which involves acknowledging 'the other' and accepting the attachment and historical ties the other has to the land, that conflict resolution becomes possible (Ashmore, Jussim & Wilder, 2001).

In line with this school of thought, Muller-Klestil (2009) argues that national identity is socially constructed and can be altered or changed, which may help to reduce the threat that conflict resolution may present for a group's national identity. However, Kelman (1997) warns that altering or changing a group's national identity is problematic and can present potential dilemmas. Kelman (1997b) states that national identity is inherently non-negotiable, as it reflects, defines and symbolizes the will of a group and its reason for being cannot be cannot be dictated or altered from the outside.

2.4 The Marginalisation of Women in Conflict Resolution

The absence of women within local, national and international meetings of conflict resolution has not gone unnoticed. It is extensively recognised and researched that conflict resolution and peace building processes are all too often male influenced and dominated, while women are largely marginalised (M'Cormick-Hale, 2012).

Factors which give rise to the marginalization of women in conflict resolution are explored by Onubogu & Etchart (2005). As few women are involved in the conflict itself as combatants, the designation of power in peace agreements is often assigned to those who have been fighting for It. As men are generally the main perpetrators of a conflict or a war, they are also generally the main planners of post conflict reconstruction and resolution. Therefore, demands of men who are actively involved in the conflict tend to receive more attention in processes of conflict resolution (Onubogu & Etchart, 2005).

Other factors which lead to the marginalisation of women in processes of conflict resolution are explored by Mbayo (2011). A lack of political strength and political vision of women, reduces their opportunity to participate in processes of conflict resolution. Mbayo (2011) argues that women lack political vision and are politically illiterate. Lack of visibility is also noted as contributing factor which can exclude women from conflict resolution processes and formal peace negotiations. Even though women may be represented and contribute towards formal processes of conflict resolution, it is often the case that their contributions are ignored. Therefore, the participation of women in the political spheres does not necessarily guarantee equal, meaningful and recognised participation (Mbayo, 2011).

Mc Evoy (2009) points to the marginalization of former politically motivated female prisoners from the Loyalist communities in the broader process of conflict resolution in Northern Ireland. Mc Evoy (2009) argues that the thirty-year conflict in Northern Ireland remains problematic in some respects, as these women were excluded from the process of conflict resolution. Empirical research conducted by Mc Evoy (2009) found that women from Loyalist paramilitary organisations, were excluded from the peace process by their male counterparts, their adversaries and by the British government.

The consequence of this exclusion, resulted in the creation of a structural barrier to the representation of any unique interests these women may have had. Mc Evoy (2009) argues that the inclusion of all women, such as non-partisan, peace brokers, combatant women can provide alternative pathways to peace and disrupt the patriarchy order and organisation of government, political parties and armed non-state groups. In departing from the marginalisation of women in conflict resolution, it is also worth noting the treatment of politically motivated female prisoners by researchers and writers in the analysis of conflict resolution in Northern Ireland. Ashe (2011) points to the area of community based restorative justice, which is an area which has been extensively researched by academics and scholars alike.

Ashe (2011) draws attention to the lack of attention given to women in discussions of community based restorative justice, and contends that writers and researchers alike, tend to valorise the experience of men in the sphere of community based restorative justice.

This in turn leads to a perception that community based restorative justice schemes are primarily ''male generated and male driven justice forms…and also overlooks men's traditional hegemonic positions within communities… and also removes women's agency from discussions of community based restorative justice''(Ashe, 2011, p.11).

2.5 The Role of Ex-Combatants in Processes of Conflict Resolution

In the aftermath of political conflict, former combatants, men and women have been actively involved in macro and micro processes of conflict resolution, which have been instrumental and vital to the preservation and sustainment of peace. In the broader process of conflict resolution in Northern Ireland, former combatants have played a central role in the negotiations which led to the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. As Mitchell (2000) notes the majority of those who negotiated the provisions and terms of the Good Friday Agreement, were ex-prisoners who had committed politically motivated offences. The disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of combatants are central components to the broader processes of conflict resolution.

The United Nations Integrated Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration standards (2006) notes that ''the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants and those associated with armed groups is a prerequisite for post-conflict stability and recovery'' (UNDKPO, 2006, P2). A successful execution of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration reflects a transformation in the roles of combatants, departing from their role in conflict and becoming ex-combatants, who are committed to conflict resolution and the restoration of a lasting peace

2.6 The Role of Former Combatants in Micro Processes of Conflict Resolution

Mc Auley, Tonge & Shirlow (2010) explore the different roles in which former combatants have undertaken in micro levels of conflict resolution in Northern Ireland.

In this domain, roles have been aligned in areas such as transitional justice, inter-community work, interface violence, anti-sectarianism and community restorative justice. These particular roles involve building bridges with former adversaries and engaging with former adversaries in a positive and constructive manner. As Gribben, Kelly & Mitchell (2005) draw attention to the fact that violence and conflict between former adversaries at a community level, could rupture and threaten the wider peace process .

Mc Carthy (2011) points to the role of former female combatants in micro levels of conflict resolution. In achieving and sustaining a long term resolution of conflict, this requires a diverse range of actors who work from ''both the top-down and the bottom up'' (Mc Carthy, 2011, p. 41). It in this vein of working from the bottom up, Mc Carthy (2011) explores the role of former female combatants in micro levels of conflict resolution.

Mc Carthy (2011) first draws attention to the fragile state of society in the wake of a conflict, and notes that the threat of a relapse back in to conflict cannot be ignored or overlooked. There maybe individuals in society who maybe fearful and have little trust and faith in moving towards the resolution of conflict. Therefore, the position of former female combatants are well placed to address such fears, mistrust and insecurities of those who are fearful and mistrustful of engaging in conflict resolution.

In this vein, Mc Carthy (2011) points to the facilitation of community meetings and workshops by former female combatants in order to explain the broader political strategy and negotiations. This in turn, can foster and generate support for the broader processes of conflict resolution, and can reduce fear and mistrust of individuals who have reservations regarding the resolution of conflict.

In undertaking such role, former female combatants have a direct line to observe and monitor warring factions on the ground and to actively engage them to support peace talks and political strategies. Former female combatants, who occupy the role of a mother or wife, also have a unique leverage to foster trust and to create new norms of acceptance and peace from within the family sphere (Mc Carthy, 2011).

This view is shared by Sorensen (1998) who notes that the involvement of former female combatants at a community level in organising and promoting peace education can help foster awareness of non-violent actions to their children, as opposed to reverting to discriminatory and violent behaviour. It is through the sphere of education, that former female combatants can adopt and implement different forms of socialization which can actively promote trust and non-violent means when dealing with conflict (Mc Carthy, 2011).

2.7 Moral Leadership and Conflict Resolution

Mc Evoy & Shirlow (2003) point to the role of former politically motivated prisoners as moral leaders in macro and micro levels of conflict resolution. It is in these roles, that Mc Evoy & Shirlow (2003) observe that former politically motivated prisoners are publicly exercising and endorsing values of non-violence within these roles. This in turn can alter and change well entrenched attitudes towards the use of violence, when dealing with conflict. Further exploration by Mc Evoy & Eriksson (2006) observe that as a result of their violent pasts that many former prisoners bring to the table a certain degree of credibility when providing moral leadership in macro and micro levels of conflict resolution. As adequately summed up by Shirlow et al, Mc Evoy & Shirlow (2006) that the rejection of violence in communities by former prisoners, is in itself a powerful exercise in moral leadership.

2.8 Dimensions of Gender and Conflict Resolution

Gender analysis over the past number of decades has altered and shaped a diverse range of academic disciplines and fields, particularly in the area of conflict and conflict resolution, which portray women and men differently in the sphere of conflict resolution.

Golan (2004) suggests that women and men approach conflict resolution from difference perspectives. Women tend to approach conflict resolution from a human rights perspective, which is underpinned by tolerance, fairness and respect for differences. Golan (2004) also note that women who are involved in processes of conflict resolution, have an alliance for minorities, as women live as 'the other', not in a numerical sense, but in the societal attitudes towards them.

Men on the other hand, approach conflict resolution by an approach which is meshed in their own agenda, specific interests and goals, with little concern or regard for the 'other'. Golan (2004) observes that women are more likely and open to crossing the divide, as women are not perceived or stigmatised at the oppressor, women may be regarded as the combatant and the enemy but not as the oppressor.

Hunt & Posa (2010) draw attention to the approach men and women undertake in the realm of conflict resolution, noting that men approach the negotiating table directly from the battlefield, while a woman's approach is usually derived from civil activism, the family sphere and community care. Another perspective which adds to this view, is that women often know the main protagonists involved in conflict and are very much in touch with the historical and current context of a conflict. Women have in-depth knowledge of the triggers which can escalate a conflict and are also familiar with the entry points for negotiation and conflict reduction (Un-Habitat, 2005).

Another reoccurring theme which emerges in the literature regarding gender differences of men and women in conflict resolution , is the notion that women are more orientated towards peace than men (Hunt & Posa, 2001). This is echoed by Zieve (2009) who emphasises the existence of a stereotype of women as being more peaceful then men, and bring a calmer compromising voice to the negotiation table. The perception of women as being inherently peaceful is not without repercussions. Mc Evoy (2010) contends that the

‘‘assumed link between femininity and peacefulness creates a selection effect for the sort of women who are allowed to participate in peace processes. Women included in peace processes are often those women who play traditional roles associated with femineity , advocating and brokering peace agreements rather then invested in the conflict’’ (2010, p. 131-150).

In a similar vein, Fink (2011) observes how the portrayal of women as being natural and inherent peacemakers, labels women who have participated in armed conflict as 'bad women'. One final observation in the literature regarding gender differences and conflict resolution, is explored by Kray & Thompson (2002), who note that women are inherently more cooperative and collaborative than men, while men are perceived as being more problem solvers, assertive, demanding and having a high regard for the own particular interests. Sharoni (1995) places caution to this school of thought and points to how a presumed similarity of women in processes of conflict resolution can overlook important power disparities and sources of oppression.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter explored the different aspects of the literature that underpin and guide the aim and objectives of the study. The individual and collective influences to disengage in conflict is significant, as it presents influencing factors as to why individuals and groups involved in conflict, decide to disengage in conflict, frames the first objective of the study.

The second aspect of the literature which is relevant to the study, is the roles of former politically motivated prisoners in macro and micro levels of conflict resolution. The second objective of the study is concerned with the roles which former politically motivated female prisoners undertake in this domain.

A review of the literature has identified the different roles in which former politically motivated prisoners undertake in the sphere of conflict resolution. Dimensions of gender and conflict resolution and also the psychological influences of conflict resolution, are all relevant aspects of the literature, as these two key areas form two of the objectives of the study. The next chapter presents the methodology which was utilised for the study.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methods which were chosen in order to conduct the study. An overview of the participant group is presented first, followed by the role of the research questions which guided this study. This chapter also presents the ethical issues which were relevant to the study and the research design of the study.

3.2 Participant Group

The participant group for this study were ex-politically motivated female prisoners, who have been convicted and imprisoned in relation to offences relating primarily to the course of the conflict in Northern Ireland. Upon their release from prison, all of the participants have engaged in and contributed towards processes of conflict resolution in Northern Ireland, in different capacities and roles. The decision on the chosen participant group was informed by the researcher's recognition that processes of conflict resolution in Northern Ireland have been traditionally associated with the experience and perspectives of men. Therefore, the rationale of this study is present perspectives and experiences of women who come from a conflict background, that is former politically motivated female prisoners in the sphere of conflict resolution in Northern Ireland.

3.3 The Role of the Research Questions

This thesis seeks to explore the motivation of and influences upon of ex-politically motivated female prisoners to disengage in conflict and to support the process of conflict resolution, which led to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Following on from this, the research is concerned with exploring the roles of ex-politically motivated female prisoners have undertaken in conflict resolution activities, aiming to highlight their involvement and contribution. The concluding dimension of this thesis aims to explore the gendered dimensions of conflict resolution from the perspective of the participant group.

3.4 Research Design

As this study endeavours to explore the experiences and perspectives of former politically motivated female prisoners in the sphere of conflict resolution activities, the

study is in essence of an exploratory nature. Therefore, a qualitative approach was considered most appropriate in order to conduct the research. Qualitative methods in research are concerned with ''methods for the collection, analysis and interpretations of data on phenomena that are not easily reduced to numbers or that might be destroyed by any attempt to do so'', (Carter & Thomas, 1997 p.31).

In order to explore the experiences and perspectives of the participant group, phenomenological analysis was considered the most appropriate means of qualitative enquiry. As Denscombe (2003) notes that a phenomenological approach to research is concerned with the experiences of individuals, it is experienced directly, as opposed to being envisioned in the mind as a particular concept, theory or abstract. Advantages to employing a phenomenological approach to research is that it ''concentrates its efforts on the kind of human experiences that are pure, basic and raw in the sense that they have not (yet) been subjected to processes of analysis and theorizing'' (Denscombe, 2010, p.94).

 Other critiques of a phenomenological approach in qualitative research point to disadvantages, which are aligned with the risk of misrepresenting the phenomenon under exploration and presenting a generalisation of the data. As phenomenological approach to research involves small sample size, this warrants questions regarding the representativeness of the data in some arenas (Denscombe, 2010).

3.5 Ethical Considerations

''Research ethics are concerned with the notions of harm, consent, privacy and confidentiality of the data and participants'', (Patenaude, 2004, p. 735). Therefore, in order to conduct this study in an ethical manner, an ethical framework was developed to abide by and to underpin this study.

3.5.1 Voluntary Participation & Informed Consent

All of the participants were informed that their involvement in the study was voluntary, and they could withdraw from the study at any stage. Leedy & Ormrod (2005) note that in order to obtain informed consent from the potential participants/subjects, voluntary participation is a prerequisite. With this in mind, the

researcher provided all participants with all of the relevant information relating to the study, in order to make an informed decision, regarding their participation in the study. Each participant was made aware of their role and contribution in the study and were fully informed of what would happen to the information and data that they would provide during the course of this study.

3.5.2 Right to Privacy

Hall (2008) observes that the right to privacy in the research field is paramount and researchers need to ascertain the privacy needs of participants and take steps to ensure and to uphold the privacy of each participant. In taking this in to consideration, responses which were presented by a participant were disclosed in a manner which protects the privacy and identity of participant, for example, allocating a code to each of the participants: P1: Participant 1, P 2: Participant 2. The researcher also ensured that any references made by the participants in relation to the number of years spent in prison, where participants lived were omitted from the study, as this could potentially identify participants and infringe upon the privacy rights of the participants.

3.5.3 Confidentiality, Exceptions to Confidentiality

Participant's were assured that their confidentiality would be upheld during the course of this research and were also aware that their contribution would be used only for research purposes and under no circumstances would be passed on to a third party.

However, participants were made aware that in the event of any disclosure regarding any acts which may be considered or deemed illegal, this would constitute an exception to confidentiality. Therefore in the event of this occurring, the researcher would have a legal obligation to pass on the information to the relevant authorities. This exception to confidentiality was outlined in letters given to the participants prior to commencing the interviews, as to ensure that participants were fully aware and informed of the consequences should a disclosure be made.

Before conveying this information to the participants, the researcher used rapport upon meeting participants, engaging in some informal conversation with the participants. Marion & Crowder (2013) note that rapport is the 'proverbial frosting on the cake', which can essentially assist or hinder human interaction in research.

Patenaude (2004) draws attention to the importance of rapport building when undertaking qualitative data collection and notes that the establishment of effective rapport provides the basis for collecting rich and useful data. In a similar vein, King & Horrocks (2010) note that building rapport with participants is widely regarded or perceived as a key ingredient in successful qualitative interviewing.

In order not to diminish rapport or hinder proceedings with the participants when communicating the exceptions to confidentiality to participants, the researcher conveyed this information is an assertive and respectful manner. All of the participants were happy and satisfied to proceed with interviewing once this issue was addressed. On reflection of this issue, it is of paramount importance for the researcher not to disclose information such as this, in a manner which comes across as being overly authoritative or presumptuous as this could effectively ruin the chances of an interview occurring and hinder interview proceedings.

During one of the first initial interviews, rapport between the researcher and participant almost failed to become apparent. The researcher mentioned the term 'criminology', and this caused offence to the participant. The researcher explained to the participant that the term criminology is not solely aligned with criminality but is a blend of social sciences and law and is an academic discipline. In conducting the reminder of the interviews, the researcher conveyed sensitivity and assertiveness when presenting the fact that the research was part of the prescribed course work for a Masters in Criminology, in order to eliminate any confusion and avoid causing any unintended offence to the participants. Upon the explanation of the term 'criminology' and its relevance to the study, all of the participants were happy to proceed with the interviews and did not wish to withdraw from the study.

Also, in a subsequent interview, the legal name or status of Northern Ireland, was also opened to critique/correction by one of the participants. Nationalists and Republicans refer to the six counties as being 'the north of Ireland', while the term 'Northern Ireland' reflects the Unionist/Loyalist view of the six counties.

The researcher was unaware of these dual meanings attached to the terms 'Northern Ireland' and the 'North of Ireland', and explained this to the participant, which was taken as being an genuine oversight and outlook on the researcher's behalf. In having established this, the participant was happy to proceed with the reminder of the interview. In order to avoid this issue occurring in the remaining interviews, the researcher took due care to refer to the six counties as 'the north of Ireland', in order not to cause any unintended offence to any of the participants and to be mindful and sensitive of the participant's views and outlooks

3.6 Sampling

Sampling methods in research are primarily concerned with two types, probability sampling and non-probability or purposive sampling. Probability sampling is commonly used in quantitative research as it is concerned with achieving representativeness of a population as a whole. In the course of qualitative research, purpose sampling is commonly used, as samples are selected on the basis that they hold symbolic representation, as they retain unique characteristics which are central to the research (Lewis, Elam & Ritchie, 2003), it is as Punch (2005) notes 'deliberate sampling'. In order to conduct this study, purposive sampling was utilised, as it allowed the researcher to purposely identify and select women who were convicted of politically motivated offences during the course of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

3.7 Data collection

3.7.1 Access and Gatekeepers

In order to access participants for this study, the researcher made contact with a gatekeeper, who had direct access and contact with a number of potential participants for this study. In the early stages, a list was drawn up, identifying potential participants.

Two interviews were organised, however, during the first interview, it became clear that this particular participant did not fit the criteria for the study. Through the gatekeeper, the researcher was given access and contact with a second gatekeeper, who became the primary gatekeeper for the duration of the study.

The researcher scheduled a meeting with the second gatekeeper in order to furnish details of the proposed study, which in turn led to the gatekeeper making contact with potential participants, who met the sample criteria for the study and subsequently agreed to take part in the study.

The narratives and experiences of former politically motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland are extensively documented and reflected within the literature, which conveys the high levels demand of this particular group by researchers within the diverse academic fields and disciplines. A normal entry point for initiating contact with former political prisoners in Northern Ireland, involves contacting one of the many organisations, who have direct contact and access with former political prisoners. The normal procedure involves the completion of an interview request form, which requests the nature of intended research. The gatekeeper within these organisations, would then pass on this information to suitable potential research participants, who may or may not decide to take part in the study. As the researcher had direct access to a prominent gatekeeper within this particular group, the researcher avoided the above procedures and protocols, which would be experienced by researchers in this context, thus saving a lot of time in the process.

3.7.2 Interview Setting

Following the completion and submission of a risk assessment form which was considered and approved by Dr. Kevin Lalor, Head of School of Social Sciences and Law, Dublin Institute of Technology, a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with five ex politically motivated female prisoners. The interviews for this study were held in an ex-prisoner support centre, situated directly on the peace lines of West Belfast. The support centre provides a range of supports and services for ex-Republican prisoners and their families. When conducting interviews, it is paramount for interviewers to remain neutral, particularly in ''their appearance, actions; their presence in the data collection process must have no effect on the responses given to them by questionnaire items'' (Babbie, 2010, p.293). In addition to this school of thought, Grinnell & Inrau (2010) suggest in the undertaking of qualitative research, some research interviews are best conducted in places which are of neutral terroritry.

This is to prevent biases occurring on the researcher and the participant's behalf, thus, eliminating the possibility of being reflected through out the study.

Due to the time constraints and busy schedules of the participants, a fully independent neutral location was not possible to arrange. The location of these interviews were organised and arranged solely by the gatekeeper, as the location was viewed as being convenient and locally accessible for all participants and not subjecting them to any unnecessary expense or travelling. However, it must be noted that all of the participants involved in the study, are not employed or are directly involved with the support service centre, which eliminates any conflict of interest arising. In terms of privacy, the researcher was given access to a room to conduct the interviews, which ensured ample privacy at all times and was not subjected to any interruptions or interference.

Also, prior to meeting any of the participants, the researcher did not engage in any research regarding the identity and status of the research participants. This measure was taken in order to eliminate any potential biases of the participants occurring before the commencement of the interviews on the researcher's behalf, which may filter through and be reflected within the study and to ensure neutrality of the researcher also.

3.7.3 Research Design

Interviews were chosen as the research instrument, as interviews provide ''rich insights into people's biographies, experiences, opinions, values, aspirations, attitudes and feelings'' (May, 2001, p. 210). As this study is concerned with the experiences and narratives of individuals, semi structured interviews were considered the most appropriate research instrument of gathering data for the study. Semi structured interviews allow room for flexibility and the question list serves as a guide for the interview itself, but also allows other questions and themes to be addressed should they arise during the course of the interviews. Open ended questions were used during the conduct of the semi-structured interviews, as ''the researcher has a list of questions

or fairly specific topics to be covered, often referred to as an interview guide, but the interviewee has a great deal of leeway on how to reply'' (Bryman, 2008,p.428). Limitations of semi structured interviews point to data obtained through the interview process as not being a true reflection or being entirely accurate, as the interview may have processed their own interpretations of the participant's experience (May, 2001). Another school of thought in this sphere points to the possibility of the data being subjected to biases which the researcher may hold (Sarantakos, 2005).

3.7.4 Storage of Data

Smith & Davies (2010) highlight the importance of storing research data safely and securely when undertaking research. Smith & Davies (2010) note that any electronic data that is collected should be stored in a password protected environment and raw data should be locked securely and safely in a locked cabinet or drawer. In order to ensure the safekeeping and security of the data collected during the course of the research, a number of measures were undertaken. All interviews were recorded by dictaphone, which were transferred to the researcher's personal computer, upon transference, the original recording on the dictaphone were then destroyed. When the computer was not in use, it was locked away safely and securely in a cabinet at all times. The researcher's personal computer is password protected with additional security features enabled such the hard drive having a full- disk encryption feature, which protects all data on the computer in the event of the computer being stolen or lost. When the computer was not in use, it was locked securely in a cabinet at times.

3.8 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted by coding the data and information collected. Coding qualitative data is effectively to understand and to ultimately make sense of the data which has been collated. Coding qualitative data involves becoming familiar with the data and information collected and involves identifying common themes which may arise throughout the course of the research interviews. Maxwell (2005) identifies the coding of qualitative research as ''to fracture the data and rearrange them into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts'' (Maxwell, 2005, p.96). Responses to

open ended questions were coded in to specific groups in order to provide analysis and explore occurring themes. For example, the motivation to engage in

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter outlines the methodology which were employed for conducting this study. The following chapter presents the research findings and also a number of themes which emerged during the course of the study.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the study and the different themes which were identified during the course of the study. The findings in relation to the motivation to disengage in the conflict and to support the broader process of conflict resolution are presented first, followed by an exploration of the roles of politically motivated female prisoners in the sphere of conflict resolution. The final aspects of the findings present the gendered perspectives of conflict resolution as experienced by politically motivated female prisoners.

4.1 Psychological Aspects of Conflict Resolution

The motivation to disengage in the conflict and to support the broader process of conflict resolution was due to the recognition amongst participants that the conflict had reached a stalemate.

> *''And basically, personally speaking, I felt there was nothing more much to give, so many people had already died, so many had been injured, we had hit a stalemate, I could see that for myself'' (P4).*

> *''But there are times when the only thing that will get you to where you want to go will be an armed struggle. Then as time moves on and as the world moves on - you have to be mature enough to know that there's a time for an armed struggle and there's a time for a political strategy, and we had a reached a stalemate, so that would have motivated me to support the move towards conflict resolution'' (P1).*

Ensuring future generations are not subjected to tragedy or have to experience conflict is outlined as being an influential factor in disengaging in the conflict and supporting the broader process of conflict resolution by one participant.

''Well, coming from a Republican family in an area that was very heavily involved with - against suppression in the area and being an ex-prisoner. That motivated me towards the peace process and also coming from a family that had a lot of tragedy as well, which meant that you didn't want to see the future generation of children, my own children and grandchildren go through the majority of thirty years of heartache that most of our community's been through'' (P5).

One participant points to the preservation and prospect of a shared national identity and breaking down sectarianism as being an influential factor to disengage in the conflict and to support the broader process of conflict resolution.

''I don't care if people call themselves British, but its to get people to respect my Irishness, and to accept that there can be British within a united Ireland, and that really is my motivation, and that where a lot of my work my political work would be in Loyalist groups, I would be involved a lot with the UVF, former combatants, and that's where my motivation, to break down the stereotypes, break down sectarianism'' (P3).

4.2 Perceptions of Conflict Resolution

A common theme which has arisen during the course of the study is concerned with the perceptions of conflict resolution. Perceptions of conflict resolution are regarded as being parallel with the settlement and transformation of conflict and engaging all invested parties in the process of conflict resolution.

''When you say conflict resolution, its not just about sitting down with your opponents and sorting out different issues and all that, its about settlement and transformation in terms of conflict, trying to change and transform conflict to be positive, and there is different ways of doing that'' (P2).

> *''Our experience of conflict resolution is as an organisation, not as one individual. And conflict resolution seems to me to just be too narrow a definition, its not about sitting down with protagonists to gain political goals or score points, its about involving everyone in the whole process'' (P1).*

Other perspectives of conflict resolution point to the reconstructing of relationships and also as a process which needs maintaining and the support of communities in order to sustain conflict resolution.

> *''Conflict resolution is about relationships and its about you know a bit like reconstructing relationships as well, and I think to this day here in the North of Ireland, it very much on going. Just because the war has ended and a political strategy was achieved it doesn't mean it's a done deal, its needs maintaining, so I would say conflict resolution is about reconstructing relationships, and in moving from a conflict to peace, you need to have the* support of *all communities across the board, it needs constant work and effort to maintain at all levels'' (P4).*

> *''When you talk about conflict resolution, well conflict resolution for me, the Good Friday Agreement was signed and all that, but that doesn't mean that's it, there is an awful lot of work which goes in to maintaining that whole agreement in much smaller processes, which is what I am involved in on the ground in my community'' (P5).*

4.3 The Role of Former Politically Motivate Female Prisoners in Micro Processes of Conflict Resolution

The roles of the participants in micro processes of conflict resolution are primarily located within their respective communities, located in different interface communities in Northern Ireland. One participant describes working with members of the Loyalist communities in micro level processes of conflict resolution.

> *''I do a lot of work in the village area, which is hardcore Loyalist , I would do a lot of work in those communities, and we would meet and we would talk, and discuss and again to give you an example, the 12 of July, is always a problem in those areas, and through our groups working together and getting a mutual respect and then spreading that out to either community, we have had our quietest two years in like thirty five years'' (P3).*

Ensuring community safety and minimizing the risk of violence in local communities, particularly during times of the Loyalist marching season was a common role which was undertaken by the participants in micro level processes of conflict resolution.

> *''When I was released, you know, I've been working in that kind of environment from then. I would have done that type of work around the marching times and seasons as tensions can run quite high, so there would be a number of us working to ensure the peace and to try calm tensions in the community'' (P2).*

> *''My role would be about talking to young people on the streets about not getting or going down the road of involving themselves in situations with the other communities, trying to get the message across that we are all living together, and we have to sort of keep the peace'' (P5).*

Engaging and communicating with politically motivated prisoners who were still imprisoned prior to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, the political strategy which was being discussed and under negotiation at the time was another role undertaken by one participant. Part of this role involved communicating back to the political leadership, the views of the prisoners regarding the political strategy which was being negotiated at that particular time.

> *"My role was more about communicating information to the prisoners about what was going on, on the outside, in relation to the talks that were happening at that time. We kind of always tried to make sure that the prisoners were up to date with any developments so in that respect we were exchanging information and they were, in turn we were kind of I suppose getting the mood of the prisoners and the feelings of them to determine what strategy or what strategy was that was determined by the party leadership"* (P2).

Communicating to members of local communities the political developments and strategies which were under negotiation before the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, is identified as a common role amongst the participants. Participants describe how they have been instrumental in communicating and influencing members of local communities and within the Republican family to support the broader context of the peace process.

> *"It was negotiating with people on the ground in the communities to believe in a way forward out of the war , where we all can live in peace and be safe, not just for us at the time, but for the future generations to come, grandchildren"* (P4).

> *"Part of my role within that would be talking to other Republican activists and explaining to them the reason why I think a certain, taking a certain road is the correct road to go. Meeting with people in my community and explaining to them why I think this was a particular road to go"* (P1).

''And when you think of things like that then you realise that there is another way forward and there's other ways to address communities, you know? and so what I would have personally did there was to take part in facilitating residents associations and meetings and where people are maybe even at street level to let people know what's going on, in relation to the political talks and developments and all that sort of stuff'' (P6).

4.4 Dimensions of Gender and Conflict Resolution

Perceptions of gender found within this study point to gender as not being a barrier or a hindrance in the roles undertaken by politically motivated female prisoners.

' 'Gender has never been a barrier in my roles or work, I mean we are all treated the same, and have been given ample opportunity to become involved in local politics if that is what you want to do, but it comes down to the individual whether they want to push themselves in that direction'' (P1).

Equal treatment of the participants within their roles and work is acknowledged by the participants.

''I was never treated with anything other than respect and comradeship. Any work I have done like for going in to the prisons and keeping comrades up to date with the political negotiations and all that, I have been treated the same as the men and never any different, my role was given the same recognition as anyone else's'' (P2).

''I am treated as an equal, my work is recognised as the same as the way a man's would be and so to be honest , I think it has been very positive, my experience am not saying that every woman has had that experience, but in my experience, its been nothing but positive''(P3).

"And we're never treated any differently and we all had the same opportunity to become politically aware and take that opportunity and use it on doorsteps or in meetings if we choose to do that. You know, having said that, you're still always open to other people's opinions and no, it definitely was never a dictatorship and the men in the organisation were always very aware of that, that it's not"(P6).

Findings within the study suggest that gender can be beneficial in some situations. One participant describes how male members of the Loyalist community would be inclined to be aggressive towards her male counterparts, but not aggressive towards her.

"They have never been aggressive to me because I was a woman, but like I said, I have seen them become quite aggressive with Republican men, maybe its because they might see another man as their enemy or opponent, and maybe don't perceive women to be an enemy or a threat in the same way? Do you know where I mean? Sometimes, in a scenario like this, gender can work to your advantage" (P3).

Another participant describes how gender can have an advantage in some situations and can help defuse a situation, particularly when there is a risk that violence may break out.

"I think being a woman helps in a lot of situations, especially in my community, where a group of lads may have gathered and maybe ready to start engaging in rioting against the Loyalist areas, and I sometimes find that if a man walks up to them and says, come on lads, move away, they'll just look at them, go fuck off. If I walk up to them and say, lads, come here, see if you get involved in that, such and such and such and they will go "Aye, alright , we will no problem, so I find sometimes women, probably because of their tone and the attitudes that they take can ease a wee situation better, yeah" (P1).

Credibility as former politically motivated prisoners rather then gender is indicated in the findings as being a central aspect to the role of one participant.

''I suppose for that type of conversation with people in prison, you needed somebody with authority and with leadership authority and also with republican, with the authority of Republican history, I mean people were kind of quite happy with me as I was in jail a long time, So we went into the jail with credibility, you know, so it wasn't gender that was carrying arguments, it was credibility and republican credibility'' (P2).

Credibility as former politically motivated prisoners rather gender, is also identified as being more instrumental and influential in the roles of the participants, who are involved in preventing violence and conflict within interface communities in Northern Ireland.

''a lot of people know you have spent time in jail and that you are in a sense legitimate, you have been there worn the tee-shirt sort of thing, so they do respect to you, so nine times out of ten , they will listen to you know'' (P4).

''It's your credibility and capability, I think that what I have found when I am working in my community, when you are talking about not getting involved in rioting and all that during the marching season, people know where you are coming from as you have done time in jail and have been involved in the struggle, so people do tend to listen to you from that respect and not go down the road of rioting and all that'' (P3).

One participant describes how credibility is very much instrumental within her role and also to some extent partially due to gender also.

''If people asked my advice on something and I gave them advice, they would be more likely to accept it because they know my history, where I came from, and that I'm not bullshitting the people, put it that way. I think to an extent, yes, because I was a woman, because of my experience'' (P1).

Another common theme identified in the study points to the inclusion and participation of former female prisoners in local community activism as setting a positive example, which challenges the gendered roles and norms of women in post conflict society.

''In doing that type of work, you need to have men and women, because women fought in the conflict it wasn't all just men, and when people see men and women out and about trying to ensure the peace in the community it sends a strong message across that women just didn't come back out of jail and back in to the home washing dishes and rearing children, women have a voice and there is equal opportunity for women to become involved in their community and become involved in local democracy you know?'' (P2).

''when other women see you being actively involved in your community in trying to keep conflict away and at bay, you set an example, you see a lot of women came out of jail and that was it, so when they see other women working for peace it showing that its not all about the men, women can play an active part too so that can be encouraging, in trying to empower other women, so I think in that respect it can send a powerful positive message for women too'' (P1).

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings from the study. The findings indicate that participants have all undertaken roles which were vital in ensuring and supporting the broader context of conflict resolution. Interface communities are particularly prone to the outbreak of sectarian violence and conflict, it is within these roles, that the participants help to support and sustain the broader process of conflict resolution. The next chapter will present the discussion of the findings in relation to the aim and objectives of the study and of the literature review.

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings of this study in relation to the literature review and of the aims and objectives which underpin this study. Before commencing this aspect of the study, the aims and objectives of the study will be revisited.

5.2 Research Question Revisited

The main aim of this study is to explore the role of former politically motivated female prisoners in the sphere of conflict resolution in Northern Ireland. In exploring the role of former politically motivated female prisoners, a number of objectives have been established in order to underpin the context of this study. The objectives of this study explore the motivation of former politically motivated female prisoners to disengage in the conflict and to support the broader process of conflict resolution, this is followed by a gendered perspective of conflict resolution.

5.3 Motivation to Disengage in the Conflict and to Support the Broader Process of Conflict Resolution

Aquilar & Galluccio (2010) observe that groups involved in protracted violent conflict are influenced to disengage in conflict and to move towards conflict resolution due to the recognition that the conflict has reached a stalemate. The findings of this study highlight this hypothesis, as participants acknowledge that the conflict had reached a stalemate, which influenced their decision to disengage in the conflict and to support the broader process of conflict resolution. Another finding identified in this context, points to the idea of a shared identity as being an influential factor. In the literature, Ashmore, Jussim & Wilder (2001) note that conflict resolution becomes possible, when groups involved in protracted conflict, accept the possibility of a shared national identity. That is acknowledging 'the other' and recognising the attachment and historical ties the other group has with the land.

One of the finding in this context, indicate this theory, as one of the participant points to the possibility of a shared national identity as being an influential factor for disengaging in the conflict and supporting the broader process of conflict resolution.

5.3 Perceptions of Conflict Resolution

Findings of this study indicate that conflict resolution is not just merely concerned with ending a conflict as noted by Tidewell (2001) in the literature, but is aligned with settling and transforming conflict. This echoes Ramsbotham, Miall & Woodhouse (2011) definition of conflict resolution, which points to conflict resolution as being aligned with settling conflict and also transforming conflict.

Other findings within this study suggest that conflict resolution is a process which involves everyone who was a party to the conflict, no matter how insignificant or significant their roles where, it requires the input and contribution of everyone involved. In the literature, Mc Carthy (2011) notes that conflict resolution requires the input of a diverse range of actors, who are located at the bottom, in the community/grassroots level and at the top of the political sphere. Findings in this context correlate with Mc McCarthy (2011) perception's that conflict resolution requires a 'bottom up and top down' approach.

5.4 The Role of Former Politically Motivated Female Prisoners in Conflict Resolution

What is clear from this study is that none of the participants were directly involved in the main negotiations of the Good Friday Agreement. This reflects the marginalisation of the participants in the broader context of conflict resolution and lends support to the theory that in broader processes of conflict resolution are too often male influenced and male dominated, which is noted in the literature by Mc Cormick-Hale (20120 and Sharma (2005). The findings of this study, however, indicate that the roles undertaken by the participants were instrumental in gaining support for the Good Friday Agreement, prior to its implementation in 1998.

This is reflected in the organisation and facilitation of community meetings in order to explain the political strategy which was being negotiated at that particular time. While these women were not proactively involved in the main negotiations of the Good Friday Agreement, they were very much instrumental in their own communities in gaining support for the agreement. The agreement, it self needed the support of those living in Northern Ireland in order to be implemented successfully. Mc Carthy (2011) echoes this particular role of former politically motivated female prisoners in the literature, and notes that the facilitation of community meetings in the wake of violent conflict can help foster support and eliminate fear and mistrust in moving towards conflict resolution.

Another finding which is consistent through out this study is the role of the participants in the prevention of violence and conflict within the interface communities in Northern Ireland. As noted in the literature, Mc Auley, Tonge & Shirlow (2010) point to the role of former politically motivated prisoners in micro levels of conflict resolution, which involves in the prevention of interface violence. This particular role is paramount to the sustainment of the peace process in Northern Ireland, as attention should be drawn to the fact that if violence and conflict should break out between interface communities, this could in fact rupture and damage the peace process. What is also notable about roles which involve preventing interface violence, is that these roles provide a platform to monitor possible warring fractions on the ground in local communities, this is echoed in the literature by Un-Habitat (2005).

5.5 The Inclusion of Former Politically Motivated Female Prisoners in Micro Levels of Conflict Resolution

In the literature, Mbayo (2011) observes that the exclusion of women from processes of conflict resolution is due to lack of political strength and vision and also due to the fact that women are politically illiterate. As noted above, the participants of this study did not participate in the broader process of conflict resolution, but in micro processes of conflict resolution. An exploration of these roles, challenge the perception that women lack political strength and vision and are politically illiterate.

Findings in this study point to the roles of participants, who organised and facilitated community meetings in order to explain the political strategy which led to the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. These particular roles demonstrate the political awareness, knowledge and vision of the participants.

Being politically in tune and aware of the political strategy would have been a central component of those particular roles, in order to explain the political strategy at that time and to render support for the Good Friday Agreement. It is also worth noting that the inclusion of former politically motivated female prisoners in micro levels of conflict resolution, challenges the gendered norms of post conflict society. As noted in the literature, conflict resolution is all too often heavily influenced and dominated by men, the involvement of the participants in local levels of conflict resolution, challenges this perception.

5.6 Moral Leadership and Conflict Resolution

Mc Evoy & Shirlow (2009) observe that former politically motivated prisoners are well placed to provide moral leadership to communities who for so long resorted to violence as a default option. Violence has been at the fore of sectarian tensions at interface levels during the course of the conflict in Northern Ireland and has been prevalent in the stewarding of contentious marches. Findings in this study indicate that in the roles of preventing interface violence, participants are providing moral leadership to their communities. By publicly demonstrating and endorsing values of non-violence, participants are endorsing their commitment to the peace process, which can have a ripple effect in to the wider community. Providing moral leadership in this domain can also help to change attitudes towards engaging in sectarian and interface violence, to communities who for so long considered violence to be the default option.

5.7 Gender and Conflict Resolution

The findings of this study reflect a number of key themes within the literature regarding gender and conflict resolution. From the findings, it is clear that gender did present any obstacles to the participants in their roles. Findings in the study reveal how gender did not hinder or negatively impact on the roles of the participants.

One findings, points to how gender can have an advantage in some situations. One participant who is involved in resolving cross community conflict, disclosed how male members of the Loyalist communities have in the past tend to become verbally aggressive towards her male counterparts.

The participant revealed that she has never experienced this personally, and notes that perhaps that this is due to the fact that she was not regarded as the enemy or the oppressor. Golan (2004) points to this finding in the literature which observes that women who participate in processes of conflict resolution are not perceived to be the oppressor or the enemy. This could correlate with the perception that maybe men women to be a lesser threat in situations as this.

Findings in the study also indicate that credibility as former politically motivated prisoners rather then gender was instrumental and influential in the roles undertaken by participants. Findings within the study reveal how credibility as former prisoners helps participants in their roles which involve the prevention of violence and conflict within interface communities. Participants who undertook roles which involved the facilitation of community meetings, which were organised to explain the political mandate before 1998, also identified credibility as being an instrumental aspect of their role. These finding are consistent with Mc Evoy & Erikson (2006) who observe credibility is very much a core component of the roles of former politically motivated prisoners when working in micro levels of conflict resolution.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented the discussion of the findings in relation to the literature and the aims and objectives of this study. The next chapter present the conclusion of the study.

Conclusion

The findings of the study present the motivations of former politically motivated female prisoners to disengage in the conflict and to support the broader process of conflict resolution. Findings in this context point to an acknowledgement that the conflict had reached a stalemate. The study has also identified the different roles in which former politically motivated female prisoners have undertaken in micro levels of conflict resolution. While the participants have not been directly involved in the macro level of conflict resolution, their contribution and input at a micro level has secured support for the broader process of conflict resolution and has also helped to sustain and uphold the peace in their communities

Findings from the study also point to gender as having a positive impact in some areas of conflict resolution. However, it is evident from the study that credibility as former prisoners was more instrumental and influential in the roles undertaken by participants, as opposed to gender. All of these findings, fall in line with the aim and objectives of the study.

In terms of future research in this area, an exploration of the role of women from the Loyalist community, would provide a holistic view of conflict resolution at micro levels in Northern Ireland. This would also present an opportunity to compare and contrast experiences with the experiences of women from the Republican community.

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Appendix 1 : Letter to Participants

Re: Request for Co-Operation and Participation in an Academic Research Study

Dear_____,

I am a postgraduate student from Dublin Institute of Technology, Mountjoy Square, Dublin 1, in which I am currently in the process of recruiting a number of participants for a research study which I will undertake for the completion of my dissertation.

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information that you need to consider when deciding whether to participate in this research study.

The study is being conducted as part of my postgraduate study in Criminology at Dublin Institute of Technology: 'Advocates of the Peace. A Qualitative study of former politically motivated female prisoners and conflict resolution'.

As part of the completion of my dissertation, I propose to interview several women who have actively been involved/convicted for their part/role in the conflict during the course of the troubles in Northern Ireland and have contributed and participated in the process of conflict resolution at local and national level in Northern Ireland.

The main objective of this research is to explore the contribution and involvement of women, (who have actively engaged in the conflict/The Troubles), in the process of conflict resolution at a grass roots community level and at a national level in Northern Ireland.

Before you decide if you would like to take part it is important for you to understand why the project is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to carefully read the description of the research below.

Research Description

Conflict resolution and peacemaking negotiations have been traditionally dominated by a male perspectives, goals and input, the contribution and participation of women in peace building and conflict resolution have to some extent been ignored or sidelined by a male perspective/counterparts.

The aim of this study is to explore and present the motivations, roles and a gendered perspective of conflict resolution of former politically motivated female prisoners in Northern Ireland. A number of objectives will be applied in order to achieve this:

The first objective will explore the individual motivations of former politically motivated female prisoners to disengage in conflict and to support the broader process of conflict resolution, which led to the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

The second objective will explore the individual roles of former politically motivated female prisoners have undertaken in micro levels of conflict resolution in Northern Ireland, prior to and after the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

The third objective explores the dimension of gender and conflict resolution experienced by former politically motivated female prisoners in Northern Ireland.

Please not that any information you disclose during the course of this research will be upheld in confidence, however, there are exceptions to this. It is important for you to note that this research is not concerned with any prior role/activity in which you have formerly engaged in during the course of the troubles,

Should you disclose any information or any activity which maybe classified as a criminal offence or which would pose a risk to yourself or others, this information will be reported to the relevant authorities.

If you would like to take part please complete and return the Informed Consent Declaration form.

Yours Sincerely,

Mary C. Mc Court

Appendix 2 : Consent Form

Dear Participant,

During the interview you will be asked a number of questions about your experiences and role in the different aspects of conflict resolution in Northern Ireland.

The interview will last about an hour approximately and a digital recorder will be used as the recording device, the data collected in the interview will then be transcribed.

Any information disclosed will be confidential unless you make disclosures in which I am obligated to report by law such as any participation in or reference to any illegal activities. Quotes may be used in the final text however no information will be given that would reveal or disclose your identity as a study participant.

You can decline to answer any questions and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time if you do not wish to proceed.

Please indicate where appropriate by circling one of these sentences:

I am a former politically motivated female prisoner

I confirm that I understand the information in this letter and I agree to take part in the study.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Thank you for your time,

Email contact: _____

Supervisors email contact: _____

Appendix 3 : Interview Guide, Semi-Structured Interview

1. When did you first engage in the process of conflict resolution?

2. What was your motivation to engage in conflict resolution?

3. Describe your role/experience of conflict resolution

4. In your opinion, do you feel you where given the same recognition as men in your work?

5. Do you feel as a woman, this helped any particular situation you were involved in within the process of conflict resolution?

6. Was there a time, when you felt being a woman hindered any situation you came across in the process of conflict resolution?- Any barriers you may have come across.

7. What is your view of the peace process now in the aftermath of the Good Friday   Agreement?

8. Are there any issues at a community level which are still causing conflict across communities?