´WOMEN ON THE PEACE LINE'
CHALLENGING DIVISIONS THROUGH THE SPACE OF FRIENDSHIP

> We said: 'Emma, it's a shame you're booking this fitness place. We're not using it. We're just going and sitting in the cafe and talking and laughing'. And we said: 'Couldn't we become a group then?

Claire, one of the Women on the Peace Line (WPL) members, recalled this quote from the moment in 2006 when a group of women from North Belfast, from mixed Catholic/nationalist and Protestant/unionist backgrounds, decided to establish WPL.[i] This chapter will analyse the space created by WPL as a 'talking space', a social space built on years of interactions that have developed into bonds of friendship. The socio-spatial dynamics of these encounters will be explored against the backdrop of the reconciliation process in Northern Ireland.

This chapter will also draw on theories of place and space to investigate the ideas and practices of friendship, an area insufficiently studied in social sciences and especially in anthropology (Paine 1969: 505; Beer 2001: 5806; Desai and Killick 2013: 4; Coleman 2013: 198). Several authors, in differ-ent disciplines, note that female friendship has been overly ignored, or even rejected (Uhl 1991; Cucó Giner 1995: 74; Derrida 1997a; Beer 2001: 5806; Still 2010), with the claim by some philosophers, such as Michelet and Nietszche, that women are incapable of friendship (Still 2010: 140).

The context where the space of friendship has been created by the women of WPL will firstly be analysed. Then, the chapter will explore how this space challenges both the division into two separate and strict

communal identifications[ii] of the people of Northern Ireland and the sexual division in a society, which, as McDowell (2008) states, has been deemed a 'gender regime' that 'places men above women . . . in post-conflict Northern Ireland in almost every aspect of life'. Next, I will consider the difficulties that the participants of this group face and how they deal with their differences. This examination will lead to questions about the dualistic dimensions of the everyday and the political, the private and the public domains, friendship and reconciliation, which will be revealed as being intertwined in the path towards positive peace.

Everyday Encounters in Reconciliation Processes
The creation of 'relational spaces' where people can meet after the end of an armed violent conflict[iii] has been highlighted as essential in peace-building and reconciliation processes (Lederach 2005). Negotiations and agreements can be carried out during peace processes at the so-called 'elite level' or 'macro-level' (Mcfarlane 2011). Actions taken at this level have been considered as 'a necessary but insufficient condition to move conflict societies from a state of transition, through transformation, and ultimately to reconciliation' (Knox and Quirk 2000: 196). It is at the societal level where everyday relationships develop with the potential to transcend hostilities and divisions. Lederach (2005: 96-97) highlights the importance of relationships that cross 'the lines of the conflict', and allow societies to 'move from interactions defined primarily by division and violence toward coexistence, cooperation, and constructive interdependence'. Some of these encounters may hold the capacity to contribute not just to the reduction of violence, but also to life enhancement. Galtung (1996: 30) conceptualizes this difference when he describes the ideas of 'negative peace' and 'positive peace'. The path towards the latter implies tackling not only direct armed violence, but also other kinds of violence going on in the society. This violence can be direct, structural or cultural, committed and suffered by different actors.[iv] Galtung argues for an expanded concept of peace, which might be dynamic, and includes the actions taken to transform conflict in peaceful ways 'by people handling them creatively, transcending incompatibilities -and acting in conflict without recourse to violence' (ibid.: 265). In this sense, the elimination or reduction of violence is therefore a process more than a goal, arguably an everyday practice. The analysis of the WPL group in this chapter will contribute to the examination of the contributions that social spaces like this can make towards positive peace.

WPL was set in the context of Northern Ireland, where different kinds of violence have widely affected the society. The armed conflict that lasted from 1969 to 1998 (the year that peace agreements were approved) left 3,488[v] killed and 42,304[vi] injured. Taking into account the small geograph-ical size of Northern Ireland and the population of less than 2 million, there were few areas left unscathed (McWilliams 1995). Despite the peace

agreements, violence is not over. In a documented article, Jarman (2004) reviewed 'the changing patterns of violence in post-ceasefire Northern Ireland'. This included paramilitary violence, violent criminal activity, sectarian violence and other forms of representative violence. In her analysis of the role of the women during the conflict in Northern Ireland and in Palestine, Sharoni (1998: 1085) affirmed that 'while the signing of peace agreements has triggered denunciations of political violence in both Israel/Palestine and the North of Ireland, to date little has been done to eliminate the structural conditions that breed violence, including violence against women'. Violence during war and violence in peacetime are not disconnected when looking at the roots of violence in a patriarchal system that uses violence to impose power, such as Woolf (1938) cleverly pointed out. This fact is encapsulated in the concept of a 'continuum of violence' used by Cynthia Cockburn (1998, 2004) as an analytical tool in different postwar contexts. The continuum of violence is explained by Cockburn (1998) as a continuum of time (pre-war, postwar, peacetime), place (home, street, battlefield) and scale. Although there has been little research done on the experiences of the women during the armed conflict,[vii] the stories gathered by Fairweather, McDonough and McFadyean (1984) support that idea of the continuum of violence. Women not only suffered the direct violence inflicted by paramilitary groups or the British army, but also the violence committed by their husbands, the institutional control over their bodies, the imposition of fixed gender roles, and the cultural violence that legitimized that. As Galtung (1996: 40) states, 'Patriarchy, like any other deeply violent social formation, combines direct, structural and cultural violence in a vicious triangle'. The goal and the process of reconciliation must address the analysis of violence against women in its multiple dimen-sions (Strickland and Duvvury 2003: 6), and how that violence is sustained and also challenged. The mandates that the patriarchal system assigns to the women of WPL, and how they deal with them, will be part of the analysis in this chapter.

Space, Place and Community in Northern Ireland

Division and social polarization are part of deep-rooted violence contexts (Lederach 2005: 37). In Northern Ireland, segregation is one of the elements considered to have led to the 'protracted nature of the conflict' (Mcfarlane 2011: 1). Boundaries or 'interfaces', both physical and symbolical, have demarcated the areas of Protestants and Catholics in this society (Boal and Murray 1977, in Feldman 1991: 28). The demarcation of such areas has limited the contact between different groups, and it has also created a strict social categorization of 'us' and 'them'. Through the practice of 'telling',[viii] people in Northern Ireland identify a person as belonging to one group or another, thus reproducing social identities and reaffirming social boundaries in the smallest mundane interactions (Jenkins, Donnan, McFarlane

1986: 26). Despite the peace agreement in 1998, division and sectarianism are still present. Nolan (2012) noted that the number of interface walls had increased from twenty-two in 1998 to forty-eight in 2012. In 2013, just before I started my nine months of fieldwork with WPL, new walls were still being erected: a so-called 'peace curtain' ('Peace Curtain' for East Belfast Church 2013) was built in East Belfast at an interface that has been considered a 'flashpoint for opposing factions in Northern Ireland for many years' (New 'Peace Fence' at St Matthew's Church in East Belfast 2013) and a place of regular rioting (Union Flag Dispute 2013; Rioting at Lower Newtownards Road - Short Strand Interface 2013).

Different discourses have sustained the representation of two opposing collective identities using a 'two communities' model approach to this society. Not only has this model been wielded in utilitarian political dis-courses, but it has also been fixed in government policy and legislation, in the media, and in academic research.[ix] This model refers to two populations identified by religion, national beliefs and political ideology: as Protestant, British, unionist and loyalist, on the one hand, and as Catholic, Irish, nationalist and republican, on the other. The use of the concept of 'commu-nity' has been criticized for not questioning the existence of two separate cultures and cementing the division (Nie Craith 2002: 179; Bryan 2006: 605). Moreover, this community-model approach has been considered a neglection of historical and dynamic elements of the production of space and identities (Mcfarlane 1986; Wilson and Donnan 2006: 28). It has also been seen as homogenizing and trying to impose senses of belonging and affiliation (Shirlow 2003; Whitaker 2011: 58), and criticized for being instrumental in processes of political control (Nie Craith 2002; Jarman 2004; Bryan 2006; Curtis 2008). Drawing on these critiques, a link might be established between the concept of 'community' and the idea of 'place' as defined by de Certeau, and the concept of 'abstract space' as explained by Lefebvre. 'Place' is described by de Certeau as the order where 'the law of the "proper" rules', and where the elements within are situated in their own '"proper" and distinct location'; it thus implies stability (de Certeau 1984: 117). According to Lefebvre, 'abstract space' is a 'tool of domination´, which destroys differences 'in order to impose an abstract homogeneity' (Lefebvre 1991: 370). The idea of community might also connect with the concept of 'place-identity', describing in this context identities intended to be fixed by physical and symbolical impositions.[x]

In contrast to the simplification implied in the community-model approach, the analysis of everyday spaces brings complexity to the study of the Northern Irish society. The analytical approach to be employed in this chapter follows de Certeau's concept of space, defined as 'the word when it is spoken' - an 'act of the present'; 'a practiced place' (de Certeau 1984: 117). De Certeau's meaning is the reverse of the terminology used by different contemporary ethnographers[xi] and other scholars (Gray 2003: 240). This chapter will use the term 'space' in relation to everyday practices that

are concrete, grounded in experience and embodied by the subjects of the action. Everyday practices that are called 'tactics' by de Certeau, meaning those that are used by 'ordinary' people, in contrast to the calculated 'strategies' sustained from the "'proper" place or institution' (de Certeau 1984: xix-xx). Space is neither ahistorical nor acontextual, as this chapter will suggest. As Massey (1994: 2) affirms, space is constructed out of social relations, which 'are never still; they are inherently dynamic'. In social spaces, unusual relationships cross and interact (Lederach 2005: 85).

This chapter will explore the challenges and contradictions that static notions of 'place-identity' generate in this society, through the analysis of the space of friendship created by WPL. When focusing on everyday socio-spatial activities, homogenizing conceptualizations of culturally distinct and spatially bounded social or political groups turns out to be inadequate as a tool of analysis.

The Creation of a Space of Friendship

The exploration of the social situations and cultural context in which particular forms of friendship develop has been highlighted as important (Santos-Granero 2007: 11; Coleman 2013: 295). In the context of social and territorial division, the participants in WPL had no contact with people belonging to the 'other' side of the conflict during many years of their lives. Of the twelve women that currently participate in WPL, six grew up in a Protestant/unionist/loyalist area (Louise, Lynda, Valerie, Rebecca, Caroline and Karen) and the other six in a Catholic/nationalist/ republican area (Claire, Laura, Monica, Theresa, Suzanne and Eleonor). They lived in working-class neighbourhoods in Belfast, in areas most affected by the conflict. They witnessed or experienced displacement, associated with intercommunal violence and intimidation.[xii] The division affected their everyday lives: they attended segregated schools; their leisure time was conducted within their respective religious communities.

However, most of them had experiences that complicated the 'two-community' place-identity. That is particularly relevant from the women of Protestant background, who faced confrontations with members of loyalist paramilitary groups during the conflict, being threaten by them on different occasions. Moreover, the majority of the women of WPL referred to their families as having clear positions regarding unionism or nationalism, whereas they related well with people within and across the different social classes. Some of the interviewees raised the fact that their fathers had been involved in trade unions, and whose socialist stance was above the communal identification when dealing with social problems. Before joining WPL, some of the participants had met people of the other communal identification at the workplace, or in their extended family (particularly the women from Protestant background, meeting Catholic cousins).

The space of friendship of WPL started in the particular scenario of the promotion of peace-building initiatives. The first time some of the current participants of WPL met was due to a proposal made by a social worker, Emma, who secured funding with the aim of gathering Catholic and Protestant women together. Emma contacted Claire and Louise, who were active in community centres in North Belfast, one in a Catholic area and the other in a Protestant one. Both were asked by the social worker to find local women to join the activity, which consisted of a gym training session followed by a healthy meal. At that time, funding was coming from the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation 'Peace II - Extension'.[xiii] The only person who had previously participated in cross-community initiatives prior to WPL was Lynda, who distinguished this encounter from meetings with women from 'Southern Ireland' or the Catholic area of West Belfast, because, on this occasion, 'it was the next street to where you came from'. The 'patchwork' nature of social geography in Belfast[xiv] means that spatial proximity to 'the other' creates an intense sense of vulnerability and fear. In contrast to other societies where 'proximity serves as the principal facilitator for social interaction' (Froerer 2013: 149), the closeness of the territorial origins of the women forming WPL was an important symbolic wall to overcome.

The women of WPL have been meeting regularly since then, creating a space of shared experiences. They have participated in different activities together, such as Bollywood dance, handicrafts, Irish language and history classes, and workshops with other groups. They have enjoyed some activi-ties more than others, but they look for activities to do as a justification for their meetings. These activities define the space of friendship in the sense that they share their memories about what they have done together and the expectations that these will continue in the future. Space and time are entangled: in the 'spacetime', 'memories and dreams are the stuff of such a fusion' (Harvey 2014: 14). Monica affirmed this idea, contrasting these memories with the ones which may be divisive: 'Our relationships are more built on our shared experiences we had since being together than what came before'. Activities have been deemed as a way to become 'interpersonally tied' in different contexts, as a way to develop friendship (Froerer 2013: 142). Beer states that friendship is based on sharing of 'time, problems, hopes and thoughts' (Beer 2001: 5806). During my nine months of fieldwork in the year 2013-14, I had the opportunity to meet and share weekly encounters and activities with these women. At that time their main activity involved attending Irish language classes. Initially that year, they were taking the classes in a building that belongs to a women's organiza-tion, and located in a working-class Protestant area in Belfast. This area is well known as the home of loyalist paramilitary groups who had a strong presence during the violent conflict. The Irish language teacher noted that he would not have dared to come to this area some years ago. Even so, the Irish language remains a controversial issue. For example, one mile

away from the centre where the women were taking the classes, a senior Orangeman warned Protestants against learning Irish as they were serving a 'republican agenda' (Orangeman Says Protestants Should Not Learn Irish Language 2014). The women were not alarmed by this statement, and had had no intention of taking a political stance by carrying out this activity. They just enjoyed being there together.

Unlike other cross-community activities led by women in Northern Ireland (from the suffragettes at the turn of the twentieth century to the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition founded in 1996 in order to secure a place at the all-party peace talks), WPL was not created to make overt political claims. They decided to remain as a group because they valued meeting with no political intentions. When I asked Caroline, from a Protestant background, about the contribution of the group to the peace process, she affirmed: 'We are here for fun, more so than for politics'. The WPL women, who associate politics with the work of politicians, are more comfortable with the idea that they are just friends. Their aims are more related to McWilliams' idea that community projects and women's centres in Northern Ireland create 'safe, yet subversive, spaces where they can organize together around issues of concern [that] cross the sectarian divide' (McWilliams 1995: 32).

A Supportive 'Talking Space'

The everyday act of talking is an essential constituent in the creation and maintenance of relationships in WPL. Monica, one of the participants from a Catholic background, who has been in the group since the beginning, highlighted this activity as being at the heart of WPL, and described it as 'what normal friends do'. Nonetheless, the participants have experienced a significant transformation through the mere act of talking. Remembering the time when they were invited to join a cross-community activity, Louise expressed her concern about having nothing to say, while Claire worried about saying something wrong: 'This is what I said: "What are we going to talk to them about?" And I'll have to watch what I say'. This fear reduced when they realized they had 'more in common' than in what divided them, and some of them referred to housing, education, health and 'women's issues' as points of connection. The elements that helped them to overcome fears of cross-communal contact were those that made them feel comfort-able with each other. After some sessions, they were more dedicated to talking than to the gym activity, and they decided to be constituted as a group '(b)ecause we got fond of each other', as Monica affirmed. The sharing of what some of them called 'private things' and the enjoyment of each other's company were elements also remarked on by the women who joined the group later.

Talking configures a space for sharing and having fun, where 'if you are down, that's the first thing to lift you up', as expressed by one of the

participants. During the weekly Irish language classes I attended, they usually spent half of the class having breakfast and talking, and the other half regularly interrupting the teacher to start different conversations among themselves. Some of them expressed in the interviews that they did not really care about learning the language, either because they were already fluent, or because they found it too difficult. Planning a trip that they did with no funding in June 2014, Claire emphasized that they had to find somewhere where they could laugh as they 'usually do'. The day of the trip, for more than three hours they were just sitting in a park and eating, talking and joking. The closeness of the bonds, feeling happy with the others, the support, having fun and sharing jokes are some of the main motivations that the women of the group highlighted for choosing to be together.

De Certeau refers to the 'popular art of speaking' as a way to manipulate and appropriate imposed places and their 'proper' meanings (de Certeau 1984: 24, 33). WPL appropriates these places and creates surprises in them: for example, learning the Irish language in a staunchly Protestant com-munity centre, which could be interpreted locally as serving a republican agenda; transforming a gym into a space for meeting, talking and sharing on a personal level, ignoring its proper use of getting fit; and appropriating the Irish classes themselves for building friendships, with the language element as secondary. It could be said that the 'talking space' created by WPL challenges the 'abstract space' described by Lefebvre (1991: 396) as relying 'on the repetitive, on reproducibility, on homogeneity'.

Challenges to the Fixed Place of Community

'Cross-community' encounters have been encouraged at the institutional level to put people from Protestant/unionist/loyalist backgrounds in touch with people from Catholic/nationalist/republican backgrounds. Not all of those encounters have had the same continuity as WPL has had. The decision of these women to keep this space alive is a choice, an election that entailed a rupture with the fixed place of the 'community'. The creation of a space of friendship may imply a 'mutation' (de Certeau 1984) that leads to problematizing imposed divisions in Northern Ireland. According to de Certeau, 'mutations' are everyday practices that manipulate the established order; tactics that make use of the cracks in places and poach in them (de Certeau 1984: xix-xxi, 24, 37).

Friendship is differentiated by the participants of WPL from family bonds and from the communal group. Considering the definition of friendship in Western culture as a volunteered relationship (Allan 1979: 17; Cucó Giner 2004: 137) in opposition to kinship relations (Beer 2001: 5805; Whitaker 2011: 63), having Catholic cousins is not the same as choosing Catholic friends. The women of the group remarked extensively on this distinction. For example, discussing ways of describing the group for a photography exhibition that I set up with them as part of the fieldwork, they decided

to write at the end of the introductory text: 'This is friendship for life'. They believed that 'friendship' suited them better than 'family', because, as Claire affirmed, 'you don't get on with some of your family'. Moreover, they regard friendship as a commitment that fosters situations where those involved do not act according to the expectations of the communal group. They say that they are proud of their friendship 'before religion' difference. According to the participants, they would protect other group members even if they had to confront members of their communal group in the process. Furthermore, when it came to a potentially divisive issue, such as the Orange parades,[xv] gratitude and friendship were expressed across religious divides. For instance, Lynda stated that she appreciated that Claire, despite being annoyed about the band that passed through her son's Catholic neighbourhood during the Ulster Protestant celebration of the Twelfth of July, had phoned Lynda to confirm that her son, a band member, was safe after the riots that happened that day.

The space of WPL may also imply a sense of freedom from the restric-tions of their communal groups. Some of the women have engaged in activities that are not necessarily highly regarded in their communities. Lynda, for example, likes the Irish language, but has faced opposition from her son. She started Irish classes in a Protestant/unionist/loyalist area of West Belfast twenty years ago but was threatened by a paramilitary group. When she explained it in class, the Irish teacher seemed impressed with her courage. Furthermore, through the 'art of manipulating and enjoying' (de Certeau 1984: xxii), they reappropriate the imposed place of the 'community' while allowing themselves to joke about their communal identifications. In the photography workshop I delivered to them, one of the pictures selected included oranges in the foreground, and they titled it 'Too much orange, not enough green';[xvi] Monica stated that they could laugh about that. Theresa referred to the 'banter' in the group as the quality she enjoyed the most, as they 'can laugh at each other, and this is acceptable'. In doing that, they mutate the 'vocabularies of established languages' - as the 'consumers' described by de Certeau do - and 'trajectories trace out of the ruses of other interests and desires that are neither determined nor captured by the systems in which they develop' (de Certeau 1984: xviii).

Moreover, the members of WPL affi med that their perception of the 'other' had changed through their participation in the group: 'Being in the group', commented Lynda, 'you look at people differently'. Some of them have started another group of cross-community women in their area, claiming that this has been possible due to their experience in WPL. Through the social and mutual obligations that friendship entails (Killick 2013: 64), the participants of WPL have opened themselves to some aspects of the other communal group, mainly regarding their religious practices. In her fieldwork about friendship in a Lebanese town, Obeid highlighted that 'social obligations are epitomized in two basic life events: marriage and death' (Obeid 2013: 105). The women of WPL attended the churches of the

other group for weddings and funerals. Caroline, a woman of Protestant background, stated that 'years ago we would never have done that'. Furthermore, they appreciate the rituals carried out by the others: Lynda commented that she was grateful when Catholics prayed for her daughter who had cancer. Participants confirmed that membership in WPL is not only changing them, but also affecting their families.

Their encounters challenge the perpetuation of a division that they feel no interest in sustaining, by contrast to politicians and paramilitaries. 'Every time Catholics and Protestants are getting together, politicians will put something in, to put distance in', expressed one of the members of WPL. According to Rebecca, meeting with the 'other' is the reason why paramilitaries 'go against women big time' and 'want to keep us apart', because she believed that the division is a business for them. This statement fits with Owens' gender analysis about 'the masculine desire to fix the woman in a stable and stabilising identity' (Owens 1985, in Massey 1994: 238). The women of WPL have broken away from these limitations and moved from own place-identities to the dynamic space of friendship. The division is seen as something that sustains sectarian political discourse, and as a problem that they hope will not exist for future generations. Talking of their sons and daughters, some participants were proud to say that their children did not care about religion, while others admitted that their descendants preferred not to live in Belfast because it 'all seems terribly petty and silly and all of that. And there is no engagement in politics here other than if you are green or orange'. They do not want to perpetuate the division, and they are acting as a means of safeguarding voluntary bonds of friendship.

Gender Dynamics

This section explores the ways in which the space of friendship of WPL not only challenges the rigid communal identifications, but also societal gender relations. Places and spaces are charged with gendered meanings, as different feminist and anthropologist scholars have pointed out (Massey 1994; Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003: 8). The cultural construction of place 'carries certain understandings of what the permissible roles and behaviours of each sex are' (Pellow 2003: 162).

On the one hand, the women of WPL sustain gender stereotypes when representing men and women in their discourses. When I asked them why they decided to be a women-only group, they explained that they felt 'more comfortable' and relaxed, that they enjoyed 'each other's company', and they could 'have more of a laugh and talk about things better'. Some members perceived men as driven by money, 'troublesome' and the cause of 'friction', in contrast to women, who like to 'mix more' and are 'more adaptable'. Valerie explained that women do so in the name of their kids. Lynda recalled a situation that had occurred some years before, when

'the IRA shot soldiers' and how the women unanimously rejected such behaviour because 'they thought the same, that they were somebody's son'. Empathy and understanding were being linked with motherhood. Also, in the domestic sphere, the participants of WPL reproduced gender roles in the labour division of their everyday lives, babysitting their grandchildren or cooking for their husbands on the assumption that this is what women do.

In addition to those embodied gendered understandings, it is important to highlight their consideration about the activity of WPL as something not 'political'. This appears to maintain the division of the public sphere, regarded as a masculine domain where politics are carried out, and the private sphere, regarded as the space of women. This dichotomy is criti-cized by some feminist scholars for reinforcing 'the view that women have no power or political agency, and that they are totally dependent on the existing social and political structures' (Sharoni 1998: 1062). Moreover, many scholars (such as Pitt-Rivers 1973, Paine 1999, and Carrier 1999, in Torresan 2011: 238) characterize friendship as a relationship comprising emotions that belong in a private domestic sphere.[xvii] This idea may shed light on the perception by the women of WPL that their friendship is non-political, and hence non-public.

On the other hand, there have been transformations in their attitudes towards how they are expected to perform as women. Firstly, weekly meetings provide 'time for themselves' and participants are fully com-mitted to such occasions, regardless of family demands. Secondly, during their conversations they talk about what they used to keep for themselves. When being together, they criticize the marriage institution or complain about their own family. Rebecca highlighted that WPL changed her a lot because it made her 'more assertive'. Being in the group, she commented, had allowed her to express her anger or annoya nee with her own family. Thirdly, gender roles and attitudes are transformed through their meet-ings. Louise was provided as an example of a role change with the support of the others in that she had adopted a more assertive stance towards her husband. Some of the women remembered the first time she had gone on a trip with the group: she had never previously left her home for a night, and cried when she got onto the b·us, worried for her husband and daughter whom she had left alone. This changed, however, the moment that the women gave her a drink, and then she 'never looked back' - as Louise affirmed. Monica connected the idea of supporting each other with chal-lenges to gender roles. She explained how men react against that 'level of support' as a way of 'trying to undermine that we have friendships', saying to them that 'you're like a bunch of lesbians down there'. Relationships, in this sense, create a space for sharing and support that allows them to confront and explore gender expectations.

In the 'talking space' of WPL, by creating intimacy in order to share their concerns, the women of WPL are breaking with the constrictions of

the 'private' or 'domestic' sphere. The house, as the place where the roles of women are fixed (Pellow 2003: 162), may find its walls shaken by the airing of these encounters. The participants of WPL are generating what anthropologist Teresa de! Valle Murga calls 'bridge spaces': spaces that are configured by bridging traditional demarcations of the domestic space and the outside, the private and the public - that is to say, spaces for change in relation to gender models (del Valle Murga 1997: 164-65). Through the trust and support developed in this space, they defeat some gender rules. Nonetheless, gender roles and behaviours do not completely disappear. As Aretxaga reflects, the tension between the transgression and reproduction of gender ideology is a dynamic process, which is part of the actions of women in Northern Ireland as in other parts of the world (Aretxaga 1997: 78). Since space is created by bodies in motion, interacting with others and the environment (Low 2014: xxiii), the place of the 'proper' -where gender norms rule - and the space of the encounter - where gender roles are both performed and challenged - are linked. Contrary to the dismissal of the body in the 'abstract space' (Lefebvre 1991: 310, 395-96), in the everyday gendered bodies interact and may reinforce cultural norms, while at the same time transforming them.

Dealing with Differences

The process of constant creation of the social space of WPL entails tensions and negotiations. The space of friendship is by no means 'a new plane of perfection, a new tabula rasa, onto which all that matters in human experi-ence comes to be written' (Casey 1996: 46). Contradictions and challenges in dealing with different place-identities are part of the space.

The participants of WPL recognized that members harbour oppositional stances in relation to religion, nationalism and politics. Nonetheless, the women of WPL fluctuate between a belief in respect for such differences, and silence about their implications. They referred to themselves and to the others as 'Catholics' or 'Protestants', although not all of them practice religion. These terms are categories linked with nationalism, understood as an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983). They include feelings of British-ness and Irish-ness, or - as Jenkins (1997: 119) points out - of the constitutional 'membership of the United Kingdom and the reunification of Ireland'.[xviii] They called 'differences' to those communal identifications, and they claimed they were proud to maintain them. Theresa drew atten-tion to this when asked about the contribution of the group to the peace process: 'They can learn a lot from us because we are very comfortable with the differences'. Most of the interviewees made reference to the idea raised by Monica in a workshop about the WPL's refusal to be considered a 'rainbow'. Monica had explained that the group is 'not a merging of colours: I'm green and Lynda is orange, and I'm very happy for Lynda to be orange, but I'm green'. They agree that they can deal with differences: 'We

just have to respect each other's opinions, to agree to disagree'. However, they consider that not talking about the past or about controversial issues such the Orange parades is a way not to offend others. Their standpoints are kept for their own communal group. Silence is a tool for dealing with differences, and it hides some of the women's beliefs. This is hardly surpris-ing in a society dominated by fear of letting the 'other' know who you are, famously and poignantly captured in Seamus Heaney's poem on silences and ways of 'telling' - 'whatever you say, say nothing' (Moloney 2014: 202).

The avoidance of confrontation is an important aspect in WPL. Karen affirmed that they decided to close the group three years ago because they did not want to take the risk of including someone who could be 'bitter'. They used this concept when alluding to someone who confronts the other community, and who displays their identity however problematic this may prove. Lynda described her son as 'pretty bitter', and she justified his attitude by claiming that '[h]e has seen a lot of murder'. Caroline referred to her grandmother as a 'bitter woman' because she lived surrounded by Catholic families and chose to display a Union flag outside her home. 'Bitterness' was explained by Mcfarlane as the opposite of a general agreement in Northern Irish society to act 'decently' towards any person (Mcfarlane 1986: 96). That attitude is not welcome in the group. A signifi-cant example elicited in order to illustrate such bitterness is a situation that occurred in a WPL Irish language class when Lynda wore a badge with the initials of a loyalist paramilitary organization ('UVF', Ulster Volunteer Force) in a community centre of a Catholic area. During the class follow-ing this event, Claire mentioned the incident, and Lynda said she wore it because of the memorial she had been to the day before for the centenary of that organization. The other participants found it inappropriate neverthe-less. In an interview, Lynda referred to the UVF badge stating: 'It's my culture, it's my history, and I'm not gonna be ashamed of that'. According to another participant, she 'put us all in danger there'. This anxiety was caused not just by the object itself, but by the place where it was shown, a place 'where you can meet an IRA man'. The fact that the UVF badge and the Irish community centre represented opposed places was significant. The situation revealed a clash between place-identities, and gave visibility to those boundaries that are still not easy to cross. Space as a set of social relations is about interaction, which 'is likely to include conflict' (Massey 1994: 139) - a conflict that could be deemed as 'part of life and as a motor of change' (Lederach and Maiese 2003: 1), but which the WPL aimed to avoid in order to keep relationships fluid.

Rodman (2003: 209) affirms that 'the contests and tensions between dif-ferent actors and interests in the construction of space should be explored'. Examining these controversies allows the analysis not to offer an idealiza-tion of the space of friendship, and also to explore the constraints faced in a reconciliation process. The difficulties detected in the analysis of WPL

may provide important clues about the problems of overcoming years of hatred, hostility, confrontation, isolation and reinforcement of communal identifications. Recognizing the differences that exist among the group and respecting such differences is regarded by some scholars as essential in the improvement of democracy (Derrida 1997a; Cockburn 1998; Bloomfield, Barnes and Huyse 2003). Derrida advocates the inclusion of the concept of 'hospitality' as a route to redefining democracy, welcoming the 'other' not by means of assimilation or acculturation, but through negotiating 'at every instant' and with rules 'invented at every second with all the risks involved' (Derrida 1997b). In WPL, silence and concealment may be an implicit norm for preventing conflictive situations, but the space of friend-ship is also a space for negotiation in the face of unexpected issues. The situation when Lynda wore a UVF badge in an Irish class was managed through the reinforcement of silence, but it was also a reminder of the differences that broke the ideal, 'relaxed' and 'enjoyable' space created at WPL and delivered such differences in their context. This space of friend-ship within WPL, as Lefebvre states about the concept of space, is not a passive or pre-existing void, but is created by that action (Lefebvre 1991: 11, 90, 170).

The Imagination of the Political
Even though the women of WPL do not regard themselves as political, it can be argued that the space of friendship might be seen as a space of politics. This follows the propositions raised by authors such as Magnusson (2013: 1) who suggests 'the possibility of a new politics, no longer centred on the state but instead on everyday life'. Different venues and activities are seen as the everyday site of politics in the city, where unanticipated trans-formations may happen (ibid.: 9). Paying attention to those spaces may lead us to imagine politics and transformation differently (ibid.: 10; Stephens 2013: 109, 117). Moreover, social spaces are key in peace building, for they might be the locus of social change that may allow to transcend violence (Lederach 2005: 86).

The space of WPL implies a transformation. Firstly, it challenges dualistic polarities that are deemed as driving cycles of violence (Lederach 2005: 35). Secondly, it questions some gender impositions through their relationships, contributing to slowly breaking with the violence sustained by patriarchy, and thus walking towards positive peace as a context where multiple inequalities must be tackled. Thirdly, the development of elements like trust, care and cooperation are part of the space of friendship, but also regarded as important components in reconciliation processes. Bar-Siman-Tov defines the process of reconciliation as a long-term endeavour that will require former enemies to 'form new relations of peaceful coexistence based on mutual trust and acceptance, cooperation, and consideration of each other's needs' (Bar-Siman-Tov 2004, in Aiken 2013: 18). Furthermore,

friendship provides emotional support - a key element of healing after war-related violence (Miller and Rasmussen 2010: 14).

The 1960s feminist slogan 'the personal is political' seems appropri-ate to refer to the elimination of definitive lines of demarcation between these dimensions. Two poles of a dichotomy connected with categories of the private and the public, which are employed as ideological weapons (Magnusson 2013: 50), as part of the patriarchal social and cultural construction. The social space of friendship requires and promotes the participants to be in relation. Through this relationship - based on trust, enjoyment, support - they are transformed, also transforming their envi-ronment in their everyday. This is a space for the unexpected to happen, for constant negotiations, which may have the potential to 'shift the bounda-ries of the familiar' (Ahmed 2000: 7, in Stephens 2013: 110), challenging in diverse ways the foundations of violence in the context of Northern Ireland. For reconciliation studies, it is important to break assumptions about what is considered political, and to bring ethnographic detail and the political impact of 'the everyday' into focus.

Conclusions

In this chapter, the space of friendship created by 'Women on the Peace Line' has been analysed in relation to the challenges it poses in the estab-lished and divided order of the Northern Irish society. The 'talking space' where bonds of friendship are developed breaks into the 'proper', and goes beyond imposed meanings and homogenizing conceptions of place and space in Northern Ireland.

The transgression and reproduction of embodied identities of place and gender has been revealed as significant in the analysis. The participants in WPL create a space that allows them to joke and relax, away from the constraints of their family and their communal group, challenging overarching communal identifications and gender roles. However, at the same time, they bring cultural norms from the place of the 'proper' to the space of encounter. In that intersection of place and space, identities are revealed as fluid, heterogeneous, and in constant formation. This is part of the rich tapestry of everyday practices, and the evidence of the numerous and intertwined layers that a space is composed of. WPL is not a model to follow, but it is an experience of life. The women of WPL express and perform multiple and contradictory interpretations of the heterogeneity they aim to live in. This 'talking space', which also includes silences, detours and constant negotiations, is transformed in the walking, creating its own unpredictable path.

The exploration of groups like WPL might broaden reconciliation anal-yses. The analysis of reconciliation processes should include not just those groups that situate themselves in the traditional political domain, but also the initiatives that are contributing to a positive peace under the banner

of privacy and enjoyment. The importance of friendship in reconciliation processes has been highlighted, with the need to break with the traditional division of private and public spheres. Dichotomies like domestic/public, personal/political, or even conflict/post-conflict are abstractions that may not correspond to everyday experiences. The slash sign here might repre-sent a symbolic fence that, in perpetuating binaries, impedes the analysis of everyday transformative spaces and the exploration of different kinds of violence and experiential and structural inequalities. Going beyond those slashes, paying attention to relational spaces, to transformative relation-ships, will allow us to incorporate and give value to different initiatives that are part of the constantly changing map of reconciliation.

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Notes

[i] 'Women on the Peace Line' is a pseudonym. It was the name suggested by the par-ticipants in order to anonymize their identities.

[ii] I will use the term 'communal identification' and 'communal group' in this chapter to refer to ascriptions in Northern Ireland that include religion, nationalist beliefs and political ideologies. In this way, I avoid employing the term 'community', which, as we will see later, has been used to reduce the complexity of this society (see Garcia Gonzalez 2016).

[iii] This 'end of an armed violent conflict' is usually referred to as 'post-conflict'. I find this latter term problematic, since conflict is part of human life and not necessar-ily negative in itself. What makes a conflict harmful is when it is addressed with violence - and the conflict in Northern Ireland was intended to be resolved through the use of violence, specifically through armed violence.

[iv] Direct violence includes physical and verbal violence and is intentional; structural violence describes the indirect violence that comes from the social structure itself; cultural violence serves to legitimize direct and structural violence, motivating actors to commit direct violence or to omit counteracting structural violence (Galtung 1996: 2, 31).

[v] Calculation based on the Sutton database (Sutton 2002).

[vi] Calculation based on Melaugh, McKenna and Lynn 2014.

[vii] In Northern Ireland, scholars and women's organizations have denounced the omission of women when considering the past. The little archival material gener-ated during the violent conflict that covers the political events involving women (McWilliams 1995: 16), or the misrepresentation of women in the remembrance of the conflict (McDowell 2008) are part of the institutionalized ignorance about women's contributions to a more peaceful Northern Irish society (Ward 2013).

[viii] 'Telling' was explained by Burton as 'the pattern of signs and cues by which religious ascription is arrived at in the everyday interactions of Protestants and Catholics' (Burton 1978, in Aretxaga 1997: 35).

[ix] See Wilson and Donnan (2006: 22) in their analysis of the use of the 'tribal conflict model', which dominated the discipline of anthropology up to the 1990s.

[x] 'Place-identity' is defined by Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff (1983: 59) as part of the 'self-identity' of the person, consisting of 'memories, ideas, feelings, atti-tudes, values, preferences, meanings and conceptions of behaviour and experience' in relation to the physical world. In a society where 'place is inextricably linked to the formation and re-creation of ethnic identities', as Arctxaga (1997: 24) claims, the definition of 'place-identity' needs to be expanded to the 'strategic construc-tion' of collective identities, such as Low and Lawrence-Zuniga (2003: 24) describe it.

[xi] Such as Ingold, who prefers the idea of place rather than space, considering the latter as 'detached from the realities of life and experience' (Ingold 2011: 145).

[xii] The population movement due to the violent conflict in Belfast was, up until the Balkan conflicts, 'the most significant shift of people attributed to violence within Europe since the conclusion of World War II' (Shirlow 2003: 79)

[xiii] Since 1995, Northern Ireland has received money from that programme, in its differ-ent stages. The 'Peace II' Programme ran from 2000 tO 2006 with a budget of €1,155 million (Potter and Egerton 2011). The beneficiaries were 'sectors, fields, groups and communities hardest hit by the conflict', and projects were 'expected to prioritize a cross-community approach' (European Council Regulation 1999). Young people, women and older workers were given particular consideration (Harvey 2003: 36).

[xiv] The 'patchwork pattern', as Allen Feldman calls it, is especially significant in North Belfast, where most of the women that joined WPL lived. Due to that geographi-cal distribution of the neighbourhoods, that area suffered '(o]ver half the doorstep murders that took place in Belfast in 1969-77' (Feldman 1991: 71-72). For Feldman, those killings at people's front doors were acts of breaking the 'sanctuary space' or 'no-go areas', which ceased to 'fully protect or insulate the community' (ibid.: 41).

[xv] These parades have constituted a historically disputed point in Northern Irish society - see Bryan 2000.

[xvi] In Northern Ireland the terms 'green' and 'orange' are used as synecdoches alluding to the Catholic/nationalist/republican 'community' and the Protestant/unionisr/ loyalist 'community' respectively.

[xvii] This viewpoint might have led to the neglect of the study of friendship, as this has been assumed as a 'personal matter' (Allan 1979: 2) or 'informal' when referring to female friendship (Abrahams 1999, in Bell and Coleman 1999: 13).

[xviii] Nationalist sentiments, however, are not always analogous with the communal group. Lynda and Rebecca provide evidence of this rupture with the homogeneity of nationalism and the concept of territory:
 L: If anybody says to me 'What's your nationality?', I'm Northern Irish.
 R: No, I would say British.
 L: I love it, because l can take a wee part of Britain and a wee part of Ireland, and I can have what I want. Northern Ireland is six counties, but to start being proud and working as if our own country is Northern Ireland, rather than Britain.
 R: Excuse me, but we are not a country. We are a province.

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