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**Women's Anti-Violence Activism
Relations in Post-conflict Namibia and
Northern Ireland**

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PhD

2022

**Women's Anti-Violence Activism
Relations in Post-conflict Namibia and
Northern Ireland**

Kate Mukungu

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the requirements of the University of
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Abstract

This thesis argues forms of relational agency can help anti-VAWG (Violence against Women and Girls) activists to challenge division and aspects of oppressive political cultures in post-conflict places and spaces. Focusing on Namibia and Northern Ireland, this research seeks to understand how anti-VAWG activists navigate through deep ethnic and ethnonational post-conflict division, to work together to bring about change. Life history interviews with twenty women activists, in 2015 and 2016, explore their activism biographies and relationships. Critical feminist analysis of these interviews reveals how solidarities formed between activists of different ages and ethnicities/ethnonationalities, can shape the development of different forms of relational agency. This thesis shows how solidarities can emerge from activists learning from each other's situated knowledges and experiences and how benefits of this learning can be retained in activism groups and networks that have continuity. However, when solidarity is strained or not fully formed in relationships between activists, they have a repertoire of practices they carry out to help safeguard activism. These practices include avoidance of contentious topics and potentially problematic encounters, as well as focusing on the high-level goals of activism. Recognising activists' concerns that addressing contentious VAWG issues, such as VAWG perpetrated by conflict actors, risks damaging relations in post-conflict contexts, helps us understand activism addressing conflict-related harms. Therefore, it is important to understand the complex legacies of conflict to be able to contextualise the relational dynamics in activism addressing these legacies. This thesis contributes to an expanded understanding of relational agency, including the features and practices of relational agency in activism and how relational agency is shaped by forms of solidarities.

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In memory of Á, L, S, and S.

Author's declaration

Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the Faculty Ethics Committee on the 30th November 2015.

I declare that the word count of this thesis is 79, 319 words

Name: Kate Mukungu

Signature:

Date: 4 April 2022

Acronyms Used in this Research

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CNR	Catholic Nationalist Republican
CRVAWG	Conflict-related Violence against Women and Girls
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New era
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GFA	Good Friday Agreement
IRA / RA	Irish Republican Army / Republican Army.
LGBT/LGBTQI	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender / Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Intersex
PLAN	Peoples' Liberation Army of Namibia
PUL	Protestant Unionist Loyalist
NI	Northern Ireland (both NI and Northern Ireland are used)
NWV	Namibia Women's Voice
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SWAPO/Swapo	South West Africa People's Organisation, before Namibian independence, which changed to Swapo after independence
SWC/SPWC	SWAPO Women's Council / Swapo Party Women's Council
UN	United Nations
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force

VAWG

Violence against Women and Girls

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This research analyses relations in women's anti-violence against women and girls (VAWG) activism in two post-conflict societies, the Republic of Namibia (hereafter Namibia), and Northern Ireland (NI). In this introductory chapter, I firstly introduce the research rationale, to understand relations in anti-VAWG activism in the context of post-conflict division and its scope as multi-site, feminist, qualitative, Global North South research. Secondly, I introduce the post-conflict contexts of Northern Ireland and Namibia, before thirdly reflecting on how my lived experience informed the research topic, particularly encountering ethnonational / ethnic division as a development worker in both countries. Fourthly, I introduce women's anti-VAWG activism by situating it in the wider work of global women's movements. Fifthly, I summarise the thesis structure and the content of each chapter, including the key contributions of this research.

1.2 Research Overview

Below I provide an overview for the research. In the first sub-section, I begin by explaining the rationale behind the study, which is that if one accepts as I do, that unified women's activism can influence developments to address VAWG, the question of how women anti-VAWG activists come together in divided, post-conflict societies is pertinent to how VAWG is addressed. Therefore, I approach this analysis of anti-VAWG activism with relations at the forefront of my enquiry. In next sub-section, I explain my usage of key terms that recur throughout this research. In the final part of this research overview, I set out the scope of this multi-site, qualitative feminist study, which I locate under the banner of development research.

1.2.1 The Rationale for the Research

Conflict and VAWG are interrelated, not least because the severity of various forms of VAWG are known to increase during conflict (Ní Aoláin, Haynes and Cahn, 2011). Additionally, conflict can restrict anti-VAWG activism and the development of policies and practice toward rights of women and girls (Enloe, 2005; Swaine *et al.*, 2018). Due to an international agenda to improve the position of women in the period after conflict,¹ this may be an optimum time for anti-VAWG activism to push for VAWG related developments (Chaney, 2016). However, in the aftermath of a conflict state actors often pay insufficient attention to gendered power imbalances, VAWG and including women, instead focusing on relations between the groups in conflict (Bell and Forster, 2019; Castillejo, 2012; Strickland and Duvvury, 2003). The lack of attention sits alongside marked increases in VAWG during transitional and post-conflict phases (Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen, 2001). Given the need to progress women's rights after conflicts, the role played by post-conflict women activists and leaders needs to be better understood at academic, humanitarian organisation and government levels (Standing, Parker and Bista, 2016). This study seeks to contribute to meeting that need in respect of women's anti-VAWG activism. As such, the research is premised that it is useful to better understand how relationships are formed and developed in post-conflict societies by women activists as they seek to move towards their conceptions of anti-VAWG justice. Within that, this study specifically sets out to analyse how anti-VAWG activists manoeuvre through ethnicised division, as a legacy of conflict.

Time-limited post-conflict aid often focuses on forms of economic recovery and development with a view to disincentivising future conflict (Donaubauer, Herzer and Nunnenkamp, 2017). However, the need to challenge VAWG is ongoing post-conflict, which requires collaborative anti-VAWG activism (Kirleis, 2008). The importance of collaborative activism is justified by Weldon and Htun (2013) who emphasise women's activism, particularly feminist civil society activism, influences progressive anti-VAWG policy and practice developments, more than any other variable, in countries throughout the world. I contend the findings from Weldon and Htun (2013) confirm anti-VAWG activists are development actors, even

¹ For example, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (or Resolution 1325), adopted in 2000, places responsibility on participating countries emerging from conflict to increase the inclusion of women in post-conflict processes.

though, as Kirleis (2008) highlights, they may be under-acknowledged as such. By development I adopt a broad view as offered by Chambers (2005) meaning a process of change.² Based on the findings by Weldon and Htun (2013) there is normative perspective in this research that unified feminist anti-VAWG organising is has the potential to positive influence ongoing development in response to VAWG. As such, in this research I am interested in how women activists come together in post-conflict settings where division may be an ongoing concern and how they participate in activism together.

Numerically, conflicts have reduced worldwide since the 1990s (Tripp, Ferree and Ewig, 2013) although the proportion of ethnicised intrastate conflict has markedly increased (Chirico, 2013). Intergroup reconciliation within a state poses complex challenges following conflict (Hughes and Kostovicova, 2018). Grassroots activist groups, including women's groups, can contribute meaningfully to what Galtung (1996) terms peacebuilding from below. Peacebuilding from below entails members of groups affected by conflict building positive relationships with people from 'other' groups in the conflict, whether ethnic, religious, national or political 'others' (Bar-On, 2002). Whilst being optimistic about the potential of activism groups and social movements to aid reconciliation, Nagle (2013) highlights activists can also reflect and even antagonise prevailing ethnic or ethnonational divisions.

My lived experienced of activism, development practice and everyday encounters during Northern Irish conflict and after Namibian independence, has informed the decision to undertake this research. I expand on this experience in Section 4, but in short, learning the extent to which Namibian peoples' lives were shaped by ethnicity, in terms of where they lived and interactions with others, reminded me of the centrality of ethnonationality in Northern Ireland. Adler and Adler (2012) argue choosing familiar research settings aids contextual understanding and quality of analysis. Familiarity also aids research logistics, in terms of moving through the research sites and utilising contacts for participant recruitment. Reflections about

² I offer further explanation on how I use the term development in section 2.3 of this chapter

my insider and outsider status with participants, and other methodological considerations follow in Chapter 4.

1.2.2 Explaining My Use of Key Terms in the Research

As there are key terms I use repeatedly, it is important to be clear about how I interpret their meaning in this research. Starting with activism and activists, I interpret both broadly in this research for good reason. Activism encompasses numerous methods of community engagement, campaigning and awareness raising, protest, political action, as well as demonstrations of solidarity and care (Ackerly, 2018; Young, 2001). While political protest and high-level social justice activism attract public attention, I recognise that every-day actions and long-term engagement by people making relationships and informal networks in their communities are also activism (Ferree and Mueller, 2007; Jenkins, 2017; Martin, Hanson, and Fontaine, 2007). Anti-VAWG activism is similarly broadly interpreted in acknowledgement that activists often engage in multiple causes (Crossley, 2018). Whether activists are known primarily for their anti-VAWG work, or whether they address VAWG in the context of other defined roles, such as in trade unions, community development, media, politics, anti-poverty self-help, or therapeutic work, I recognise all as anti-VAWG activists. Participants in this study are aware they were selected because the researcher recognised them as anti-VAWG activists, or they volunteered having self-identified as such, as further explained in Chapter 4.3. Further, throughout this thesis I refer to feminist and women's activism whilst acknowledging that, although there is substantial crossover, they are not always coterminous. I adopt the distinction by Ferree and McClurg Mueller's (2007) that women's movements focus on women as members and organisers to address issues impacting on women, whilst feminist movements seek to end women's subordination to men.

I adopt a broad definition of development in this thesis as being a process of change that may have positive and negative outcomes, according to the perspective of different development participants (Chambers, 2005). Various dimensions of development, economic, social, political, rights based, etc., are all

designed to bring about change. However, changes are not always harmonious in between these dimensions and may be contested (Sumner and Tribe, 2008). Feminist critiques of development highlight the ways women and girls are affected, including in relation to VAWG, not all of which are positive (Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead, 2013; True, 2012). I find the distinction made by Hart (2020) of “big D” Development and “little d” development useful, with the former being large scale interventions in the global South, usually at the instigation of the global North and the latter being spread by capitalism as connected to Development. However, I am not trying to apply this research to either big D or little d development, but rather focus generally on how activism and activists seek to create change where they are.

Moving on to feminism, I don't find it easy to distil what it is into a single sentence because of the diversity of feminist perspectives. However, I interpret feminism in line with this contention:

To be 'feminist' in any authentic sense of the term is to want for all people, female and male, liberation from sexist role patterns, domination, and oppression.

(hooks, 1982 p.156)

Further, power is wielded in ways that systemically discriminates against women, particularly where gender intersects with other factors such as race and class (Collins, 2017). This means the oppression affects people variously in these intersections. As such, feminism in an overarching sense, is broadly interpreted in this thesis as commitment to liberate people of all genders from sexist and intersecting oppression. Different feminist perspectives and alternatives to feminism, as they relate to activism, are analysed in the literature review in Chapter 2.

I define post-conflict in accordance with Junne and Verkoren (2004 p.1) who state it is “shorthand for conflict situations, in which open warfare has come to an end”.

I argue colonialism is a conflict situation, in line with Galtung (1998) who highlights how colonialism imposes various forms of violence, direct, cultural, and structural. Conflict and colonialism can be followed by negative peace, when overt war-related hostilities cease, but more covert and structural forms of violence remain (Galtung, 1985; 1990). I am therefore careful not to prescribe how long after hostilities the term post-conflict has currency, because there are varying factors determining how long the latent or manifest legacies of conflict persist. These include violent acts orchestrated by breakaway insurgents (Brown, Langer and Stewart, 2001 p.4), the level of integration and reconciliation between groups involved in conflict (Brown, Langer and Stewart, 2001; Galtung, 2001; Lerner, 2007) and the degree and fairness of economic and social development achieved (Junne and Verkoren, 2007; MacGinty and Willaims, 2016).

The final explanation I offer here is for VAWG. For this I use the definition of VAWG in the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (also known as the Vienna Declaration) as a starting point, which is:

any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

(United Nations General Assembly, 1993, p.3)

From this definition VAWG is a form of gender-based violence (GBV) but, as Hughes, Marrs and Sweetman (2016) explain, even though the terms GBV and VAWG are used interchangeably, GBV incorporates violence directed at men, boys, and transgender people, because of their gender. However, due to the subordinate status of women and girls caused by complex and pervasive layers of gender inequality, VAWG is the most prevalent form of GBV globally (Hughes, Marrs and Sweetman, 2016; UN Women, 2010). As such, VAWG is one manifestation of systems of male domination that have existed over time and across cultures (Hunnicut, 2009; Sengupta and Calo, 2016). In the above

definition our attention is drawn not only to violence, but the context in which violence is meted out. The public and private spheres are significant as men's violence to known women, particularly intimate partner violence, is among the most pervasive forms of VAWG (García-Moreno, Zimmerman and Watts, 2017; Libal and Parekh, 2009). As such, a substantial level of VAWG occurs in private and familial spaces, as well as familiar spaces, such as the route to school (Lewis, Rowe, and Wiper, 2017; Zohra et al. 2010).³

Beyond direct interpersonal examples of violence, the concept of structural violence by Galtung (1969) is utilised in this thesis to incorporate the negative power of social institutions and systems to inflict harm. As Basu (2010) argues, women anti-VAWG activists regularly extend their analyses beyond the interpersonal to a range of systemic practices disproportionately harmful to women and girls. For example, various analyses of law as violence are applied by activists and activism scholars, ranging from gendered and racialised narratives and processes of blaming of rape victims (Hayes, Lorenz and Bell, 2013) to state restrictions on women's bodily autonomy by criminalising abortion (Enright, McNeilly and de Londres, 2020; Merry, 2012). With that in mind, I am keen not only to focus on interpersonal acts of violence as VAWG but also on oppressive systems, politics and restrictions.

1.2.3 The Scope of the Research

This research is feminist which shapes the ontological, epistemological, and methodological decisions I have made. To introduce these decisions, I ascribe to a subjective ontology and a qualitative approach which values the situated knowledge of research participants. Methodologically, my approach to applying a feminist ethic incorporates working towards feminist change, being intersectional, transdisciplinary and valuing research participants (see Jenkins, Narayanaswamy

³ The extent of the problem of VAWG is backed up by quantitative research spanning the continental areas of Africa, America, Asia, Australia, Europe, and Oceania, with figures ranging from one in four to one in two women having experienced some form of VAWG (see Black *et al.*, 2014; Elman, 2007; Jewkes *et al.*, 2010; Izumi, 2007; WHO, 2013). However, prevalence estimates are based on how studies define VAWG, and which specific acts result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm. Variances in definitions may relate to; non-partner sexual violence, physical or sexual violence, or coercive control by an intimate partner or family member (domestic violence), stalking, harassment, trafficking for sexual exploitation, as well as harmful practices, such as forced and early marriage, and female genital mutilation (FGM).

and Sweetman, 2019; Kobayashi, 2001; Scheyvens, Novak and Scheyvens, 2003). I expand on what it means to have a feminist research paradigm in Chapter 4.2. My decision to have two research sites traces back to how my experience in both Namibia and NI prompted my interest in conducting this study. Indeed, multi-site research can help the researcher reach a depth and breadth of understanding (Alasuutari, Bickman and Brannen, 2008) as the object being studied “spans more than one social world” (Nadai and Maeder, 2005 p.28). Multi-site research was previously undertaken on the contextualised experiences of women human rights activists and their understanding of how gendered human rights issues are enacted (see Jokela-Pansini, 2019). Similarly, Okech (2019) carried out a multi-site analysis of gendered discourses in settings impacted by violent identity-based conflict. Although spanning two country sites, I have no overriding goal to pursue a comparative approach. Instead, I mirror the approach Jenkins (2017) took when researching the lived experiences of women activists in two countries, by analysing data across both research sites and recognising the specificities of each research site.

I have already signalled my interest in the importance of anti-VAWG activists as development actors. Sumner and Tribe (2008) argue development research encourages a transdisciplinary understanding of issues impacting on peoples’ lives in a variety of geopolitical contexts. This research builds on various bodies of scholarship and disciplines. For example, in conceptualising agency I draw from relational sociology (Burkitt, 2018), sociology of development (Jha, 2019), education (Edwards and Mackenzie, 2005), indigenous philosophy (Ogude, 2018), feminist theory (Tamale, 2020), as well as perspectives on solidarities from human geography (Featherstone, 2012) and feminist theory (Hancock, 2011). One unusual aspect of this study is that the research sites are in Europe and Africa, which somewhat challenges traditional framings of international development as:

an act of benevolence from ‘developed’ country populations to distant communities in ‘developing’ countries.

(Clements and Sweetman, 2020 p.1)

Due to this framing, even when carried out in the global North, development research has tended to study groups or organisations with a global South focus (see Desai and Potter 2006; Unwin, 2006). This North to South gaze relates back to the description of big D development offered by Hart (2010), being focused on mostly global South countries coming out of colonisation, though often being led by global North donors. Research on development has similarly followed that trajectory. However, the problem with this framing is that research addressing issues such as VAWG can often come under the banner of development in the global South but less so in the global North. As Žarkov (2015 p.894) explains:

The classical formulation of ‘development’ as a field has, for a long time, excluded ‘developed countries’ from theorizing and research on ‘development issues’ such as rampant poverty, inequalities and discrimination, violence, and the oppressive role of the state.

Widening inequalities within countries in the global North and South shows there is no justifiable case for treating the North as somewhere that does not require development.⁴ Indeed, conceptions of development are changing, as the global introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals demonstrates, and the limitations of the North / South binary are being more widely recognised (Horner, 2020). With this research, I seek to contribute positively to this change.

The study is informed by a qualitative analysis of life history interviews with twenty anti-VAWG activists, ten in each country. Life history discussions facilitate reflections by activists on their activities and relationships with others across their entire span of activism. As I expand in Chapter 4, this choice of method enables participants to situate themselves in macro and micro events in their places, which change over the course of their lives (Miller, 2000). As such it facilitates an analytical approach in line with the purpose of the sociological imagination: “to grasp history and biography and the relations between them within society” (Mills, 1970, p.12). Participants may be associated with a diverse range of groups,

⁴ I also discount the suggestion that countries in the North are developed while countries in the South are developing.

organisations, and networks throughout their biography. Given the activists' biographies are the units of analysis of the research, as research participants they are not asked to represent any group. However, I acknowledge activism often involves emotional investment and strong interpersonal connections in groups (Gravante and Poma, 2016). The line between the story of the activist and the activist group can therefore appear blurred (Baillie Smith and Jenkins, 2017). Even allowing for this potential lack of separation, the thesis does not name groups or organisations based on research participants' association with them. The safeguarding considerations informing the decision not to name third party groups and individuals are further methodologically explained in Chapter 4.5.

1.3 Introducing Post-conflict Namibia and Northern Ireland

The decision to analyse women's activism in Namibia and Northern Ireland, in the context of how activists negotiate internal ethnic and ethnonational divisions, arises from my lived experience in both countries. I introduce both post-conflict contexts here by summarising their histories, as a prelude to a more detailed analysis of each place in Chapter 3. I explained in section 2 above, that I am careful not to specify how long a conflict must have ended to be termed post-conflict. This introduction shows that Namibia and Northern Ireland are in different post conflict positions, with Namibia being an independent republic and NI being in an ongoing fragile, post-conflict peace process.

1.3.1 Namibia

Namibia has been independent since 1990 having previously been colonised longer than any other African country (Becker, 1995). Under German colonisation from 1884, racial segregation and settler domination of indigenous people were violently imposed in German South West Africa, as the country was then named (Melber and Saunders, 2007). This violence was devastating for Herero and Nama people, as approximately 80% and 50% respectively died by protracted starvation and killings in concentration camps, in the first genocide of the twentieth century from 1904 to 1908 (Olusuga and Erichsen, 2010; Zuern, 2012). When South Africa invaded during the First World War the land was constituted as South

West Africa, a League of Nations territory administered by South Africa from 1921 (Sturges, 2004). Oppressive racialised policies continued as apartheid regulations were extended from South Africa, confining indigenous people to about 10% of the land and township areas in urban areas (Sturges, 2004). Racialised laws were the root of pre-independence conflicts between indigenous Namibian ethnicities, as colonial apartheid was a system of divide and rule (Horn, 2010).

When the League of Nations collapsed at the end of the Second World War, South Africa tried to annex the area completely, but this was blocked by the newly established United Nations (UN) (Dobell, 2000). This event marked the beginning of a long running dispute about Namibia in the wider context of African decolonisation from the 1950s (Melber and Saunders, 2007). The independence struggle began in earnest in 1966 and was largely waged by political and military leaders in exile in neighbouring Angola, Zambia and elsewhere (Dobell, 2000).⁵ Those involved in the struggle from within Namibia had to contend with the oppressive Koevoet (Sledgehammer), the counter-insurgency unit of the South African police, the army, and the restrictions of apartheid, while those in exile had to adjust to military camp life (Dobell, 2000; Horn, 2010). This separation of the exiled leadership from the people in Namibia they represented would have far reaching relational impacts both during and long after the struggle and is among the relational dynamics analysed in Chapter 3.

An internationally managed UN negotiation process, part of the wider thawing of the Cold War, paved the way for Namibia's independence from South Africa and the end of apartheid (Leys and Saul, 1995). The newly formed Namibian government rejected calls for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, instead promoting unity under the slogan 'One Namibia One Nation', and with the instruction to look forward, not back (Akuupa and Kornes, 2013). Consequentially, people from ethnicities previously aligned to South African and German colonisers, and people from diverse Namibian ethnicities systematically discriminated against and pitted competitively against each other, were expected to develop the new

⁵ The independence struggle is also known as the South African Border War, the Namibian War of Independence, the Bush War and the Angolan Bust War (Leys and Saul, 1995). I use independence struggle (uncapitalised) as it is the term I encountered whilst living in Namibia.

Namibia together. The life history interviews I conducted in Namibia took place twenty-five years after Namibia became independent.

1.3.2 Northern Ireland

The protracted ethnonational conflict in NI, known informally as the Troubles, commenced in the late 1960s (McEvoy, 2008). Ethnonational is more accurate than the more commonly used term sectarian, however, the reference to sect acknowledges Catholic and Protestant religions are synonymous with the two main ethnonational groups (Doherty and Poole, 1997; McGarry and O'Leary, 1995; O'Duffy, 1995). Broadly speaking, those who wish to be reunified with the rest of Ireland, Nationalists and/or Republicans, are primarily Catholic, and those who wish to remain in the United Kingdom, Unionists and/or Loyalists, are primarily Protestant (Jankowitz, 2018).⁶ The origins of the NI conflict trace back to 1169 when the Anglo-Norman Kingdom of England first invaded Ireland (Duffy, 1999) although more recent aspects are introduced here. Ireland was subsumed into the United Kingdom by the 1800 Act of Union, although following lengthy political and armed struggle, the Government of Ireland Act 1920 provided for an Irish Free State. This state excluded six north east counties, now NI, where the majority were descendants of English and Scottish settlers, and loyal to the United Kingdom (McKittrick and McVea, 2002). The Irish minority in NI, cut off from Ireland, was subject to decades of systematic discrimination and engaged in widespread civil right activism in the 1960s (Bosi, 2008). These protests, violently quelled by security forces, were followed by intercommunal rioting, displacing people from communities in Belfast and Derry (Kennedy-Pipe, 1997). From the late 1960s military violence by Republican and Loyalist paramilitary groups and British state security forces ensued.

⁶ The acronyms CNR (Catholic Nationalist Republican) and PUL (Protestant Unionist Loyalist) have become part of discourse, influenced by organisations funding peace and reconciliation work in NI (Jankowitz, 2018). These simplistic acronyms risk homogenising people. For example, one might identify as Nationalist, but not Republican, whilst also denouncing Catholicism. Where these acronyms are used in this thesis, it is in acknowledgement of their local use. The term Loyalist is often applied to populist supporters of Unionism willing to justify paramilitary violence to sustain NI (McGovern and Shirlow, 1997), which I also problematise as it suggests Unionism has no connection to paramilitary violence.

The peace process, like the conflict, has been protracted since the 1990s, the pinnacles of which were Republican and Loyalist ceasefires in 1994 and the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) in 1998 (Dixon and O'Kane, 2014). This multi-party agreement, endorsed by both British and Irish governments, acknowledges NI as part of the UK, which can only be changed with a majority vote both in NI and the Republic of Ireland. The GFA made provision for a power sharing or consociational governing structure along ethnonational lines (Hayes and McAllister, 2013) which ensures the significance of ethnonational difference structurally endures (Hughes, 2009). Given the power sharing government has been suspended as much as it has been operational, the peace process is still fragile, and the official absence of violence is arguably matched with the absence of meaningful resolution (Campbell, 2019).

Having left Northern Ireland eight months before the 1998 GFA and, later moved to Namibia, when it was almost thirteen years independent, my lived experience of both contexts were at different points along the conflict to post-conflict continuum. I have however, felt connections between both contexts, in respect of the interpersonal dynamics of division, which I now go on to discuss.

1.4 How My Lived Experience led to this Study

Whilst I reflect extensively here about how my lived experience led to this research, I need to clarify that this is not an autobiographical or autoethnographic study. However, the researcher's self can affect several aspects of the research process, particularly the choice of project (Letherby, 2000). When drawing on one's own biography in choosing a topic, researchers should be reflective on their subjective experience (Adler and Adler, 2012). Thus, I explain here I grew up in an Irish Republican environment, along the Irish/Northern Irish border, and, in childhood interpreted the conflict through Republican values. For example, in the Republican prison hunger strikes of the early 1980s, my affinity was with the strikers. I had an aversion towards symbols of Britishness, armed security forces, British flags etc. Following conflict incidents that touched me directly, I became involved in peace activism in early adulthood when I was a student in Belfast. This activism primarily involved cross-community work with young Catholics and

Protestants and included exploring Loyalist/Unionist and Nationalist/Republican identities and backgrounds. I gained insight into the mutuality of peoples' insecurities and concerns about dealing with the 'other' and how these concerns could be alleviated by ongoing meaningful, facilitated contact. Experiencing respectful, caring interactions between young people, initially suspicious of each other, left me with a strong belief in the power of facilitated encounter and meaningful interpersonal relationship building across difference.

Wanting to better understand 'the other side' in 1994 I arranged a community development student placement in an area of Belfast known as the Loyalist heartland (Shirlow and Coulter, 2014). The geographical reach of this organisation, which later employed me, theoretically included several interface communities, which in NI are:

the conjunction or intersection of two or more territories or social spaces, which are dominated, contested, or claimed by some or all members of the differing ethnonational groups.

(Jarman, 2004, p.5)

However, in the divided NI 'community' is synonymous with ethnonationality, so my work was restricted to Protestant / Unionist / Loyalist sides of the interface.

My Catholic background attracted attention and I was repeatedly told, in a matter-of-fact rather than sinister way, had I tried to do such community work as a Catholic man, I would have been shot. Donahoe (2017) concurs that women in NI are perceived as less of a threat and can cross divides in ways men cannot. The senior figure of our organisation was involved in a small Loyalist/Unionist 'Think Tank', mostly made up by male community and political leaders discussing the Troubles and peace process (see Hall, 1995). Additionally, our organisation facilitated a forum to ensure local developments were inclusive of women, who were active agents in the community, if less visible in strategic leadership roles.

As Donahoe (2017) recalls at community level in NI, women involved in community development and peacebuilding were thought of as 'wee women' doing 'wee women's work'.⁷ As such, the benefits of women being more able than men to cross divides were tempered by women's work being taken less seriously. Although I practically supported some women impacted by domestic and sexual violence, I was not engaged in public feminist activism challenging VAWG. I was occasionally aware of and engaged in anti-VAWG discussions and events, though my main anti-violence efforts, were 'Troubles' related. Within that, I believe I may have focused on men and boys as the main protagonists/potential change-makers in the NI conflict, perhaps internalising the 'wee women' identity. However, as feminism later became important to me, so did my interest in revisiting the issue of violence, as it impacts on women and girls. My work in Belfast was focused on engaging young people in community development, and I had regular in-depth discussions with them. They knew my ethnonational background, either because they could deduce it from my name, or were told. About two years after I started working with one group of young people, some confided feeling conflicted in that they liked working with me but had to keep it secret out of concern their families would find out they associated with a 'Taig'.⁸ This acknowledgement educated me about the difficulties the young people experienced engaging with me, inside their own community. The ways internal conflict denies people opportunities to form relations across division are specific to each context. This study gives me the opportunity to revisit the NI context, which is still segregated, although with a focus on how women activists form relations to address a common concern.

In 2001, I moved to Windhoek, the capital of Namibia, to work as a development manager with a focus on HIV, in a non-governmental organisation (NGO). I was briefed about the disparity in resources between White, so-called Coloured and Black people in Namibia, differences visible from the outset. However, I had not known anything about division between different indigenous Namibian ethnicities. The significance of ethnic identities can remain dynamic after conflict, and tensions between people in different groups can linger (Simonsen, 2005). Over several years I concluded that, like NI, Namibia has many interface areas,

⁷ Wee means small

⁸ Taig is a derogatory term for Catholic in NI

although it is not a term used in Namibia. Rural and urban segregation are systemic effects of colonialism and apartheid, which segregated people according to ethnicity (Leys and Brown, 2005; Müller-Friedman, 2006). The inadequacy of my previous analysis of apartheid being solely focused on skin colour, obscured the situation that, in Namibia, there are a considerable number of 'other' groups. The more familiar I became with peoples' lives and relations in ethnicised places, the more reminded I was of dynamics and nuances of division in NI. Hearing people describe other Namibian ethnicities in derisory terms, reminded me of discussions I experienced in NI, but with one key distinction: division is part of NI discourse and did not appear to be so in Namibia. In short, I was surprised at the extent of ethnic division, which provoked my interest in how people overcome it.

My focus on Namibian ethnicities is not to suggest colour and nationality did not feature in my experience in Namibia, because they did. Whilst I expected my White European identity to be noticed, I was genuinely shocked at the extent of the privilege that came with it. Although I was a development manager in a Namibian NGO, I was regularly invited to HIV strategy meetings with international donors. I became unsettled by the absence of Black Namibian organisational colleagues and peers in similar organisations, despite no discernible reason for me to be present instead of them. This excessive inclusion felt Eurocentric/global Northern-centric, or, as Dang, Rahman and Chingore-Munazvo (2021) argue, a sign of white supremacy that dominates global health. Baillie Smith and Jenkins (2017) contend the development sector has a history of othering those it exists to support. For me, this experience underscored the importance of local agency in development and strengthened my willingness to question claims about local, marginalised, poor people and women shaping development interventions and amplifying their voices in development processes.

My biography has not just shaped my wish to focus on how activists respond to post-conflict ethnonational/ethnic division in their situations, but also my choice of anti-VAWG activism. My interest in feminist anti-VAWG activism increased after I left Namibia. Leading a women's organisation in UK enhanced my insight into various insidious ways women are excluded and their contributions overlooked. Looking back, I sense VAWG was relegated below other concerns, the violence of

the Troubles in NI and HIV transmission in Namibia. However, as I was active in peacebuilding in NI and managed HIV services in Namibia, I accept the lack of attention on VAWG as my shortcoming, as well as being relevant to each place. I doubt I was primed then, as I am now, to appreciate the contributions of feminist activism. Therefore, whilst the purpose of the research is to better understand how activists overcome post-conflict division in order to effect change to a common problem, it is important to me that the activists are women and that the common problem is VAWG. Reflexivity should be practiced in relation to the research process and the researcher's self, with the latter requiring "self-critical sympathetic introspection" (England, 1994 p.82). Having focused here on how my biography influenced the choice of research topic, in Chapter 4, I will reflect on how my identity may have impacted interactions with participants.

1.5 Introducing Anti-VAWG Activism as Core to Global Women's Movements

VAWG is a central concern in a plethora of women's and feminist groups that contribute to development and human rights (Ferree and Tripp, 2006). Rather than a single global women's movement, there are various movements made up of local, national, and transnational networks, non-governmental organisations (NGO) of various sizes, international funding bodies and global entities, such as the UN (Basu, 2010). Three world conferences: UN Decade for Women (1975-1985) in Mexico City 1975, Copenhagen 1980, and Nairobi 1985, were significant in providing space for activists to discuss VAWG in their country contexts and to explore ways for new-anti-VAWG norms to emerge and be disseminated (Moghadam, 2005). Indeed, the elevation of VAWG from a previously a taboo issue to a significant global human rights priority is one of the most notable achievements of global women's activism since the 1970s (Antrobus, 2004; Harcourt, 2009; Hall, 2015; Htun and Weldon, 2012). As well as initiating one of the most concentrated periods of high level anti-VAWG policy gains, the UN Decade for Women also brought stark differences between women's movements in the global North and South, and their analyses and realities of oppression into focus (Joachim, 2007; Johnson Odum, 1991). Global South actors highlighted the specificity of VAWG concerns from state oppression and conflict contexts. Disagreements about awareness raising methods strained South/North relations,

as South activists were aggrieved that some influential North activists depicted their situations in oversimplified, homogenising ways, overemphasising their victim status (Tripp, et al. 2011). Mama (2004) argues feedback from global South activists significantly contributed to improved feminist consciousness in global movements, specifically regarding inequalities caused by colonialism, race, class, and other oppressive structures. Input from global South activists, including Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) sowed the seeds of what become Resolution 1325 (Antrobus, 2105; Cockburn, 2007). An analysis of various developments and perspectives in feminisms in the North and South follows in Chapter 2.2. Currently, eliminating all forms of VAWG, exploitation and harmful practices, is part of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) under goal 5, to increase women's empowerment and gender equality (United Nations, 2015).

1.6 Thesis Structure

In **Chapter 1** I introduce the research rationale. As part of an extended literature review, in **Chapter 2**, I analyse a range of relationalities within and surrounding women's anti-VAWG activism. I begin with analysing relations in feminism and alternatives to feminism in the global North and South, before looking at the complexities of how VAWG occurs during and following conflict and how this VAWG is addressed. I then analyse agency highlighting it's relational, contextual, and fluid components, before critically reviewing relational aspects of activism. Finally, because activism occurs in different places and spaces, I analyse theoretical perspectives on how relations in places and spaces can influence the activism occurring therein.

Continuing the literature review into **Chapter 3** I analyse the relational issues arising from the conflicted histories of Namibia and Northern Ireland, specifically ethnic and ethnonational division, and their gendered impacts. Further, in each country section I provide an overview of women's anti-VAWG activism. The theoretical and analytical development in Chapter 2 and 3 help inform the research questions:

- What are anti-VAWG activists' perspectives on the impact of conflict and the post-conflict context on their lives and activism?
- How do women activists come together in anti-VAWG activism and exercise agency across ethnic / ethnonational and other differences?
- How do post-conflict factors shape anti-VAWG activism relations?

In **Chapter 4** I analyse my development of a feminist, qualitative research paradigm, and my choice of life history anti-VAWG activists as post-conflict actors. I review my participant recruitment methods and challenges I encountered, including two participants' rejection of the proposed use of pseudonyms. I explain my process of thematically analysing twenty life history interviews and the tool I developed to manage this. Finally, I explain the challenges I encountered in determining which themes to develop when writing up this thesis.

In **Chapter 5** I analyse activists' accounts of VAWG perpetrated by conflict actors in their own communities and argue for an understanding of the multifaceted ways this is a difficult issue to address in activism. The forms of intragroup VAWG perpetrated, the responses to them and the relational challenges of taking this VAWG up as an activism issue are distinct in both countries. However, in both places, activists concerned about this issue hesitate, yet persist, amidst the unwillingness of others to engage with it.

In **Chapter 6** I analyse accounts of activism between feminist activists of different ages, conceptualising aspects of their synergistic collaboration as relational agency. I argue solidary relationships between feminist activists across different ages have the potential to improve activism in the here-and-now and are also necessary for continuity that enables activists to respond to long-term threats and oppressions. I exemplify this argument using two long-term issues, the politicised homophobic repression of feminism by state actors in Namibia and the under-participation of Protestant Unionist Loyalist (PUL) women in activism in NI.

In **Chapter 7** I analyse how solidarities emerge across ethnic/ethnonational and other differences in the discussions and practices of anti-VAWG activism. As well as demonstrating how these solidarities can form a basis for relational agency

production, I analyse how activists mitigate situations where relations are strained, including refocusing on the high-level or superordinate goals of activism.

In **Chapter 8** I bring the research to a conclusion. I state the overall thesis position which is that forms and practices of relational agency analysed in this study are shaped by solidarities across age and ethnic difference. This relational agency can help anti-VAWG activists as they challenge oppressions. However, just as relations can fuel their agency, concerns about relations can hold activists back from addressing some contentious issues, such as VAWG perpetrated by conflict actors. I emphasise the original contribution to knowledge this research makes, which is its expansion of previous understandings of relational agency and its reciprocal relationship to solidarities. I reflect on the entirety of the study, including its limitations and opportunities for further research.

1.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have set out the purpose of this study to develop an understanding of relations in women's post-conflict anti-violence VAWG activism in post-conflict settings. Not only have I justified the intellectual rationale based on the underacknowledged role of post-conflict anti-VAWG actors, but I have also expressed my personal rationale for choosing this topic, based on my lived experience in NI and Namibia. I have placed anti-VAWG activism in the work of the wider women's activism globally and set out the remaining structure of the thesis. In the next chapter, I analyse literature on a range of factors in and surrounding anti-VAWG activism in post conflict places.

Chapter 2: Analysing Factors Surrounding Women's Post-Conflict Anti-VAWG Activism

2.1 Introduction

To understand relations within a particular form of activism, in this case, anti-VAWG activism, it is useful to understand relations in the surrounding factors that influence the activism. Therefore, in this chapter I set about developing a conceptual framework by analysing literature on factors that influence women's anti-VAWG activism in post-conflict places and drawing out their relationalities. By relationality I simply mean, determining relationships or connectedness (Mayhew, 2015) or "drawing interconnections" (Yeung, 2005, p.1.). The factors I analyse are feminism, VAWG during and after conflict, agency, activism and finally, the places and spaces in which activism occurs. In the first of four subsequent sections, I begin by analysing relationships in and between diverse feminisms and alternatives to feminism in the global North and South. I prioritise the parts of the North and South that take in Northern Ireland and Namibia, to help later make sense of feminist relations in both places.⁹ Secondly, I analyse VAWG in the context of conflict and its aftermath, and some of the relationalities in activism and policy responses to this VAWG. Whilst acknowledging the dominance of discourses around intergroup conflict-related VAWG, I focus on VAWG within groups and communities, due to its relevance to ongoing place-based activism. Thirdly, I analyse theoretical conceptions of agency and activism. I challenge traditional conceptions of agency as a fixed attribute possessed by individuals and set out a transdisciplinary analysis of agency as a relational, fluid, and contextual phenomenon. Drawing on scholarship on activism and social movements, I analyse relational elements of collective identity and solidarities, leading me to argue solidarities are more pertinent to this study. Fourthly, I analyse theory on places and spaces, focusing on how place-based and spatial relations can influence activism. This involves analysing useful concepts developed by scholars of place and space, including the politics of place, time-space, and field.

⁹ In chapter 3 I carry out an analysis of feminist relations in Namibia and Northern Ireland

2.2 Relationalities of Feminisms in the Global North and South

Analysing relationalities of feminisms in different parts of the world involves finding out the stories of these feminisms. I examine these stories in depth here, to later make sense of whether and how feminisms in NI and Namibia fit into the wider feminist developments around them.¹⁰ When introducing anti-VAWG activism developments in the context of wider global women's activism, in Chapter 1, I highlighted differences and tensions between global North and South activists. The context for much of those differences becomes crystallised through an analysis of how feminist perspectives developed in the global North and South, which I undertake here. To maximise relevance to the research sites, my analysis of the North focuses on western Europe, particularly the UK, and the USA. In the global South, I prioritise on Africa, particularly southern Africa. In the first sub-section I show how relational issues in the US and western Europe have been bound in differences between diverse strands, waves, and generations of feminisms. In the second sub-section, I analyse how relationalities in Africa, have centred on diverse perspectives about what it means to be feminist and African, in the context of Africa's history of being dominated and oppressed by the global North. In the third sub-section, I trace some of the tensions between North and South feminisms, related to their different experiences and analyses of inequalities. Given the diversity of feminisms, which I show in this chapter section, a key determinant of feminist relations is the extent to which feminist actors converge or diverge in their fundamental analyses of power and visions for change. Overall, my analysis points to different challenges in achieving solidarity in feminist relations and a constant need to guard against splits in local and global feminisms.

2.2.1 Strands and Waves of Western Feminisms

Anti-VAWG activism and feminisms are inextricably linked. However, activists may relate to a particular feminist ideology, a composite of feminist perspectives or

¹⁰ I analyse feminist and women's activism relations in Namibia and Northern Ireland in Chapter 3.

be non-feminist. Among many feminisms, liberal feminism, which campaigns for equality in education, the workplace, public institutions, and policies relating to families, is the most pervasive in liberal/neoliberal democracies (Epure, 2014; Hannam, 2013). This dominance is somewhat inevitable, given the emphasis on engaging with mainstream public state institutions, and the overall effect is that women's rights gains are usually made in otherwise unchanged societal structures (Connolly, 2006; Tong, 2017). When the term 'second wave of feminism' became popularised in the 1970s no-one could have predicted how pervasively waves would be used to describe and distinguish surges of feminist activism.¹¹ The wave concept is analysed here because it is common parlance, although analysis of literature shows it to be temporally and practically problematic. In practice, many feminist activists are confused about what each wave means ideologically and where to position themselves therein (Evans and Chamberlain, 2015). This is unsurprising, given that feminist waves have different place-based features and timelines and aspects associated with one place are regularly misapplied to another (Redfearn and Aune, 2013). As I later show, the wave construct risks complicating relations between activists associated with different waves, particularly activists of different ages. As contemporary feminist activists may align to second, third or fourth wave feminisms, all three are included in this analysis.

The Second Wave

Whilst the second wave overlapped in the United States (US) and Britain, British activism started several years later and differently to US (Aune and Hollyoak, 2018; Redfearn and Aune, 2013). However, in both places, the women's movement was significant in the 1970s because of how feminist activists of different perspectives came together and apart. Literature shows a spectrum of accounts about the collaborative and conflicted relations between liberal, socialist, Black, radical, and revolutionary feminist groups¹² although the issue of VAWG

¹¹ United States journalist Martha Weinman Lear first coined the term in 1968, to distinguish women's liberation movement activities of the time from the campaign for women's suffrage over fifty years earlier (van der Tuin, 2016).

¹² See Ryan (1992) for an account in the US, Connolly, and O'Toole (2005) for Ireland, and Pugh (2015) for Britain

was often at the centre of both the merges and splits. In the US, different feminisms campaigning together, in large movements, such as the National Organisation of Women, became part of public consciousness. Radical and revolutionary feminist visions of women's liberation require dismantling systemic patriarchal oppression of women through structural revolution (Rowland and Klein, 1990; Rudy, 2001). However, radical feminist demands for action on VAWG converged with a liberal feminist emphasis on campaigning for gender equality legal reform (Binard, 2017; Wendell, 1987). Significant divisions manifest on contentious VAWG issues, such as whether pornography and sex work are inherently oppressive to women and contribute to increased VAWG (Ryan, 1992; Tong, 2017). Following subsequent splits some anti-pornography radical feminists aligned with right wing conservative religious and political actors (Ciclitira, 2004). Even though radical groups set up in the US in 1970s were short lived (Ryan, 1992), radical feminism has shaped understandings of VAWG as systemic and patriarchal, rather than solely attributable to individual violent men (Kinnell, 2008).

Although socialist and radical feminism are often perceived as aligned (LeGates, 2001), it is a mistake to conflate the two, primarily because of the potential for key divergences around VAWG.¹³ In Britain, radical feminists were the main protagonists in anti-VAWG awareness, protest and initiating support services for violated women (Kelly, 1988). Early feminist achievements included reduced restrictions on abortion in Britain and on birth control in the UK (Hannam, 2013).¹⁴ Not only did legislative gains around VAWG take longer in Britain, but so also did national level feminist campaigning on the issue of VAWG. Sell (2013) argues the delay was due to British socialist feminism fearing male-female division on VAWG might weaken the unity of those in the class struggle. National Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) Conferences put together a list of demands for women's liberation in respect of equal pay, access to childcare, abortion etc. throughout the 1970s (MacKay, 2011). It was not until what turned out to be last WLM conference of 1978, that ending violence against women was added to the

¹³ For example, Setch (2002) argues division between socialist and radical feminists in the London Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) of the 1970s, resulted in radical feminism being side-lined.

¹⁴ These developments were utilised by radical feminists in Ireland to protest the inaccessibility of contraception. In 1971 Irish feminists smuggled birth control pills on a train from Belfast to Dublin in an act of public defiance (Connolly, 2006).

list, as proposed by activists in domestic abuse and rape crisis support services (Rees, 2010).¹⁵ Negative media coverage of feminists disagreeing with each other and engaging in disruptive protest - radical anti-VAWG sit ins, and marches such as 'Reclaim the Night' peaked in the late 70s (Hannam, 2013) - formed part of a backlash against feminism portrayed across much of the world.

The dominance of liberal feminism during the second wave was problematised as exclusionary Black feminisms (Sandoval, 2000). Insightful Black feminist analyses on the impact of race, sexualised hierarchies, class, and poverty on the lives of Black women were critical of the lack of awareness shown by mainstream liberal feminism, accused of pursuing an imperial white, middle-class agenda (see Amos and Parmar, 1984; Davis, 1982; hooks, 1982). Important contributions from Black scholars, underacknowledged at the time (Thompson, 2010) include the concept of intersectionality which protests perspectives of discrimination and violence being solely located in gender (see Combahee River Collective, 1982).

Intersectionality became influential in later waves, after Crenshaw (1989; 1991) utilised it to illustrate the negative effects of multi-layered oppressions imposed on Black women, on the grounds of race *and* gender, and legal frameworks that only saw them as either Black or women, but not both. Therefore, although marred by conflict and division around the issue of VAWG, it is undeniable second wave feminisms made lasting impacts in terms of making VAWG unacceptable (Connolly, 2005).

The Third Wave

Third wave feminism, a surge of activism by young women from early 1990s in US and late 1990s in UK (Aune and Hollyoak, 2018) is so diverse, it is not easily defined (Evans, 2016b). Analyses range from critiquing the third wave as individualistic and post-feminist, to celebrating it as a post structural approach encouraging women to define feminism for themselves (Aune and Hollyoak, 2018; Evans, 2016b). McRobbie (2009; 2011) points to feminine consumerism and an

¹⁵ At the same point, towards the end of the conference, a group of revolutionary feminists tried to progress a motion to scrap the whole list of demands, as they did each year, due to objecting to cooperating with the state. On this occasion, the conference ended in chaos and conflict (Rees, 2010).

absence of political critique in her analysis of the third wave being post-feminist. Indeed, music and fashion are key features of this wave, captured in mass media messages such as the Spice Girls' girlpower. However, the third wave also had an influential anti-commercial subculture, such as the US Riot Grrrl punk scene making and circulating zines, and protesting VAWG by reclaiming terms like bitch and slut, designed to insult women (Garrison, 2000; Helmbrecht and Love, 2009). Hernández and Rehman, (2002) analyse aspects of the US third wave as a hybrid of second wave, Black, queer, transnational and Global south feminisms. In Britain, third wave activists, guided by intersectionality have pushed for feminist change on VAWG, just using different activism methods than previously, such as online engagement (Evans, 2016a; 2016b; Redfearn and Aune, 2013). It is therefore premature to label this wave post-feminist (Kinser, 2004).

The Fourth Wave

Scholars contend the fourth wave is underway (Chamberlain, 2017). I note that several features identified by Cochrane (2014) as fourth wave, challenging rape culture, online feminism, and intersectional recognition of different identities, are like the third wave features I discussed above. Activists and feminists with no prior activism experience, increasingly occupy digital spaces to share testimonies of harassment and abuse and call out those who downplay rape culture and misogyny (Chamberlain, 2017; Cochrane, 2015; Mendes and Ringrose, 2019). Sites such as Hollaback, Everyday Sexism and the hashtag #MeToo enable a counter visibility where the gaze is placed on abusive men (Gómez and Aden, 2017; Loney Howes, 2019). We appear to be in a moment when 'networked feminist counter publics' are using anger in visible ways to fight back against VAWG (Mendes and Ringrose, 2019, p.40). Trans inclusion is increasingly being interpreted as an indicator of intersectionality which, in Britain, Evans and Chamberlain (2015) associate with third and fourth wave feminists. Stryker and Bettecher (2016) argue polarised notions of trans inclusion and exclusion in feminism are overly simplistic and do not reflect the spectrum of responses experienced by trans people in feminist activism. Nevertheless, conflict and division around trans inclusion / exclusion are emerging in feminism and anti-

VAWG activism.¹⁶ As such, the labels we apply to waves of feminism in respect of these issues have serious relational implications, which is an aspect of the wave concept I go on to problematise.

Feminist Waves and Generational Discord

The wave metaphor is widely conflated with feminist generations and scholarship on feminist waves deals extensively with generational discord.¹⁷ Therefore, differences between generations become emphasised, rather than differences within waves (Henry, 2004) even though the above chronology shows diversity and differences within waves. Lewis and Marine, (2015 p.131) argue:

waves of feminism suggest homogenous bodies of thought that are distinct from one another, and, within each wave, feminists acting in agreement with one another—each a droplet in the wave.

Consequentially, age range and generation have become fundamental aspects through which feminist difference is theoretically analysed. The focus on generational discord poses a relational question about how feminists from different waves associate with each other. Reger (2015) acknowledges feminists in older generations can disidentify from methods used by younger activists, for example, Slutwalk activists wearing revealing clothing to problematise blaming victims of sexual assault. Morrison (2020) expresses concern that intersectionality is being claimed by younger activists as a fourth wave trait and juxtaposed with trans exclusionary radical feminism, labelled as second wave. The implication is trans exclusion becomes portrayed as a generational problem, when the focus should be on political ideology of exclusion (Morrison, 2020). Therefore, the ways wave narratives are being interpreted risk causing division between feminists of different ages.

¹⁶ For example, at the 2014 Reclaim the Night event in London radical feminists distributed a pamphlet denying trans women were women and describing them as transgender males who perpetrate VAWG comparatively to non-transgender males (Ahmed, 2016).

¹⁷ See Gillis and Munford (2004), Henry (2004 and 2005), Lewis and Marine (2015) and, Reger (2015).

Undoubtedly, intersectionality has gained increased feminist attention (Carbado et al., 2013) to the point it has caused a “paradigm shift” in thinking about how structural inequality contributes to violence (Ackerly and True, 2010, p.469). For example, proponents of affirmative advocacy, an approach grounded in intersectionality, advocate that societal level change be centred around those experiencing the most marginalisation and disadvantage (Strolovitch, 2007). However, it is reasonable to query the extent to these developments are wave related or part of the conceptual evolution of intersectionality. The wave metaphor is concurrently viewed as divisive (Gillis and Munford, 2004) and an umbrella under which diverse feminisms gather, and between which solidary inter-wave dialogue can develop (Evans and Chamberlain, 2015). Whilst the idea of solidary inter-wave dialogue may sound appealing, what it is and how it might occur are not totally clear. Lewis and Marine (2015) recommend conceptualising feminism as a tapestry rather than waves, arguing this metaphor encourages more reflexivity and intergenerational compassion. Given the above problems associated with waves and how they are interpreted, I query how useful waves are at engendering unified feminist activism to address VAWG, even though VAWG undoubtedly remains a central feminist concern. However, as NI is positioned between Britain and the US, where the debates analysed here are taking place, this analysis prepares me for analysing ideological tensions that may be discussed in life history interviews, about activists from different ages ranges and associated with different waves.

2.2.2 Afrocentric Perspectives and Feminist Developments in Africa

During the US-Euro second wave, most African countries had either recently emerged out of colonial rule or were still trying to secure independence, meaning African activists were addressing vastly different issues. Diverse perspectives developed in Africa at this time, around whether to incorporate aspects of Western feminism or reject it outright, as part of decolonisation. Literature shows aspects of these perspectives are still meshed in contemporary perspectives in manifold ways, which affect whether, when and how anti-VAWG, women’s rights, and gender equality actors are willing to declare themselves as feminist. I analyse these on two levels, perspectives explicit in their Afrocentric features, and activism-oriented efforts to develop collaborations between diverse feminisms in

Africa. This analysis is undertaken to show that while individual strands of feminist theory were initially developed to reject and provide alternatives to Western perspectives, the more recent emphasis is on bringing diverse feminisms together for transnational organising in Africa, that is globally linked.

Afrocentric Feminisms / Alternatives to Feminisms

Afrocentric perspectives of west African, mainly Nigerian academics from the mid-1980s fuelled debates about what it means to be African and feminist (Mekgwe, 2008; Salo, 2001; Wane, 2011). African womanism, Stiwanism, Motherism and Nego-Feminism, all highlight African features that make them distinct from Western feminism, although as I show, some include homophobic features. Postcolonial analysis runs through these perspectives, particularly the material challenges African women face due to racialised colonial legacies, neo-colonial inequalities and deeply entrenched oppressive patriarchal structures (Awinpoka Akurugu, 2021). Tripp (2016) argues these perspectives attracted more contemporaneous attention in US and Europe than Africa. This geographical feature was, in part, due to where the works were published (Arndt, 2002) and it also likely to be because the authors, having spent time living in US and Europe, referred to western feminisms in their perspectives. For example, Ogunyemi (1985) termed her womanist perspective African womanism, to distinguish it from the African American womanist perspective developed by Walker (Phillip, 2006). Both perspectives converge by viewing sexism and male dominated institutions as concerns among, "the impact of racism, neo-colonialism, nationalism, economic instability, and psychological disorientation on black lives" (Ogunyemi, 1985, p.71). However, Ogunyemi argued US womanism and white feminism "overlook African peculiarities", specifically the importance of having children and a lack of compatibility with lesbian love (Ogunyemi, 1996, p.114), an argument criticised for oversimplifying Western feminism as anti-male and lesbian (Arndt, 2000; Tripp, 2016). Advocating African womanism remains separate from Western feminism and African American womanism, Ogunyemi also discouraged reconciliatory efforts between White and Black feminisms, believing racism against Black women to be intractable (Awinpoka Akurugu, 2021; Maparyan, 2012).

Stiwanism includes a Marxist analysis of multiple oppressions faced by Black African women on the grounds of race, gender, and class, and encourages a reconnection with pre-colonial resistance and future African transformation in harmony with men (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994). When Ogundipe-Leslie developed Stiwanism, derived from the acronym “social transformation including women in Africa” (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994, p.229) she held off from calling it feminist, lest it would be met with resistance.¹⁸ Awinpoka Akurugu (2021) expresses concern about diluting or obscuring feminism to make it palatable, on the basis this risks subsequent gender relations maintaining the status quo, rather than achieving transformation. Motherism, developed by Acholonu as both an Afrocentric feminist theory and an alternative to feminism, focuses on domestic nurturing in harmony with the natural environment, as ‘the essence of African womanhood’ (Acholonu, 1995 p.110). Like Ogunyemi, Acholonu spent a considerable period outside of Africa, first in Europe and then US, and similarly to African womanism, Motherism argues the emphasis African women place on motherhood sets them apart from Western feminists (Arndt, 2002). Like Stiwanism, Motherism rejects the colonial imposition of Western values on African culture and expresses a goal of transforming African societies through male/female complementarity (Acholonu, 1995; Mateveke, 2019). Describing the archetypal rural African woman as “innocent, unspoilt, unsophisticated in her world view, her thinking and her way of life” (Acholonu, 1995, p.121), Motherism appears not to acknowledge African women’s diversities (Awinpoka Akurugu, 2021; Lewis, 2001; Nkealah, 2016)

The last perspective, Nnaemeka’s, Nego-feminism also promotes complementary male/female relations but does not shy from the word feminist. Nego denotes “the feminism of negotiation; no ego feminism” (Nnaemeka, 2004, p.660 and 661) and the perspective emphasises African relational practices of compromise and acting without personal gain. Compromise, in this context, includes deciding when and when not to confront the patriarchy (Arndt, 2002). Nnaemeka (2005) acknowledges the pervasive view from political and social leaders that feminism is an unwelcome import to Africa. However, she encourages solidarity between Western and African feminisms whilst challenging Western feminists to be open to

¹⁸ Just as Sell (2013) argued British socialist feminism did not assert strongly enough regarding some women’s rights issues in the 1970s, to maintain strong male female relations for the class struggle, it appears Ogundipe-Leslie feared sacrificing unity between men and women by arguing for feminism.

learning from African peers, and focus more on women's material needs than excessive theorising (see Nnaemeka, 2004).

The perspectives above coalesce around some common themes including working collaboratively with men, the distinctness of African experiences of colonial oppression, and visions of decolonised African freedom (Alkali *et al.*, 2013). However, decolonial visions vary among them and some draw heavy criticism from feminists in Africa. Aspects of African womanism and Motherism are criticised as homophobic, separatist, and regressive.¹⁹ While these Afrocentric perspectives lacked widespread exposure early on, they have since been widely diffused within Africa. Indeed, they are detailed here because, as published works, the features of the perspectives are still being analysed and debated. This may seem an obvious point, but one that has resonance given feminist scholars in Africa highlight a longstanding problem of being overlooked, by often global North publishers.²⁰ There are significant diversities within and between Africa's fifty-four countries. As such, it is problematic to uncritically define specific attributes as universally African (Mekgwe 2008). So, rather than portraying African feminism or feminism in Africa as a single phenomenon, it is more purposeful to acknowledge feminisms in Africa (Mama, 2019), as I go on to examine.

Developing Diverse Feminisms in Africa

The spread of liberal democracy and neoliberalism in Africa precipitated liberal feminist engagement with public policy and law-making similarly to the global North (Ahikire, 2014; Lewis, 2010).²¹ Substantial gains within individual countries and across Africa through bodies such as African Union (AU) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) include laws and policies on VAWG.²² However, analysts concerned about insufficient critique of political leaders from

¹⁹ See Awinpoka Akurugu, (2021) Salami, (2017) and Mama (2019).

²⁰ See Gqola, 2001, Lewis 2001; 2010, Mama, 2017; 2019. Such is the paucity in feminist publications from within Africa, the first academic journal in Africa to feature the word feminist in the title, the Southern African Feminist Review, was not published until 1995 (Mama, 2017).

²¹ One approach pioneered in Africa, gender mainstreaming, has become commonplace at national government since the UN Conference on Women in Beijing 1995 (Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead, 2013; Tripp, 2018).

²² Legislation in Namibia on rape and domestic violence is among the most noteworthy. See Chapter 3.

some state feminist actors, argue these developments have been at the expense of radical feminist justice (see Gouws, 2010; Lewis, 2010; Mama, 2019). Tripp et al. (2009) attribute this lack of critique to a dynamic in which the unity between men and women fighting colonialism, continued in the immediate post-independence period as positive relations between male political leaders and newly formed women's organisations.

Portrayals of African feminism as conservative overlook that feminist activists, often outside government, have pursued radical post-independence changes, particularly regarding VAWG, sexual rights, and addressing restrictions associated with culture and religion (Ahikire, 2014). The 1985 Nairobi UN Conference on Women was a catalyst for feminist organising (Antrobus, 2015; Kolawole, 2002) and by the 1990s explicitly feminist organising increased, often with international donor funding, rather than state aid (Tripp et al. 2009). Where activists became more vocal in their critique of governments for not sufficiently addressing women's issues, relations between independent feminist groups and ruling parties deteriorated, and governments pursued tactics to quell feminism, including claims feminism is unAfrican (Baksh and Harcourt, 2015). Framed by political leaders as decolonisation (Epprecht, 2004), the dismissal of feminism as lesbian and the rejection of both as Western-centric "disguises a deep-seated conservatism thinly masquerading as a healthy populism" (Lewis, 2010, p.112). McFadden (2007) among those who experienced such oppression, argues postcolonial feminism requires a willingness to protest postcolonial governments exceeding authority and control, not just colonial ones. However, not only does such an oppressive political culture make challenging the state difficult, it discourages women from declaring themselves to be feminist. It was in this context, among other challenges, activists set about strengthening transnational feminist relationships in Africa. The African Feminist Forum (AFF) was established in 2006, with previous attempts having stalled due to bitter disagreements on what constitutes feminism/African feminism (Imam, 2011; Tamale, 2020). AFF founders developed an explicitly feminist charter, specifying there is no need to pursue a single feminist identity, though containing principles to which members ascribe.²³ Tamale (2020) argues AFF acknowledges Africa as a single historical unit, while

²³ Forum principles include need to publicly identify as feminist and to develop theory and practice in Africa to address interlocking systems that exclude, marginalise, and oppress women (Imam, 2011).

recognising heterogeneity of cultures, contexts, and impacts of patriarchal power in Africa:

Our current struggles as African feminists are inextricably linked to our past as a continent, diverse pre-colonial contexts, slavery, colonization, liberation struggles, neo-colonialism, globalization etc.

(African Feminist Forum, 2006, para. 4 and 6).

There are calls from feminist activists and academics to explore the potential of feminism utilising the concept of Ubuntu.²⁴ Ubuntu, internationally popularised by Bishop Desmond Tutu, is most simply understood through the expression 'Ummuntu ngumuntu ngabantu – a person becomes a person only through other persons' (Masolo, 2019). As such, Ubuntu is widely associated with South Africa, although it has been traced as far north as Egypt (Tamale, 2020). Ubuntu philosophises how human beings are intertwined in ethical relations from the moment of their birth (Cornell and van Marle, 2015) leading Tamale (2020) to liken Ubuntu to a communitarian human rights concept. Several feminist scholars argue gender justice can be achieved by tapping into approaches meaningful to societies where Ubuntu is implicit. Gouws and van Zyl (2015) argue a synthesis of feminist relational approaches to care and Ubuntu conceptions of justice could create a relational ethic of feminist justice. Similarly, Tamale (2020) sees potential in using Ubuntu principles to guide decolonial feminist justice for the future. Although such discussions are at an early stage, they highlight how indigenous African philosophy and feminism are being reimagined as symbiotic.

Finally, although the term fourth wave is not widely used in African feminisms, unsurprising, given the differences in the North South feminist trajectories I discussed here, activism using fourth wave methods has recently surged in parts of Africa (Salami, 2017).²⁵ These developments show perspectives and approaches assimilated into current feminisms and activism in Africa are

²⁴ I return to Ubuntu later in this chapter in section 4.1 regarding the relational features of agency.

²⁵ See the website www.africanfeminism.com set up in 2012 for "all African feminists in their plurality to reflect the personal journeys and social movements" (African Feminism, nd).

continually redefined in relation to local contexts, and in response to global developments. Direct-action student activism to decolonise higher education in South Africa in 2015, had considerable input from explicitly intersectional feminist and gender non-confirming activists (see Khan, 2017; Ndelu, Dlakavu and Boswell, 2017).²⁶ As Ahikire (2014, p.9) argues, in African contexts, feminism is a “complex phenomenon to conceptualise”. Amongst that complexity are relational dynamics in which anti-VAWG activists may hesitate or outright decline to describe themselves as feminist (Gaidzanwa, 2013) whilst others may be loud and proud in their feminist expressions.

2.2.3 The Relational Effects of Divergent Feminist Analyses

Feminists are at the forefront of critiquing structural causes of oppression of women and girls, including effects of war, colonialism, development, capitalism, and neoliberalism (Ackerly, 2018; Aguinaga et al., 2013; Raj, 2011). I argue the convergence or divergence of different feminist analyses have relational implications. In other words, the way different feminists view the injustices feminists seek to have remedied influence how they relate to each other. As such, conflicted relations are somewhat inevitable in feminist activism and scholarship. However, when analyses differ, and feminist efforts pull in opposing directions the relational consequences can be far reaching.

In Chapter 1, I highlighted the UN Decade for Women in terms of progress, but also conflict. During conference exchanges those representing global North feminisms seemed slow to grasp arguments from global South representatives locating women’s oppression beyond gender, in violent political, military, imperial and economic systems (Johnson Odim, 1991). It is alleged global North representatives resisted these analyses and downplayed them in written event summaries (see Joachim, 2007).²⁷ Significant bridge building, between North and

²⁶ Feminist counter publics are increasingly organising anti-VAWG protests, such as Slut Walk (Salami, 2017) and involved in online organising using hashtags such as #TotalShutdown (Clark, Mafokoane, and Nyathi, 2019). Although instigated in South Africa, similar organising is emerging in neighbouring countries. I include these examples as a footnote as they have mostly occurred after my research visit to Namibia in 2015.

²⁷ In the 1985 Nairobi Conference, DAWN launched a book and hosted panels, critiquing issues and recommending measures, such as reductions in military spending, to challenge the domination of the global North cohort at previous conferences and ensure a legacy for global South perspectives (Antrobus, 2015).

South actors within global movements cause Baksh and Harcourt (2015, p.4) to conclude they are generally “committed to shared values and solidarity across differences”. However, tensions and conflicts have recurred at different points, with global South actors repeating the concern about excessive influence being exerted from the North (Mendoza, 2002; Walsh, 2016). Scholars argue that to maximise unity global women’s movements need to accept the ongoing challenges of addressing power imbalances and accommodating diverse forms of resistance, as well as diversities in women’s experiences according to how they are affected by local and global relationships, geopolitically (Baksh and Harcourt, 2015; Miguda, 2010; Thayer, 2009). This is the solidarity challenge Mohanty (2003, p.170) writes about when she argues:

claiming universality of gender oppression is not the same as arguing for the universal rights of women based on the particularities of our experiences.

Not only have global South feminisms problematised the dominance of feminisms from more privileged geopolitical positions, but they have also been at the forefront of critiquing uneven development. The colonial heritage of state sponsored development is undeniable (see Morgan 1964; Kothari, 2002; Craggs, 2014). Imperial self-interest was behind many initial interventions in the global South presented by colonisers as philanthropic, and which continued after formal colonisation ended (Kothari, 2002; Mayo, 1975; Midgley, Hardiman and Narine, 1986).²⁸ Post-colonial feminisms have argued race and gender biases in development are due to dominant Western worldviews, and the legacy of colonial imperialism in the global South (see Kothari, 2002; McEwan, 2001; 2018; Horn, 2020). Further, as Eyben, Kabeer and Cornwall (2008) argue, when development is focused on economic growth and not gendered social and political relations, the position of women and girls worsens. Feminist critiques of development go hand in hand with their critiques of neoliberalism, a project to advance well-being through free market capitalism (Harvey, 2007) which has been spread worldwide

²⁸ Aspects of the colonial approach to development were replicated in NI during the Troubles, which influenced how community development practice emerged (Dominelli, 2019; Griffiths, 1974; Lewis, 2006).

by global financial institutions and subsumed approaches to international development (Hart, 2010). Feminist critiques of global neoliberalism include that it has deepened women's and girls' experiences of poverty; led to increased exploitative and insecure working in informal economies, often requiring women to leave their children to follow work; and increased their vulnerability to violence (Bannerji, 2016; Bhattacharyya, 2015; Carty and Mohanty, 2015; Smith, 2008; True, 2015). Further, anti-VAWG activists and women-focused organisations have highlighted that neoliberalism has restricted their ability to respond. This concern is expressed by some organisations providing emotional support, as such care work which has become commodified and de-politicised by states and donors, through procurement processes (Lenrner and Allen, 2009; Mohanty, 2013).

However, even when feminisms recognise the same systems as being oppressive, such as global neoliberalism, differences in their standpoints or in aspects of their perspectives can get in the way of forming solidary relations, as the analysis in this section demonstrates.²⁹ Overall, my analysis of feminist trajectories in the selected global North and South areas, as well as the different feminist critiques of global issues, points to the difficulties of achieving solidarity in feminist relations.³⁰ These difficulties can apply across waves, generations, feminist ideologies, identities, and different experiences of inequalities according to global positionings. As my research undertakes interviews with women activists on their life histories of potentially feminist activism I can reasonably expect to hear accounts of conflicted relations associated with these factors. As Emejulu (2018, p.272) argues, "feminist solidarity between women cannot be presumed... It requires tough discussions". The same argument can be applied to dealing with VAWG associated with conflict and post-conflict contexts, which I now go on to explore.

²⁹ As a further example, Fraser's (1997; 2009) critique of neoliberalism, argued the feminist focus on identity issues during the second wave, was to the detriment of advocating for economic justice. In so doing, she assessed feminist identity-based activism focused on race, sexuality etc. as cultural. She was heavily criticised for not acknowledging how this activism challenges marginalisation on material and substantive justice grounds, (see Young, 1997), and for failing to recognise its sophisticated anti-neoliberal analysis, particularly from global South scholars (see Aslan and Gambetti, 2011; Bhandar and Ferreira da Silva, 2013).

³⁰ I analyse solidarity in section 4.2 below.

2.3 Women, VAWG and (Post) Conflict Situations

Diverse forms of armed conflict; civil war, ethnicised wars, low or high intensity interstate wars, and militarised disputes and events falling short of war, occur according to context (Black, 1998; Szayna *et al.*, 2017). Conflict-related VAWG has emerged as a key concern for international human rights organisations in recent decades (UN Women, 2010). However, as I argue in the first sub-section below, although conflict-related VAWG occurs in a variety of forms and contexts, attention has been focused on highly publicised incidents of mass sexual violence and not on less well highlighted community level harms and private intimate violence (Ní Aoláin, Haynes and Cahn, 2011).³¹ My analysis shows how concern is particularly focused on inter-group, often inter-ethnic VAWG. In addition to arguing for a need to increase attention on conflict-related VAWG *within* groups, communities, and ethnicities, I highlight scholarship arguing for the importance of understanding the crossover between what may appear on the surface as ‘ordinary’ violence, and violence that is conflict-related. In the second sub-section, my analysis of literature on activism and policy on conflict-related VAWG shows that women’s activism has influenced a wide range of international legal and policy responses to this harm. However, there various complexities facing activists when responding to conflict-related VAWG, in terms of determining what the end goal of activism is and dealing with the risk that activism interventions might fuel further division.

2.3.1 Conceptualising Conflict and Associated VAWG as Gendered

Ethnicity is prominent in analyses of conflict, which is understandable given that intrastate, ethnicised conflict has been the most prevalent form of conflict since the end of the Cold War (Chirico, 2013; Szayna *et al.*, 2017).³² However, there is a strong case to also focus on gender, due to various ways manhood and womanhood are invoked in discourses of ethnicity and nation in conflict (Enloe, 2008; Yuval Davis 1997). Understanding how gender features in inter-ethnic

³¹ In the context of conflict VAWG is more commonly termed sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). As such, I use both terms interchangeably.

³² Former colonies are particularly affected, notably in Africa, where half of the countries have experienced intrastate conflict (Manjoo and McRaith, 2011).

relations, prior to conflict, can help make sense of inter-ethnic gendered violations during conflict, particularly why widespread use of targeted sexual violence occurs in some conflicts and not others (Hagen and Yohani, 2010; Wood, 2009).³³ Enloe (2005) argues specific societal constructions of masculinity, key to understanding conflict, can be revealed by examining the lives of women. Further, states characterised by gender inequality risk normalising violence to the extent it increases the likelihood of internal conflict (Caprioli, 2005; Melander, 2005). Violent conflicts are male dominated struggles and men constitute the major casualties of conflict (Cockburn, 2010; Milićević, 2006; Puechguirbal, 2012).³⁴ As Cockburn (2010) argues, in war aspects of masculinities and militarisation are mutually constitutive and dependent on each other. However, women participate as combatants, particularly in intrastate conflicts albeit to a much lesser extent than men (Alison, 2004; Kunz, 2017; MacKenzie, 2009; Taylor, 1999) and, are confirmed to have participated in the perpetration of sexual violence (Sjoberg, 2016). If we oversimplify women as peace-loving victims of war, we fail to understand the “complex processes by which women take sides, take risks, take arms, and wage war” (Aretxaga, 1995 p.19). However, civilian women and girls suffer disproportionate levels of gendered harm during armed conflict (Bell and O'Rourke, 2007), as the complexities of conflict can compound and act as drivers of VAWG in numerous ways (Davies and True, 2015; -Ní Aoláin, Haynes and Cahn, 2011; Mama and Okazawa-Rey, 2012). I now go on to identify and explore these gendered harms experienced by women and girls, and problematise the extensive focus some forms of conflict-related VAWG have received, at the expense of others.

Identifying Multi-Faceted and Under-acknowledged VAWG

The deployment of sexual violence during violent conflict is often linked to the consolidation of ethnicity/ethnonationality through domination over other groups (Okech, 2019). This concept of ‘rape as a weapon of war’ has attracted high level

³³ See Korac (2016) for an analysis of how re-patriarchisation in former Yugoslavia paved the way for militarisation and the highly gendered violence that occurred during the conflict. See, also Gallimore (2008) for an analysis of gender relations between Tutsis and Hutus, before, during and after colonisation and the bearing these relations had on perpetrations against Tutsi women during the Rwandan genocide.

³⁴ Men and boys suffer in additional manifold ways, such as being conscripted into conflict, coerced to commit atrocities (Sjoberg, 2016) and, as is being increasingly understood, being raped by men (Schulz, 2021).

attention since the 1990s, following two examples of mass sexual violence in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. The shock provoked led people to conceive of rape as a weapon of war as if it were a modern phenomenon, although sexual violence has been an aspect of war for hundreds of years (Hagen and Yohani, 2010). At surface level, widespread interest is positive, although oversimplifying rape as a weapon of war risks mistakenly treating it as an anomaly of war that must be ended swiftly, merely so the status quo can resume (Ayiera, 2010). Feminist analysts express concern about singling out this form of VAWG for intervention, without sufficient understanding of the reasons behind such violence, and without being sufficiently cognisant of other forms VAWG exacerbated by conflict.³⁵ This point is demonstrated by Swaine (2018a) who recalls encountering various coexisting forms of VAWG as an international aid practitioner in Darfur, yet intergroup rape was the form that caused concern.³⁶ It is not just women and girls from rival groups that are subject to conflict-related VAWG and, as such, we need to be more holistic in our conceptualisation of it. This is because the roles adopted, predominantly by men during conflict, are related to oppressive expressions of masculinities within various groups, families, communities, military units, or ethnicities/nationalities (Ashe and Harland, 2014; Wood and Toppelberg, 2017).

Whilst acknowledging the harms caused by intergroup VAWG in conflict, I argue for the need to also increase understanding of relationally complex intragroup VAWG in conflict, because like intergroup VAWG, it can also be strategically perpetrated. The utility of sexual violence for intragroup domination, punishment and control applies across numerous military contexts. For example, when young soldiers in Sierra Leone were coerced to rape family members to prove their loyalty to their armed group, cutting family ties increased military control over soldiers (Mackenzie, 2009). Sexualised socialisation practices in the US military, trivialise sexual assault, whilst also ensuring it is available to punish those deemed weak and control/deter victims and witnesses from reporting abuse (Wood and Toppelberg, 2017). Problematising US military sexual violence as intractable,

³⁵ See Cockburn (2010), Djurić-Kuzmanović, Drezgić, and Žarkov, (2008), Eriksson Baaz *et al.* (2010)

³⁶ In addition to intergroup rape by armed actors were incidents of rape, sexual exploitation by community leaders, peacekeepers, and employers near the camps and intimate partner violence. However, local leaders and international aid agencies singled out strategic intergroup rape as the issue of concern (Swaine, 2018a).

Nagel (2014; 2017) argues military women are now subjected to forms of abuse from comrades that civilian women have long endured during war.

Conflict situations enable a variety of forms of VAWG ranging from wholly expressive to wholly strategic acts (Wood, 2006). However, distinguishing between expressive and strategic acts can be difficult. Soldiers who perpetrated sexual violence in Democratic Republic of Congo, reveal the distinction they made between rape for lust and evil rape, arising from war-related hate and anger (Errikson Baaz and Stern, 2010). Green and Ward (2009, p.609) argue dual purpose violence, “simultaneously serving private and political goals” has become one of the central characteristics of contemporary armed conflict. Their research showed how various forms VAWG, including intragroup VAWG, was perpetrated in both individually expressive and politically expedient ways, in post-invasion Iraq. The concept of dual-purpose violence suggests more attention needs to be focused on the cross-over between what is, ostensibly, ‘ordinary’ and conflict-related violence.

Identifying Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) in conflict and determining how systematic it is, require detailed understanding of conflict as it occurs, which is challenging (Swaine 2015). Scholars and activists highlight relational dynamics that have impeded responses to the issue. For example, following forty-years of conflict in Mindanao, Philippines, seventeen of which were spent in peace negotiations, it emerged some peace negotiators had perpetrated SGBV against rivals (Davies, True and Tanyag, 2016). The prominent input of perpetrators constrained reporting mechanisms for SGBV and silenced survivors, despite conflict actors gaining positive recognition for the active participation of women in the resolution process (Davies, True and Tanyag, 2016). This example shows the insufficiency of engaging elite women in resolution negotiations, without understanding how different women are victimised in conflict. Further, gendered experiences of conflict need to be considered alongside inequalities around race/ethnicity and class/socioeconomic status, as demonstrated by the ways sexual violence was targeted towards impoverished women from minority ethnic groups and clans in Somalia (El Busra and Sahi, 2005). Finally, everyday disruptions, violations, and restrictions highlighted by women and girls as

problematic during conflict are not always prioritised by the state and its institutions (Porter, 2016). These may include negative encounters with military and security forces, and the struggle to maintain family life following loss or upheaval (Ní Aoláin, Haynes and Cahn, 2011). The prioritisation of certain insecurities related to the conflict, and invisibility of others, reinforce and reflect the power relations exacerbated by conflict (Ward, 2004).

VAWG as a Transitional and Post-conflict Issue

VAWG occurs in peacetime, intensifies during war and conflict, and continues in the aftermath (Hoewer, 2013). As such, VAWG needs to be analysed in the context of that continuum and the political, economic, and social factors that coalesce in its perpetration (Moser, 2001). General acceptance of VAWG can increase during conflict, a challenge with implications when conflict ends (Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen, 2001). When people witness and perpetrate violence during war, it risks the normalisation of violence post-conflict (Medie, 2015). VAWG levels, particularly domestic violence, are known to have increased following several conflicts,³⁷ which the demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants can exacerbate.³⁸ For example, Theidon (2009) attributes the domestication of violence following war in Columbia to the desensitisation of former combatants, who had to repeatedly inflict fear and terror on others during war. Similarly, Caicedo (2005) found sexual exploitation and violence intensified in the areas of Columbia where former combatants gathered during the demobilisation phase.³⁹ Transitional and post-conflict phases can be highly politicised situations in which some problems are prioritised while others are downplayed (McLeod, 2011). High level international attention focused on VAWG during conflict, such as sexual violence as an act of war, can reduce significantly post-conflict (Ayiera, 2010). One possible reason is an assessment by decision makers that male-on-male violence in the immediate post-conflict or transitional period is more politically destabilising than VAWG (Puechguirbal, 2012).

³⁷ See Manjoo and McRaith 2011; McWilliams and Ni Aolain, 2013; Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen, 2001

³⁸ See Buckley-Zistel and Zolkos, 2012; Mama and Okazawa-Rey, 2008; Milićević, 2006

³⁹ Despite the findings of Caicedo (2005) being widely shared, Flisi (2016) problematises that demobilisation and reintegration processes in Columbia fail to plan for how the security of women and girls would be impacted by the further return of former combatants.

Increases in VAWG and hostility are conceptualised in feminist analyses as forms of post-conflict backlash against women. Various forms of backlash have been identified following World War 1 and liberation wars within countries (Cockburn, 2004; Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen, 2001; Pankhurst, 2008). Increased VAWG and the marginalisation of women have particularly affected militarised, divided ethnic/ethnonational societies, and places where male dominance has become normalised (Okazawa-Rey, 2008; Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002). For example, in Northern Uganda, increases in controlling behaviours and constraints on women and girls' everyday liberties occurred post-conflict (Bukuluki et al, 2013). Okech (2019) highlights how ethnonational homogeneity can be conflated with state-building practice following conflict, in ways that restrict women's freedom, particularly reinterpretations of culture and tradition and the perpetration of structural violence. The wider effects of war may also influence how VAWG is perpetrated post-conflict. For example, in Juba, South Sudan, El Bushra and Sahi (2005) express concern about the connection between the proliferation of weapons and phenomenon of gang rape at gunpoint. Given that the concept of the post-conflict backlash is widespread, yet the forms of backlash are so diverse, it is important to be attuned to the context in which backlash takes place. I now go on to examine activism responses to conflict-related VAWG, particularly how activists have utilised legal and policy measures.

2.3.2 The Challenge of Responding to Conflict-related VAWG in Activism

Globally, anti-VAWG activists have a strong track record in using the human rights paradigm as it enables them to draw on internationally recognised standards in their advocacy (Nelson and Dorsey, 2003). Indeed, the transnational advocacy of anti-VAWG activists has been crucial to the establishment of various international legal instruments now in place to respond to VAWG, including VAWG in conflict.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ I highlight four notable examples: 1. The involvement of the All-African Women's Conference in drafting the 1979 UN Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), one of the first international measures to address women's rights globally (Bhattacharjya et al. 2013; Tripp, 2018). 2. The Global Campaign for Women's Human Rights 1991-1993, successfully campaigned for UN member states to commit to eliminate violence against women in what is known as the Vienna Declaration (Center for Women's Global Leadership, No Date). 3. The Women's Caucus for Gender Justice was formed in 1997 following

However, the multi-faceted nature of conflict-related VAWG and the varied conflict contexts in which it takes place, pose challenges for activists in terms of how to respond. As my analysis goes on to show, the tensions surrounding conflict related VAWG, underscore how conflict and its aftermath not only impact VAWG, but also the environment and dynamic in which anti-VAWG activism takes place. These tensions can have implications in terms of when those affected by conflict-related VAWG may be ready to respond. Women are not homogenous and may disagree about the harms caused in conflict, including VAWG (O'Rourke, 2012). Foremost among the potentially divisive aspects of activism on conflict-related VAWG is determining the end goal of this activism. Activists are required to choose whether to pursue punitive approaches that punish past violations, non-punitive responses that may be focused on reconciliation or post-conflict development, or a combination of these. I draw on notable examples from former Yugoslavia and South Africa to illustrate this argument further.

The complex mix of responses from feminist activists to the headline concern of rape as a weapon of war highlights how divisive this issue can be. The widely publicised litigation against Serb leader, Radavan Karadzic, for mass rape of Muslim and Croatia women by Serbian soldiers in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia (Amon, 2000) is a case in point. Depending on one's perspective, *Kadic et al. v. Karadzic*, led by Catharine MacKinnon in New York, may either be a positively pioneering case that succeeded in getting rape as a weapon of war recognised in international law (see Nenadic, 2011) or an overseas intervention that became incorporated into the dynamics of war which fuelled further ethnic division (see Kesic, 1994, Mladjenovic 2001; Žarkov, 2003). Kesic (1994) questions some written claims made by MacKinnon,⁴¹ arguing the messaging undermined anti-violence efforts of Croatia feminists challenging sexual crimes by Croatia soldiers and contributed to the demonisation of Serbian people. Mladjenovic (2001) and Žarkov, (2003) argue international attention on rape of some women from some ethnonational groups, undermined anti-nationalist

agreement at the Beijing World Conference on Women in 1995 to campaign to make rape a war crime (Visvanathan, 2011). The Caucus was instrumental in ensuring rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation, and sexual violence were included as war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Rome Statute of 1998, the basis for the permanent International Criminal Court (Spees, 2003). 4. UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security in 2000 came about following lobbying from women's groups (Pratt and Richter-Devroe, 2011).

⁴¹ In the build up to the case MacKinnon attributed mass rape to a flood of pornography into Serbia (see MacKinnon, 1993).

feminist activists throughout former Yugoslavia trying to highlight manifold ways women from various ethnonational groups were harmed. This example underscores how transient international feminist activism can be felt to impede ongoing local activism inside conflict areas. Critical of the feminist contribution to international legal responses to war time sexual violence, Engle (2020) argues feminists were gripped by it to the detriment of other goals, such as anti-militarism and economic justice. She alleges a shift occurred in the 1990s in which ending the impunity of human rights violators took priority over truth and peace (Engle, 2015). Engle (2020) argues this shift is evident by willingness of feminist activists to pursue punitive, international criminal justice responses.

Critiques of carceral feminism highlight that activists can choose to engage in non-punitive initiatives. Indeed, feminist anti-VAWG activists have so engaged, for example in Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) processes, such as instigated in South Africa following the end of apartheid. Feminists successfully advocated for women-only sessions and anonymised testimonies (Goldblatt and Meintjes, 1998). However, many women who submitted initial written testimonies did not go on to speak in person at TRC sessions, with reasons including lack of information about the possibility of anonymised testimonies, shame, stigma, and not wanting to be portrayed as a victim (Goldblatt and Meintjes, 1998). Further, some women refused to disclose abuse by male peers because of not wanting to damage the reputation of the liberation struggle (Kashyap, 2009) and some were warned by abusers in powerful positions not to engage (Graybill, 2001). By its own admission, the TRC fell short of its goal to be sensitive to gendered experiences (Kashyap, 2009).

Feminist analyses of conflict and war does not just relate to when conflict is taking place, but also to the sensitive period when conflict ends and processes for future co-existence and peace are being developed. Transitional justice is associated with post-conflict political change and legal responses to confront the wrongdoings of repressive practices during conflict (Teitel, 2000). However, remedying the harms of the past, suggests such harms need to be named and acknowledged, which is not easy. Mueller-Hirth and Rios Oyola (2018) argue for a need to better understand the importance of time and temporalities in addressing past violence in

conflicts and for transitional/post-conflict justice actors to develop more time-sensitive perspectives. This need exists, not least because the sequence of events that occur in transitional justice and post-conflict processes tends to be determined by political time (MacGinty, 2016) rather than the temporality of social time, which is usually slower (Rios Oyola, 2018). Thus, as the above example from South Africa shows, victims of conflict-related VAWG may not necessarily be ready to acknowledge their experiences and/or have those experiences publicly known at the same moment the political process encourages such acknowledgement. Activists supporting those violated may similarly be required to maintain a level of silence to respect the dignity of the women and girls affected.

Feminist activists have engaged in non-punitive responses to conflict-related VAWG, through using the 1979 UN Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the 2000 UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. A strength of CEDAW is that it monitors signatory countries in the global North and South (Dairiam, 2015; Freeman, 1997) which enables anti-VAWG activist movements to use CEDAW monitoring processes to hold their own governments to account (Bhattacharjya et al. 2013)⁴². For example, in India anti-VAWG activists utilised CEDAW to highlight the problem of sexual violence perpetrated by soldiers at border areas and conflict zones in 2014, resulting in CEDAW recommending the repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958 (Veillet Chowdhury, 2016). Initially UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security highlighted women as victims of conflict, although later provisions are more cognisant of women as agents in peacebuilding and justice processes (Shepherd, 2011). In instances where conflict has had a weakening impact on women's collective activism 1325 provides an opportunity to enable activism to grow post-conflict (Chaney, 2016). This is useful to anti-VAWG activism generally as well as addressing conflict-related VAWG. Indeed, the existence of 1325 is used by activist groups to press for inclusion in long term peace building and developments (Pierson, 2018a; Porter, 2016). Through 1325 extensive attention has been focused on grassroots women's groups engaged in

⁴² Although the convention is weakened by the extent to which states can choose whether to ratify CEDAW wholly, with reservations or not at all (Montez, 2021). Further, it was 1992 before CEDAW was explicit about violence against women being a form of discrimination (Nousiainen, 2017) by which point other initiatives were also in train.

conflict resolution and peacebuilding in global South communities (Basu, 2016) which has compromised the safety of some activists (Kandiyoti, 2013; Shepherd, 2011).⁴³

1325 and CEDAW can be mutually reinforcing, particularly as CEDAW has continually become more explicit about comprehensively including different types of armed conflict, war and associated gendered violence (Nousiainen, 2017; Veillet Chowdhury, 2016). Indeed, in the example from India above, anti-VAWG activists utilised CEDAW to argue that 1325 should apply to conflicted areas of India, an argument supported by CEDAW monitors (Veillet Chowdhury, 2016). Whilst various UN instruments provide opportunities for anti-VAWG activists to focus international attention on conflict-related VAWG in their domestic sphere, engaging with them clearly requires considerable knowledge, expertise, and human resources.⁴⁴ Resourcing engagement can be particularly challenging for grassroots groups whose time and effort is often taken up seeking to influence local relationships and supporting women directly affected (Basu, 2010). For this reason, the input of transnational women's and feminist advocacy groups can be important. Networks such as DAWN, Women in Development in Europe (WIDE) and the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) have helped increase awareness of rights frameworks, and funding for anti-VAWG activism groups to run support services and self-help, encourage local participation through campaigns and awareness raising, and conduct research into need (Basu, 2010; Harcourt, 2013, Moghadam, 2005). Such diverse work under the umbrella of anti-VAWG activism helps explain why Basu (2010) argues VAWG is the arena in which women's movements have been most successful. Similarly, Hughes, Marrs and Sweetman, (2016) argue development and humanitarian organisations are more sensitised to VAWG because of women's activism, making them more considered about how their programmes impact on gender relations and VAWG,

⁴³ Basu, Kirby, and Shepherd, (2020) therefore, argue 1325 processes need to focus on better protecting women human rights defenders. Basu (2016) further argues addressing the Northern dominance in the leadership and agenda setting surrounding 1325 is necessary and that the UN must take more of a steer from actors in conflicted areas of the global South, rather than merely engaging them as grassroots activists. Doing so may help inform processes to better protect activists.

⁴⁴ For example, women's rights in conflict currently sits across four different international law regimes, international humanitarian law, international criminal law, international human rights law, and the UN Security Council (O' Rourke, 2020).

as well as being more understanding about how VAWG restricts women and girls participation in development.

In sum, there appears to be reason for optimism and caution about the potential of anti-VAWG activism, particularly in complex conflict and post-conflict societies. However, to reduce or eliminate VAWG post-conflict, change is needed throughout society all the way to community and household level. Legal and policy gains may help act as enabling factors but may not be interpreted as evidence that VAWG reductions will follow (Abdullah 2014; Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender 2002). This argument is borne out by the high prevalence rates of VAWG in post-conflict societies and post-conflict backlash discussed above. While activists have transformed the arena in which conflict-related VAWG is addressed, the forms of VAWG recognised in this arena appear to be narrow and focused on high-level incidences of rape. Further, intervention by activists can be subsumed into division during and post-conflict, which may be counterproductive to that activism. McWilliams and Ni Aolain (2013) and Porter (2016) argue for the need to increase understanding of the complex effects of various conflict and post-conflict situations on VAWG. This research seeks to contribute to meeting that need by deepening our understanding how post-conflict situations and anti-VAWG activism in those post-conflict contexts intertwine. I now go on to analyse scholarship on the relational aspects of agency and activism.

2.4 Conceptualising Agency and Activism Relationally

Agency, the belief that change or development is not only possible but something we can potentially determine, is a key element of activism. For this reason, agency is central to analysing activism. I begin this section by conducting a transdisciplinary analysis of literature on agency. I develop two themes in addition to agency being relational, which is that agency is fluid and contextual. Given that activism is often carried out in groups, including social movements, in the second sub-section, I draw on social movement scholarship, to analyse some relational practices and effects of activism. I also disentangle the features of collective identity and solidarity, two relational concepts which crossover significantly in social movement scholarship. From this analysis I explain why, for this study, I am

interested in solidarities over collective identity. Overall, this analysis highlights how important relationships can be to activists individually and collectively, not only in terms of the actions they carry out but also how they relate to other activists when carrying out actions together.

2.4.1 An Analysis of Agency as Relational, Fluid, and Contextual

The simplicity of defining agency as “the capacity of human beings to shape the circumstances in which they live” (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009, p.28) belies the extent to which complex debates about structure and agency have dominated social theory. As Archer (2003) argues, the dichotomy of structure and agency is one of the central problems social theory seeks to solve about how reflexivity results in action. However, social theory has traditionally individualised agency, seeing it as the the extent to which one is able to determine and carry out actions in the context of restrictions that come from social structures, such as class and religion (Buchanan, 2018). Giddens’ (1984) theory of structuration highlighted how structure and agency were related to each other, in that reflexive agency shapes the very structures that in turn can encourage and restrict agency. Whilst showing a relationship, structuration framing arguably situates structure and agency as a dichotomy. Several relational perspectives I go on to analyse below encourage us veer away from dichotomous thinking. In the below analysis of literature, I adapt the properties of agency developed by Jha (2019)⁴⁵ in a broad transdisciplinary analysis in which three themes emerge. Firstly, agency is relational. Secondly, it is fluid and future focused, not a fixed attribute either present or absent. Thirdly, being relational, agency emerges from the evolving context, power relations and inequalities.⁴⁶

Agency is Relational

⁴⁵ Jha (2018, p.208) argues “agency has six distinct properties: one, it is emergent from the context; two, it evolves over time; three, it emerges through patterns of behaviour rather than through isolated actions; four, these actions take a range of forms beyond observable or overt action; five, it is both shaped by and shapes the individual’s narrative identity; and six, it is relational or embedded in individual’s relationships, reflecting the nature of power that configures those relationships”.

⁴⁶ There are concepts used interchangeably with agency, such as, autonomy and empowerment (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007) and these themes are variously present in associated literature.

The conceptualisation of agency as individualistic is critiqued by scholars in different disciplines many of whom highlight the widespread association of agency with the individual is a recent phenomenon. For example, Blaser *et al.* (2011) state relationality was predominant across various cultures, and linguistic references to autonomy were collective until the nineteenth century, when notions of autonomy for individuals/males with property, emerged. In psychology, Bandura (2007, p1001) who fundamentally sees agency as relational, argues against binary approaches “pitting autonomy against interdependence, individualism against collectivism, and social structure against agency” on the basis that they create false dichotomies. Therefore, focusing on relationality serves as a bridge preventing those binaries and false dichotomies, given that agency can be used to describe both individual and collection actions.

Agency, particularly women’s agency is a key concept in development discourse.⁴⁷ One of the most established frameworks conceptualising human agency in development is the Capability Approach or CA (Chandler, 2013). CA measures peoples’ ability to make decisions and undertake actions towards living meaningful lives (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999). An individual / collective binary is a source of debate within CA. The initiator of the approach, Sen (2002) argues the approach uses individual measures, because wellbeing and agency cannot be measured collectively. Several scholars argue against this dominant focus on the individual and in calling for accommodation of collective agency, point out that some capabilities can only be achieved through collective action/interactions.⁴⁸ In a standardised list of capabilities proposed by Nussbaum (2001) capabilities involving relations do feature, for example, political participation and affiliation and, being able to show concern for others,⁴⁹ although the concept of agency as relational has not fully gained traction in CA.

⁴⁷ Following the UN Conference on Women in Beijing 1995, gender and agency have been incorporated into development processes, in the form of gender mainstreaming (Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead, 2013), although earlier approaches, *Women in Development* in the 1970s and *Gender and Development* in the 1980s also focused on women’s agency and involvement in development (Brouwers, 2013; Pearson, 2005)

⁴⁸ see Ballet, Dubois, and Mahieu, 2007; Griewald and Rauschmayer, 2014; Ibrahim, 2006; Pelenc *et al.*, 2013

⁴⁹ Sen (2002) rejects the idea of a prescribed list of capabilities, instead arguing capabilities should be determined by the people involved.

Conversely, the crucial role played by relations in agency is central to various indigenous philosophies, resistant of individualistic discourses (Mabovula, 2011; Moreton-Robinson, 2000). In one such philosophy, Ubuntu, relations are paramount, not just as the means of expressing agency, but also the reason to do so. Core to Ubuntu is the belief that interdependent human relations construct identity, personhood, community, and society (Ogude, 2018; 2019). Indeed the central tenet of Ubuntu, that a person becomes a person only through other persons, effectively specifies that people gain a sense of how to be, based on what they learn from the people with whom they share community. Similarly, much feminist philosophical theory understands agency through relational processes with interdependence between humans as the basis for behaviour (Redshaw, 2013). Whilst the ideal of agency may be to achieve harmony between preferred action and action, feminist scholars highlight women are reflexive about whether and how to enact their preferred action in the context of the relational possibilities and restrictions in their lives (Madhok, 2013).

Relational sociologists take a similar view of the importance of relationality as the philosophers above. Emirbayer (1997) states the individual comes into being from the recognition that comes from participating in mutual relationships. Indeed, Emirbayer (1997) sees relationships, or transactions between beings, as so important, he argues they should be the primary units of analysis of the social world. Similarly, Prandini (2015, p.3) argues, the individual and the social “are made by the same stuff – relationships.” Rejecting a societal structure and individual agency binary, Powell and Depélteau (2013) instead argue we should make sense of how individuals and societal structures affect each other.⁵⁰ Relational sociology argues conceptions of agency change when viewed as relational rather than individual, which applies whether action is undertaken by an individual or group (Burkitt, 2016; Crossley, 2010; Jha, 2019). Through a relational lens actors become interactants, actions become transactions and structure becomes a web of networks of interdependent relations in which interactants and transactions are located (Burkitt, 2016; Burkitt, 2018; Crossley, 2011).

⁵⁰ Similarly to Giddens (1984) theory of structuration mentioned above.

Relational sociologist, Bourdieu (1984) developed the concept of habitus to capture how our identity and everyday actions/agency are influenced by our relationships with people and groups surrounding us, both in ways that are known and unknown to us.⁵¹ Crossley (2002) argues habitus is highly applicable to scholarship on activism, particularly as activists share values and shape behaviours that become ingrained, thus setting the scene for new relationships with people around those values. Influenced by Bourdieu's work, Kennelly (2009, p.260) emphasises the relationality of agency by arguing the relations people have shape their view of what actions are possible. She argues agency is:

the contingent and situated intersection between an individual's social position within a field of interactions, and the means by which the relationships within that field permit that individual to take actions that might otherwise be inconceivable.⁵²

(Kennelly. 2009, p.260)

In addition to the overarching argument that agency is relational, Edwards and Mackenzie (2005, p.301) refer to relational agency defining it as:

People's ability to seek and use help which expands their interpretations and supports their responsive actions, where agency is a capacity to undertake deliberative action.

Their definition raises the question of the difference between agency and relational agency, given the argument being developed here that agency is inherently relational. Perhaps the distinction is found in the extent to which relations with others makes agency and its associated actions conceivable and achievable? As such, referring to relational agency would then be given to mean that relations and

⁵¹ Habitus is his term for peoples' ingrained habits, skills, morals, and values, which are shaped by being in groups and society (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Along with the concept of field, which I analyse in section 5 of this chapter, habitus is one of the core components in Bourdieu's (1984) theory of practice.

⁵² Here Kennelly (2009) uses the concept of field to explain agency.

interactions with others are paramount to the subsequent action. In sum, whilst conceptions of agency in social theory have previously overwhelmingly focused on the actions of individuals, the importance of relations as a basis for agency is increasingly being understood (Archer, 2003; Mische, 2011). However, we are left needing to distinguish between agency in which relations are elemental and relational agency, where relations are paramount.

Agency is Fluid not Fixed

In psychology, the fluid nature of agency is presented by Bandura (2007) as a process and pre-action stages include forming intentions and forethought when actors anticipate the outcomes of considered action. Intentionality and forethought, whether individual or collective, are crystallised by goals, which encourage agents to prioritise attention and effort toward goal-relevant actions (Locke and Latham, 2006). Goals can be subordinate, step-based tasks at a low level of the goal hierarchy, or superordinate, which, like values, can be directed towards high level, long term, societal ideals (Höchli, Brügger and Messner, 2018). Sherif (1958) unearthed a relationship between superordinate goals and conflict resolution, in an experiment with boys' inter-group conflict, that reduced once they had common goals to work towards. Subsequently, the psychologically informed practice of harnessing agency towards common superordinate goals has become part of formal inter-group conflict resolution processes (Miller, 2017).

In development, Rao (2017) critiques stark assumptions that women's agency is possessed only by assertive, educated women, attributing this mistake to insufficient awareness of the fluid and nuanced nature of agency in women's relational experiences. On a similar level, Menzel (2020) recognises whilst specific situations may restrict peoples' agency, this is not the same as people lacking agency. Arguing for a two-dimensional concept of agency Menzel (2020) differentiates between motivational dimensions, actors' wish to do something, and effective dimensions, actors' sense of being able to achieve some level of the desired effect. As such, actors' abilities to identify desired action and carry it out are not fixed but based on a continual process of decision making and negotiation with others (Kabeer, 1999).

Agency Emerges from the Evolving Context

Various disciplines acknowledge how power relations and inequalities can restrict peoples' agency. The capability approach in development is explicit that political and social factors can constrain agency, which the approach seeks to overcome (Nussbaum, 2003). Similarly, Masolo (2019) argues the indigenous philosophy of Ubuntu acknowledges aspects of peoples' characteristics, such as race, gender, or disability, have been misused by powerful actors and structures, to deny agency. Scholars argue Ubuntu encourages agency in responses to these power abuses, through ethical socio-political action to enhance human wellbeing and humaneness (see More, 2005; Ogude, 2019). Feminist philosophers, Mackenzie and Stoljar (2000) highlight that peoples' social embeddedness influences their understanding of the parameters within which they express agency because:

agents' identities are formed within the context of social relationships and shaped by a complex of intersecting social determinants, such as race, class, gender, and ethnicity.

(Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000, p.4)

These relationships and determinants impact agents' expectations, range of choices and sensemaking about how their agency is exercised. Benhabib (1987) influentially argued that generalising perspectives of agency on some privileged groups of people, fails to incorporate the ways people in marginalised groups are socially embedded. This is because actions are affected by historic and prevailing social contexts which shape relations, as well as the choices made by actors (Madhok, 2013). Bearing social and political power dynamics in mind, requires being reflexive about not placing unfair expectations on agents in how they pursue feminist goals (McNay, 2016). The choices made by people in systematically marginalised groups on how and whether to express agency as resistance, may differ from choices made by people able to take freedom of expression for granted (Hemmings and Kabesh, 2013). While explicit resistance to patriarchal relations may be viewed as an ideal expression of feminist agency such emphasis risks

overshadowing subtle expressions of agency (Mahmood, 2011). As such, it is important to appreciate agency and activism need not only be on a grand and radical scale, but in everyday encounters. That said, it is also important not to assume marginalised women are unable to exercise agency.

This transdisciplinary analysis of agency challenges the notion that it is a fixed individual attribute, but rather that it is fluid and continually in process. Various disciplines show how expressions of agency are influenced by relationships, the context of power and relational inequalities, agents' social embeddedness and the process of determining future goals and action. Therefore, to apply this knowledge to an analysis of activism in this thesis, it is important to pay attention to the relational dynamics of the context, power, and inequalities in which anti-VAWG activism occurs and how activists set about determining their action. I now go on to analyse the relationalities of activism practices.

2.4.2 The Relationalities of Activism and its Practices

Anti-VAWG activism is carried out in grassroots community development / community action groups, social movements of various sizes and coverage, as well as anti-VAWG support services. Social movements combine some or all three forms of practice: collective campaigns targeted at authorities or decision makers; a repertoire of performance methods, such as demonstrations or media engagement; and representations to the public about the worthiness of their activism cause (Tilly and Wood, 2008: 7). Social movement theory contributes to our understanding of the processes and inherent challenges of organising and activism. Resource mobilisation theory, dominant in the US in 1960s and 70s, focused on the rational and strategic methods of organising (Buechler, 1995: Crossley).⁵³ This approach was critiqued for excessively focusing on movement actors in terms of the resources they bring to movements and for under-acknowledging the dynamic, often passionate nature of their interpersonal

⁵³ The US centric development of the theory, which McCarthy and Zald (1977) acknowledged, was critiqued as lacking relevance to various other contexts. For a critique from the perspective of European social movements see Cox and Flesher Forminaya (2013), for Africa see Amadiume, (1995), Eckert, (2017) Elongué and Vandyck (2019) and the Global South, see Bayat, (2016), Fadaee, (2016) Motta and Nilsen, (2011).

responses to perceived injustices (van Zomeren, Postmes and Spears, 2008).⁵⁴ In recent decades social movement scholarship, primarily the political opportunity approach⁵⁵ has increased its focus on affective relationship development in activism practices, which I analyse. My subsequent analysis of collective identity, and solidarity, terms so similarly and interchangeably discussed in social movement literature that they can appear as one and the same (Flesher Fominaya, 2010)⁵⁶ leads me to conclude on the pertinence of solidarities, which I explain.

Political Opportunity Approach

Political opportunity focuses on aspects of political struggle bring people into activism, or contentious politics (Tarrow, 1998). The political opportunity approach contends that however willing people are to struggle against injustice in pursuit of a particular cause, they are likely to be most engaged when they sense opportunity (Crossley, 2002). As such, the opportunity draws activists further into activism. Applying this thinking to anti-VAWG activism would entail analysing what draws activists into activism and how they can maximise opportunities to secure improvements in the prevention or response to VAWG, so activism can be shaped around that opportunity. The political opportunity approach focuses on relations in activism and the context in which activism takes place because, as Meyer (2004) argues, contentious politics are always context dependent. Scholars of the political opportunity approach recognise that both relations and context have a bearing on activists' choices about how to mobilise, advance their claims, form alliances, and generally how they politically engage (Crossley, 2002). These choices include whether and how to advance formal campaigns that require

⁵⁴ McCarthy and Zald (1977) argue that, because inequality and discrimination exist in all societies, a collective sense of grievance cannot be used to predict organising around an issue. Instead, collective action is dependent on mobilising resources – people, funding, media coverage etc. - through a quasi-organisational group (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). Using entrepreneurial terminology McCarthy and Zald (1977) elaborate on the resource mobilisation task of social movements, to convert adherents - supporters of the cause - into movement constituents - resource providers - needed by movements to ensure sufficient resources flow to enable activism

⁵⁵ Also termed the political process approach or political opportunity structure

⁵⁶ For example, Polletta and Jasper (2001) describe collective identity as “an individual’s cognitive, moral and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice or institution”, similar to the portrayal of solidarity by Hunt and Benford (2007, p.439) “an identification with a collective such that an individual feels as if a common cause and fate are shared” and solidarity by Melucci (1996, p.23) “the ability of actors to recognize others and to be recognized, as belonging to the same social unit”.

engagement with the state (Guenther, 2009a). This approach entails analysing activism practices which are highly relational, such as framing and coalition work, as well as how the relationalities of activism lead to different effects, one of which is spillover. I analyse these three aspects of activism here, because of the potential that they may be related to participants' accounts of the activism work they do.

Framing

The political opportunity approach specifies how the process of framing issues shapes the activities undertaken by social movements (Snow, 2004). Framing is a relationally detailed process, or, rather set of processes that require being attuned, not just to a particular target audience but to various people that will be impacted by the framing. Activism groups are required to decide on the messaging of the diagnostic frames that present the problem, the prognostic frame that spells out the solution, and the motivational frame, or call to action (Snow, 2013; Snow and Benford, 1988). Theory on framing, like much political opportunity theory, can be applied to diverse global South and North societies (Bayat, 2016) because it places a strong emphasis on context. For example, the context of anti-VAWG campaign work is driven by the goals of winning over hearts and minds against VAWG and advocating for policy and resources to change the VAWG status quo around violence (Sweetman, 2013). Much anti-VAWG activism occurs beyond social justice campaigning for societal change to the provision of support for victims/survivors (Lenrner and Allen, 2009). As such, anti-VAWG activism groups often experience a dilemma about how to balance various forms of advocacy and support for those affected by VAWG and forms of resistance to practice (Anwary, 2003; Harcourt, Heumann and Asya, 2017). Activists involved in care work may be concerned about protest and framing methods that may jeopardise resources for care work. More generally, disagreements within social movements about how to communicate issues to the wider public to encourage change can be the source of great conflict (Oyedemi, 2020).

Coalition Work and Spillover

Political opportunity scholarship analyses alliances or coalitions between activism groups and the formation of broadly politically aligned networks of activism groups. Anti-VAWG coalition work can range from organising protests across an alliance of groups, to planning complementary support services for those affected by VAWG (Cole and Luna, 2010). Ackerly (2018, p.60) argues combining effort across groups can “transform the power dynamics of the political landscape”. Relations are therefore not just dynamic within activism groups but between groups coming together to tackle issues. Activism practices are transmitted through coalitions between movement groups, overlapping movement communities and shared membership between activism groups, a process and effect Meyer and Whittier (1994) conceptualise as social movement spillover. Spillover theory highlights how relations between activism groups can not only shape activism practice but also values, knowledge and awareness and across groups regarding different issues. For example, groups involved in anti-VAWG activism often align with groups campaigning for gender and sexual minorities, as well as pro-abortion choice activism, thereby increasing engagement with those issues (Currier and Thomann, 2016). When members, ideas and activism methods crossover, they have a mutually reinforcing influence on the activism within each individual group as well as the shared activism as part of the coalition, or alliance of groups (Whittier, 2013). In moving now to critique collective identity and solidarities in more depth, my interest is in determining their usefulness in analysing activism across difference and through division.

Collective Identity

The focus on collective identity as an affective aspect of participation in activism and relationship development between activists, is attributed to so-called ‘new social movement’ theorists from the 1980s (Flesher Fominaya, 2010).⁵⁷ Melucci is credited with popularising the term collective identity (Jasper, Tramontano and

⁵⁷ The mushrooming of movements focused on identities and social relations, feminist, queer, peace movements etc., resulted in calls for analysis on movement identities, cultures, and the motivations of activists (Melucci, 1988; Crossley, 2001; Pichardo, 1997). The newness of these social movements is contested (see Cox and Flesher Fominaya, 2013). Moreover, new social movements are now more widely known as identity movements, a term which Currier and Thornton (2016) argue belies the survival strategies activists are required to adopt, for example, where sexual minority rights and feminist activism are dangerous.

McGarry, 2015), which he conceptualised on three levels. The subjective level involves “emotional investment”, the objective level comprises “cognitive definitions” and thirdly, collective identity involves an intersubjective “network of active relationships” (Melucci, 1995, pp.44-45). From these three components the group becomes an “interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals or groups at a more complex level” (Melucci, 1989, p.34). Melucci (1988) argues collective identity is formed when people with similar beliefs initially come together and decide to take collective action and he later argues it is reformed over time within movements, through a repeated process of negotiation and interaction (Melucci, 1995). Further, because these repeated processes produce common language, goals, decisions and practices in the movement, collective identity “is not a thing, but a system of relations and representations” (Melucci, 1995, p.50). Scholars argue collective identity can contribute positively and negatively to social movement development (Klandermans, 2014). Tilly (2008) highlights a strong sense of collective identity can present a movement group positively to external actors, as unified, committed and therefore a movement to be taken seriously. One can therefore see how a movement would want to project itself as having a strong and well aligned collective identity. Conversely, Saunders (2008) argues groups with a powerful sense of collective identity can be hard to penetrate and seem exclusive and cliquy to those outside, resulting in ‘us and them’ type factions. Such internal division can threaten activism groups by exposing dissonance and exacerbating existing conflicts about activism goals, methods, and strategies for change (Shriver and Adams, 2013; Horn, 2013; Taylor and Whittier, 1992).

Due to being pervasive in social movement scholarship, Poletta and Jasper (2001) argue collective identity has been overused to fill theoretical gaps. Polletta and Jasper (2001 p.285) define collective identity in relation to the individual activist seeing it as the “cognitive, moral and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice or institution”. Collective identity has been used by Holland, Fox and Daro (2008) to explain the process of meaning making by movements. Various scholars highlight the development of a shared oppositional consciousness to injustice as important in sustaining activists in their struggle (della Porta and Diani, 2006; Reger, 2004; Taylor and van Dyke, 2004). However, empirical research on whether individual activists see themselves as being part of

a collective group identity has produced varied results. Saunders (2008) argues collective identity forms among small groups of individuals within movements, rather than at movement level, whereas McDonald (2002) rejects that collective identity is the reason collective action occurs. Supporting McDonald, Bobel (2007) argues the personal identity of individual activists does not need to align with a collective identity in a movement. The internet age has enabled peoples' fluid engagement with activism groups, campaigns, and identity politics (Castells, 2009). Such fluidity can result in various levels of engagement, short intensive spurts, one-off participation, and long-term involvement, with varying levels of intensity. In such diversity engagement, it follows there would be a variance in the extent to which activists identify with activism groups.

I question the extent to which the various descriptions, attributes and dynamics can fit the definition of collective identity. For example, sharing meaning and oppositional consciousness to injustices such as VAWG, need not equate to movement members having a collective identity. Anti-VAWG activists may well find the process of sharing meaning or an ideological position on VAWG enabling when it comes to taking a stand on the issue.⁵⁸ However, sharing an *identification with an issue* with peers stops short of having shared *identity with peers*. After all, movement members' identities are not homogenous. Identities are shaped by a range of factors and relations outside of the movement (Weldon 2006). Further, one's oppositional consciousness develops throughout their biography, which can't be assumed to solely occur within a single movement. Therefore, I problematise the idea that it is somehow necessary or desirable for activists to align to a collective identity. Further, if one can be an activist without aligning to a collective identity, there is a need to explore and understand how people make sense of their own activism (Brown and Pickerill, 2009). Having problematised the necessity for activists to ascribe to collective identity in activism, I now go on to analyse a concept conflated with collective identity, solidarity.

Solidarities

⁵⁸ This is pertinent given anti-VAWG activists have been threatened, ridiculed, and punished for speaking out on VAWG (Barcia, 2011; Motta, Flesher Forminaya, Eschele and Cox, 2011).

Firstly, there are many forms of solidarities. Scholz (2008) argues for a typology of solidarities, identifying three basic forms: social, civic, and political solidarities. The overarching meaning of solidarity used in this thesis is “relation forged *through* political struggle which seeks to challenge forms of oppression” (Featherstone, 2012, p.5). This definition focuses on relations that develop in the doing of activism, as resisting oppression and injustice can involve extensive relational encounters. This meaning can be applied to constituted activist groups or movements, and community development activism, in line with Bhattacharyya’s (2004) argument that community development promotes self-help and solidarity. Featherstone’s concept does not place a prerequisite of collective identity on activists or those experiencing solidarity. He argues that the association of solidarity with likeness “obscures the importance of solidarities in constructing relations between places, activists, diverse social groups” (Featherstone, 2012, p.5). Given that Featherstone further argues solidarity is a “transformative political relation” (Featherstone, 2012, p.16) the emphasis placed on creating new relations with diverse people and groups across places, sets the scene for transformative encounters which result in change. In other words, this approach to solidarity encourages solidarity across difference.

Achieving solidarity across difference, which should be both a political and ethical goal (Mohanty, 2003), is challenging, as discussed in section two above in relation to feminism. In many respects those challenges show that, whilst solidarity across difference may be a simple concept at surface level, it is complex, because of the manifold ways people are affected by inequalities and injustice. In practical terms, Featherstone (2012) contends that by practicing solidarity, questions of difference can be discussed between people as part of their political action. This pragmatic approach is helpful and given this research is informed by discussions with people who have engaged in activism, it encourages explorations with them about how they have engaged with people across difference in activism. Part of the theoretical complexity of solidarity across difference, as Littler and Rottenberg (2020) contend, is that it has been analysed on various levels, emphasising the affective, communicative, and action components. When Lorde asked her feminist peers to consult their internal place of knowing to “touch that terror and loathing of

any difference that lives there” (Lorde, 1983, p.101) she was acknowledging the affective challenges of achieving solidarity across difference, whilst encouraging all to also acknowledge those challenges and commit to overcoming them. So, whilst Featherstone (2012) encourages the exploration of difference to arise from the joint political action, there is also a realisation that discomfort, fear, or concern about difference may get in the way.

This study is interested in activists’ accounts of coming together across difference, particularly difference pertinent to the post-conflict context, whether expressed in terms of affect, communication, or action. Hunt and Benford (2007, p.439) present solidarity across difference as external solidarity, which is “the identification of and identification with groups to which one does not belong”. Given ongoing post-conflict intergroup tension, external solidarity may be a useful term to describe instances where individual activists’ past sense of tension with a group has been replaced with an ability to identify with the people in the group. However, identification of and identifying with is distinct from identifying as, so there is no suggestion of external solidarity having a prerequisite of collective identity. The spaces and opportunities for building relations and engaging in activism across difference are often restricted by conflict. The biographical nature of this research enables activists to explore how they identify with people in groups and identities to which they don’t belong and whether or how this has changed over their biography.

As well as the differences we understand *may* have been deepened due to the division of conflict, ethnicity/ethnonationality, there are a multitude of other differences among activists, class, sexuality, disability, religion/faith, and legal status, among them. Often these issues have a direct bearing on how people experience the issue being addressed in activism, which is significant for anti-VAWG activism, given that responses to it are beset with inequalities (Collins, 2017). One form of solidarity, intersectional solidarity is explicit in how it that recognises and addresses multiple and interactive systems of oppression (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall, s2013: Hancock, 2011; Steans, 2007). In other words, intersectional solidarity is borne out of intersectional praxis, activism that is practiced in line with the intersectionality paradigm (Einwohner *et al*, 2019;

Hancock, 2011). The high standard required for intersectional praxis is not to be underestimated. Being intersectional requires acknowledging overlapping and multiple identities shaping experiences of power and oppression (Evans, 2016) and uncovering the intricacies of power relations (Choo and Ferree, 2010). As such, Hancock (2014) describes intersectional solidarity as a deep political level form of solidarity. Weldon (2006) contends an intersectional approach to solidarity has the potential to improve activists' abilities to sustain solidarity across group differences and thereby achieve their transformative potential. Featherstone (2012) argues solidarity, particularly across difference, can be forged from the ground up through struggle and activism. However, there are practical challenges of achieving solidarity across difference where inequalities in resources, opportunities, and privilege between people abound (Cole and Luna, 2010; Kerner, 2018; Littler and Rottenberg, 2020). However, as the emphasis is on standing with another, when one does so, they are required to do so from their own identity to support another who is also defined by their identity.

In sum, scholarship on activism is increasingly focused on its relational features and practices. Analysing literature on activism in social movements has helped attune me to activism practices, such as framing and coalition work and the effects of such practices, such as spillover. In turn, this prepares me for exploring activists' perspectives on how they experience relations when negotiating with others to frame an issue, or when coming together in coalition. Whilst my analysis of collective identity and solidarities show them both to be highly focused on relations, collective identity focuses on the similarities of those in a collective situation. Solidarities, on the other hand, accommodate and encourage exploration of differences. This main distinction in how difference is accommodated informs my contention that solidarities are more pertinent to this study, than collective identity. This decision is based on the rationale of this study which is to explore how activists form relationships across difference and through divisions that have been accentuated by conflict. As such, this research has an interest in how relations develop across differences in the places and spaces where activism occurs. This leads me to analyse how place and space are conceptualised, in terms of the importance of relations and relationality.

2.5 Places and Spaces as Relational Domains of Activism

The final aspect of this framework of relationality focuses on the places and spaces in which activism occurs. Here I argue that relationalities of place and space influence the activism in them, which several concepts, such as the politics of place, time-space, and field, help elucidate. Feminist conceptualisations of place and space pay attention to the inter-relational impacts of history, culture and politics, and the manifold ways these are gendered (Oberhauser *et al.*, 2018). Not only are relational positions in places and spaces gendered, but they are also impacted by how different social identities link to various axes of power over time in terms of race, class, sexuality, amongst other factors (Oswin, 2008). As such, when analysing the relationalities of place and space it is necessary to incorporate time, which I show below drawing on the work of feminist geographer, Doreen Massey. I firstly highlight literature on the importance of place which informs my conceptualisation of the participants in this study as place-based activists. I then set out my analysis of Massey's concept of time-space and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of field as tools to aid understanding of the nature of relations in the spaces of activism.

2.5.1 Places as Unique Sites of Activism

A place does not merely provide a physical backdrop for activism, but activism and the place in which it occurs are mutually constitutive of each other (Oslender, 2004). It is undeniable that places are impacted by their unique histories, including legacies of oppression, exploitation, and violence (Dirlik, 2002). This is not to suggest the people of a place or a place itself are inherently violent, but to highlight the need for continual evaluation of relational factors in places, both locally, and between local and global processes (Springer, 2011). This analysis applies in situations of conflict when harmful relational encounters can displace peoples' sense of belonging (Smith, 2015) and displace peoples' bodies (Wako *et al.*, 2015). Further, in post-conflict places relations often need to be renegotiated and processed anew (Björkdahl and Gusic, 2013). As shown in section 3.2 of this chapter, various post-conflict processes, social, political, legal etc. often have different temporalities and rhythms, all of which can affect and be affected by

activism in that place. As such, the nature of activism is influenced by the place in which it emerges and can go on to influence relations in that place. Even when activism is focused on an issue, such as VAWG, it is still place-based and should be conceptualised as such (Dirlik, 2002). Networks of actors and webs of networks focus on their place, whether activism occurs within a locality, city, or at national and transnational level (Harcourt and Escobar, 2002). This focus forms part of what Harcourt and Escobar (2005) conceptualise as the politics of place, in recognition of how women's activism is shaped by the relational environment of the physical locale and the social public space in which it operates. As such, anti-VAWG activists in Namibia and Northern Ireland participating in this research are acknowledged as place-based activists.

Massey (1994, p.154) encourages us not to conceptualise places as “areas with boundaries around” but instead as “articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings”. The first part of this statement is pertinent to my reflections in chapter one about ethnonational interface areas of Northern Ireland and similarly ethnicised locations in Namibia, which emphasise the boundaries of these places. Massey (1991) disputes the idea of a single essential identity existing within a bounded place, on the basis that such a place would be static and effectively dead. Therefore, as closed as a place may seem, relations within it are influenced by connections within and beyond that place, both locally and globally (Massey, 1991). This point is borne out by Bessant (2018) who talks about communities, the places where people live, highlighting that, although each community develops unique ethnocultural and linguistic features, and physical landscapes, ongoing relational changes, ensure these features do not remain static. As such, rather than being fixed, places are open, ever changing and experienced in different ways by people in them, according to their relational positions (Massey, 1994; Oberhauser *et al.*, 2018). Massey makes the case for considering place as a “momentary co-existence of trajectories and relations” (Massey, 2000, p.229) and highlights the uniqueness of each place in terms of how it is *thrown together*: “what is special about place is precisely that throwntogetherness, the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now” (Massey, 2005, p.140). Further, Massey (1994) argues we should acknowledge the multiplicity of relations and experiences occurring, beyond those readily identified. Whether places are large or small, relations occurring within them and

between one place and another are more complex and extensive than we can appreciate at any time (Massey, 1994). This perspective encourages us not to essentialise interface or ethnicised places in reductive or over-simplified ways and instead explore how the biographies of activists can increase our understanding of the multiplicity of relational processes in each unique place.

2.5.2 The Relationalities of Activism Spaces

Space, in the sense of the dimensions of the world we occupy, is closely associated with place, and is similarly relational, given it is “constituted through interaction” (Gaffikin and Morrissey, 2011, p.100). Massey’s analysis of space mirrors that of place as she argues it is: “no more than the sum of all our relations and connections” (Massey, 2002, p25). She encourages us to think of time and space as inseparable, coining the term time-space to signal this (see Massey, 1999)⁵⁹ and to think of both as open, which she describes as “unfinished and always becoming” (Massey, 2005, p.59). This openness is so because space is continually being formulated by interrelations around phenomena as they stretch out over time (Giddens, 1984; Massey, 1994; 2005). Applying this thinking to anti-VAWG activism means recognising that activism space is more than the current formation of activism groups, and activities in any given place. Anti-VAWG activism space is the manifestation of relations and interactions in response to various VAWG issues. This means activism space is not only taken up with encounters focused on issues being addressed, but also on the issues not being addressed, which Massey (2005, p.12) describes as a “space of loose ends and missing links”. In that regard, activists’ concerns about what is not being done in and by anti-VAWG activism, may be of similar interest as to what is being done. Public space is contested (Lefebvre, 1991; Springer, 2011) and much anti-VAWG activism takes place in the public space of contentious politics.⁶⁰ Analysing spatial relations is integral to understanding the effects of politics and power (Massey, 1999) and in so doing I draw on the concept of field.

⁵⁹ May and Thrift (2001, p3) renamed time-space TimeSpace in a “conscious attempt to move still further away from any separation of the two” (time and space).

⁶⁰ As well as in private encounters of therapeutic and other support to violated women and girls.

Bourdieu argued society is multidimensional space made up of sub-spaces, and conceptualised sub-space as a field: “a network, or configuration of objective relations between positions” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.97).⁶¹ This focus on sub-spaces approach enables the space of a specific activity or phenomenon, to be analysed as a field in its own right (Hilgers and Manges, 2014). Bourdieu utilised field to analyse the nature of relations in phenomena, such as politics, economics, science, culture and religion. His position was that relations in the field in which people engage, whether expressed as formal explicit rules or unwritten practices, have a bearing on the shape of peoples’ subsequent engagement (Bourdieu, 1977). In other words:

We may think of a field as a space within which an effect of field is exercised, so that what happens to any object that traverses this space cannot be explained solely by the intrinsic properties of the object in question.

(Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.100)

By relationally analysing the spaces of activities as fields, Bourdieu formed views on those activities. For example, he argued the political field had a purpose of maintaining relationships with those internal and external to it, because of the need to establish legitimacy in relations with the public (Bourdieu, 2000).

Although Bourdieu did not use field to analyse relations in activism spaces, various scholars have since done so.⁶² Crossley (2003) argues fields are structurally unequal relational spaces of struggle, and the inequalities in fields have distinct impacts for activism in political, legal, and social arenas. Analysing the activism field or ‘field of contention’ should therefore involve understanding the sub-spaces - legal, political, media spaces and so forth - in which activism occurs, and how inequalities in those fields may have become normalised (Crossley, 2002). This is

⁶¹ The theory of general practice is based on a formula which incorporates habitus (the ingrained habits, skills, morals, and values, introduced in in Section 4.1 above) and various forms of capital. I do not elaborate on the formula as my goal is to utilise field to conceptualise the relationality of space, not to apply Bourdieu’s theory of practice to women’s activism.

⁶² See Crossley (1999) who used field in the analysis of mental health user movement activism in Britain, Ibrahim (2015) who analysed anti-capitalist activism in Britain and Ray’s (1999) work on women’s anti-violence activism in India.

useful, because activists can seek to address the inequalities and oppressions they experience in one field, for example politics, in other, less hostile fields, such as legal and media spaces. Relational complexities, inequalities, and power dynamics in each field influence how activists and movement groups strategise and interact within the political and cultural conventions they inherit (Ray, 1999). Considering activism in terms of the relational inequalities within the field highlights how aspects of activism vary in different places and spaces, according to factors such as activists' relations with the state and political leaders (Ray, 1999), and relations with other activism groups (Ibrahim, 2015). Ray (1999) argues the political culture of the field has particular importance in this regard, which she conceptualises as:

The acceptable and legitimate ways of doing politics strongly influenced by but not reducible to the complex web of class, gender, race, religious and other relations that order society.

(Ray, 1999, p.8)

Political culture and aspects of normalised inequalities are connected to what Bourdieu (1977) terms doxa, which are the taken for granted or self-evident features in fields. These features not only impact on activism groups, but also individual activists. Kennelly (2009) argues field relations set the tone for how activists express their agency and exercise their ability to act.

Considering how relations in different phenomena stretch over time is incorporated into the concept of field, just as in time-space. However, unlike Massey (2005) who emphasises the open and unlimited potential of the future to achieve change in time-spaces, Calhoun (2013, p.84) argues Bourdieu focuses more on the dynamics of "partial transformation and partial reproduction" within fields. As such, when focusing on the temporalities of activism struggles, the field concept encourages a recognition of continuities and changes in field relations over time. Field, just like time-space has potential to aid analysis of participants' relational experiences across their activism biographies.

2.5.3 Thinking Relationally about the Places and (Time-)Spaces in this Study

This above analysis of literature shows how the relationalities of place and space are brought to bear on activism in multifaceted ways. The unique histories of violence, oppression, and political culture on the places in which activism is practiced, shapes the activism that emerges. It follows, in post-conflict places, particularly those with lingering divisions, normalised inequalities can result in activist groups and individuals adopting relational approaches to be able to operate, whether to circumvent division, comply with it, or consciously resist/end it. Feminist theorising on place and time-space, as well as field and features therein, such as political culture, have potential to aid a relational analysis of women's post-conflict, anti-VAWG activism. As such, I draw on these concepts in a relational analysis of activists' biographies.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed literature to identify a range of relationalities that surround women's anti-VAWG activism in post-conflict settings. Rather than a single conceptual or theoretical position, this analysis results in a multifaceted framework to inform my analysis of anti-VAWG activism in post-conflict settings. Firstly, feminist relations are influenced by factors, such as waves, generational discord, and ideology, all of which are grounded in time and place. These factors incorporate perspectives influenced by historic, political, economic, imperial and racialised experiences. Further, how feminists analyse inequalities and diversity of experiences influences how they relate to each other, particularly in the context of a long tradition of domination by white, global North feminisms. This learning prepares me for the analysis of scholarship on relations in women's and feminist activist in Namibia and NI that follows in the next chapter. Secondly, experiences of conflict-related VAWG and responses to it are varied, with forms of conflict-related VAWG being difficult to identify. There is a need for a more nuanced understanding of VAWG during and post-conflict, including dual-purpose VAWG and underacknowledged VAWG within groups and communities. Whilst policy and legal processes around SGBV, the term more usually applied to conflict situations, have developed extensively in recent decades, much of which is connected to

women's activism, these processes are complex. Further, activists are required to think through what they are trying to achieve with activism addressing conflict-related VAWG. Thirdly, exploring agency across a range of disciplines, highlights its relational, fluid and context dependent features. That said, there is a need to distinguish agency that is inherently relational and relational agency. Activism practices in social movement scholarship that emphasise relationality, spillover, framing and coalition work, are useful in this relational analysis of activism. The concept of collective identity is not key to this study, because it risks under acknowledging peoples' differences. However, utilising solidarities can be useful in examining relations formed between activists in the context of post-conflict division. Solidarity across difference and solidarity informed by intersectionality may be of particular interest. Finally, I have established the importance of place and space, incorporating time, as relational sites of activism. I have determined that using concepts such as field and associated features, such as political culture, may prove useful in exploring activists' relational experiences across their activism biographies. In the next chapter, I critically analyse literature on the conflict and post-conflict contexts of Namibia and Northern Ireland.

Chapter 3: The Legacies of Conflict in Namibia and Northern Ireland

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present a detailed analysis of literature on the conflicted histories of Namibia and NI and their relational implications. In Namibia, the liberation struggle from colonialism and apartheid delayed feminist activism. Following independence, the split between pro-government gender equality and autonomous feminist activists has been exacerbated by the former being part of anti-feminist and homophobic repression of the latter. Scholarship on NI shows various ways the internal ethnonational conflict that followed colonialism and partition, delayed and divided feminist activism. In NI's post-conflict consociationalism (ethnonational power-sharing), women's rights are restricted by the dominant and enduring emphasis on the ethnonational binary. In each country section I start with an analysis of the conflict. I then scrutinise accounts of conflict-related VAWG in-depth, as well as how conflict and post-conflict dynamics touched women's activism. I close off each country analysis by examining the current policy and practice context surrounding VAWG and situating the diverse forms of anti-VAWG activism. Finally, I develop the research questions that evolve from a combination of literature reviewed thus far, my lived experience of the countries and my biographical interest in anti-VAWG activism.

3.2 Namibia

The legacies of colonialism in Namibia emerge from genocide, the widespread subjugation of Namibian people, and the far-reaching harms of apartheid. Relational issues arising from the liberation struggle are found in the dynamics between different groups and ethnicities in the context of their role in the struggle, as well as the enduring 'detainee issue', all of which I incorporate in the below analysis. Drawing on the work of Fanon (1963), Namibian psychologist Shaun

Whittaker provides a damning assessment of the ongoing harm caused by the violence of colonialism in Namibia and southern Africa:

Namibians should admit that colonialism was much more than is implicit in Fanon's phrase,⁶³ namely that it was an avalanche of murders, assaults, robberies, rapes, suicides, tortures, imprisonments, abuses, etc. Colonialism signified nothing less than the collective traumatising of the Namibian people who must carry the heavy burden of the consequences for generations. In this regard, the alarming legacy of bloodshed is everywhere in southern Africa: The anti-colonial fighters who were imprisoned and beaten, the detainees who were tortured, the women who were raped and molested, the children who were abused and collectively punished, the unemployed and the ex-colonial soldiers who commit suicide, the families who mourn for loved ones, the widespread violence against women, the general trauma and self-destruction.

(Whittaker, 2011, no page)

In the analysis that follows, aspects of this assessment will be further explored.

3.2.1 Ethnic Disparities and Differences as Legacies of the Past

Colonisation and Apartheid

In the Berlin Conference of 1884, when Africa was carved up for European ownership, what is now Namibia was declared a protectorate of Germany named German South West Africa (Melber and Saunders, 2007). German colonisation created a system of so-called native reserves, the first of several colonial interventions to geographically and politically separate people by ethnicity, culture, and language (Haugh, 2013). Resistance to colonisation by Herero and Nama people was violently quelled by German forces between 1904 and 1908 implementing a signed Extermination Order and almost four fifths of the Herero people and half of the Nama people were slowly killed in concentration camps (Olusuga and Erichsen, 2010). Although the contemporary German government acknowledged this historic genocide and a minister from the German cabinet issued an apology in 2004 (Kössler, 2008), the issue remains contentious.

⁶³ "Fanon's phrase" in Whittaker's quote relates to the avalanche of murders that accompanies colonialism (see Fanon, 1963)

Protracted negotiations for reparations are a source of tension, not just in Namibian /German relations, but between state leaders representing Namibia, and leaders from Herero and Nama groups who argue for an active negotiating role (Tharoor, 2018).

Following the genocide, German colonial laws developed in the early 20th Century consolidated widespread subjugation of indigenous Namibian groups by expropriating land, effectively banning livestock ownership and coercing people into an abusive wage labour system, both on settler farms and in newly established diamond mines (Kössler, 2015). San people, hunter gatherers difficult to coerce into wage labour, were targeted for non-compliance by colonial policies effectively criminalising them as vagrant (Gordon and Sholto-Douglas, 2000). Although German colonisation was brief, its practices and policies entrenched a hierarchy of ethnicities and systemic economic inequality that have endured, given Namibia is one of the few states where internal inequality exceeds global inequality (Kössler, 2015). German colonisation ended abruptly when Great Britain's declared war against Germany in 1914 and the Union of South Africa sent in troops on behalf of the British Commonwealth, defeating the German army (McGregor and Goldbeck, 2014). Administering the area throughout the war paved the way for colonisation of Namibia by South Africa from 1920, under a League of Nations agreement (Heneborn and Melin, 2012).

Under South African administration, poor Afrikaans-speaking White people came from South Africa and appropriated land for farming. McCullers (2011) describes pre-apartheid colonial culture as unique within the British Commonwealth:

South African colonial ideologies developed from English, Dutch, and German colonial legacies and were comprised of a dangerous mixture of racial constructs such as Baaskap (white supremacy) and black peril scares that encompassed tendencies towards liberal paternalism, on the one hand, and sexual anxiety, violent repression, and poorly disguised slavery, on the other.

(McCullers, 2011, p.45)

As such, even before apartheid was legislatively introduced in 1948, South Africa's colonial hostility to indigenous Namibian people was entrenched. Conceptualising apartheid as segregating Black, White, and so-called Coloured people may be accurate, though is undoubtedly incomplete. Initially advocated in 1940s South Africa so Afrikaner people could have "cultural-political 'space' separate from Anglos, blacks, colored and Indians" (Louw, 2004, p.29), apartheid was further developed to divide indigenous Black ethnicities (Leys and Brown, 2005). Urban areas were transformed as different ethnic groups were moved to peripheries, townships with poor land and no infrastructure. In Windhoek, Black people were forcibly removed from integrated Old Location to ethnically segregated Katutura (Krüger, 1998). Indeed, Katutura is still laid out according to these ethnic segregations showing the apartheid legacy persists. In rural areas, division was orchestrated by colonial forces through their relations with traditional leaders, affording powers and responsibilities to them. The 1963 Odendaal Plan⁶⁴ set out South Africa's policy of Separate Development for Namibia, in 'self-governing homelands', further ethnic segregation which compounded division, mistrust, competition, and occasional armed inter-ethnic combat (Leys and Brown, 2005; Wallace and Kinahan, 2011). Seeking to reduce South Africa's claim on the area, the United Nations (UN)⁶⁵ revoked South Africa's mandate in 1966, thus setting the scene for the ensuing independence struggle (Dobell, 2000). International relations inadvertently added to Namibian ethnic division when the UN announced the Oshiwambo dominated South West Africa's People's Organisation (SWAPO) as the legitimate political representative of Namibia in 1975 (Dobell, 2000), at the expense of other minority ethnic groups seeking independence. This move potentially added to post independence concerns about the domination of Oshiwambo people, a concern I explore later in this section.

The Independence Struggle

When the independence struggle commenced in 1966, colonisers intensified the divide and rule approach of apartheid by increasing the number of traditional

⁶⁴ The full title is the Report of the Commission of Enquiry into South West African Affairs

⁶⁵ In its capacity as superseder of the League of Nations which gave South Africa the original mandate

authorities and co-opting traditional leaders to the military, both by bribery and coercion (Taylor, 2008). Most traditional leaders were recruited for the South African defence forces, the South West African Territorial Force, (SWATF) and later the Koevoet, the notorious counter-insurgency unit (Bolliger, 2017). In north Namibia, the Koevoet engaged in guerrilla warfare against SWAPO's armed division, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) and violently suppressed community members suspected of supporting SWAPO/PLAN (Bolliger, 2017). It is important to understand regional variations determined who aligned with whom in the struggle, as some traditional leaders supported independence struggle actors. However, as Friedman (2014) explains, where colonisers controlled traditional leaders, they used propaganda to portray SWAPO as the enemy of local ethnic groups and colonial security forces as their protectors. This is the context in which colonial veterans later claimed to have taken up arms for SA, believing they were protecting their community (Bolliger, 2018).

Further aspects of liberation struggle efforts caused division, particularly between the leadership of SWAPO in exile and some remaining SWAPO supporters in Namibia. The initial exile of SWAPO and PLAN members in the late 1960s was followed from 1974 onwards by an exodus of young people, with some thirty-five thousand in exile camps in Angola, Zambia, and Tanzania (Leys and Brown, 2005). Those involved in the struggle inside Namibia had restricted communication with exiled leaders, so they did not always have a shared sense of how best to show resistance (Akuupa and Korne, 2013). Not wanting to deviate from the liberation project, exiled SWAPO leaders had a policy of 'no development before liberation', although several prominent community organising movements were set up within Namibia by SWAPO and SWAPO Youth League activists, including Namibian Women's Voice (NWW, as shall be discussed further) and Bricks Community Project (Becker, 1995; Cleaver and Wallace, 1990). These groups responded to the survival concerns of Namibian people living under oppressive apartheid rule (Leys and Saul, 1995). The SWAPO instruction to limit and, in the case of NWW, end activities prior to Namibian independence, have had ongoing implications for post-independence relations (Leys and Brown, 2005). UN

Resolution 435 recommended Namibian independence in 1978, which was to be confirmed ten years later as part of ending the Cold War.⁶⁶

The Detainee Issue

A stark example of intragroup violence known commonly as ‘the detainee issue’, remains one of the most divisive aspects of the independence struggle. SWAPO leadership is alleged to have sanctioned human rights abuses of exiled Namibians accused of spying for South Africa, including incarceration in so-called dungeons, torture, rape, killing and failure to repatriate missing detainees presumed dead (Höhn, 2010; Saul and Leys, 2003; Trehwela, 1993)⁶⁷. Surviving detainees allege accusations of espionage were meted out in an ethnicised manner (Trehwela, 2009) designed to overpower anyone questioning SWAPO leaders (Leys and Saul, 1995). Some detainees spoke on return though most opted not to draw attention to themselves. Accusations go all the way to the highest office, as Namibia’s first President, Sam Nujoma, was military commander during the independence struggle.⁶⁸ As such, this issue challenges the narrative of Namibian history and the image of those celebrated for securing independence (Höhn, 2010).

Namibia had no truth and reconciliation process, as the governing Swapo Party⁶⁹ pursued an official amnesty for all conflict-related violations (Kamwanyah, 2014). Critics viewed the policy as being one of amnesia rather than amnesty, to avoid having to admit responsibility for unknown numbers of missing detainees, presumed dead (Dobell, 1997; Conway, 2003). The state’s approach to reconciliation deliberately discouraged analyses of these past violations, arguing that this would only incite a desire for retaliation (Parlevliet, 2000). Instead,

⁶⁶ In 1988 the Brazzaville Protocol between Angola, Cuba, and South Africa, aided by the United States and the Soviet Union, made provision for Cuban troops to withdraw from Angola, and the subsequent implementation of 435 (Hatchard and Slinn, 1991).

⁶⁷ Estimates of the number of missing detainees presumed dead vary. Dobell (1997) cites a range of 1,600, from the International Red Cross, to 2,100, based on a statement by former detainee, Eric Biwa. However, Höhn (2010) notes the Namibian National Society for Human Rights puts the figure at 4,200.

⁶⁸ A book by written church leader Siegfried Groth in 1995, deeply implicates Nujoma in the detainee issue, which he angrily condemned (Dobell, 1997).

⁶⁹ SWAPO became the Swapo Party after independence

Namibian people were urged to focus on the future and on ethnic/racial, social, and economic reconciliation (Dobell, 2000). In his doctoral thesis, the first Prime Minister and current President of Namibia, Hage Geingob, explains why he advocated drawing a line under the detainee issue after independence:

Occasionally, innocent people were labelled as spies... However, as I argued in the National Assembly, there were others who had also suffered. Many were killed as a result of spies providing information to South Africa... Those who were labelled wrongly or rightly were still alive and could make their case, but those who died as a result of betrayal did not stand a chance...SWAPO was a party to full amnesty, and the government followed through on that position in independent Namibia. It hired and trained those who were detained outside the country. Some of the top civil servants in Namibia are the ones who were detainees during the struggle.

(Geingob, 2004, p.203 and 204)

This account is notable by what it omits, as Geingob acknowledges deaths caused by spies but not those accused of spying. However, he does argue the amnesty was sincere in the efforts made to integrate former detainees in independent Namibia.

Various affected groups have campaigned since the 1980s, keeping the issue live, albeit sporadically (Höhn, 2010). One group, Breaking the Wall of Silence, argues a lack of progress by the Swapo Party on apologising, exonerating detainees, and providing details of where the disappeared are buried, prevents the issue from being resolved (Dempers and Clarke, 2010). Societal division lingers as to whether these events should be revisited or forgotten for the sake of peace and stability, while some who raise the issue of the ex-detainees, experience marginalisation and isolation (Saul and Leys, 2003; Kamwanyah, 2014). Indeed, this analysis from 2000 seems as relevant over two decades later:

There is still a pervasive silence washing over the political landscape, which is broken only intermittently... Undoubtedly, there are those who could seek to make their voices heard but, instead, choose silence, and equally there are others who want to be heard and upon whom silence is imposed.

Post-Independence

The democratically elected government promoted unity through a discourse of 'One Namibia, One Nation' in hopes of deprioritising difference between Namibians (Akuupa and Kornes, 2013). However, inter-ethnic relations and hierarchies in modern Namibia are bound up in a complex range of historic and political factors, which the government has been accused of failing to recognise and address (Kamyanwah, 2018; Lattimer, 2002). For example, in One Namibia, One Nation discourse all questions about race and ethnicity were removed from the 1991 census, and replaced by questions on language (Christopher, 2006). Namibia's oldest and most marginalised ethnicity, the San, pejoratively called Bushmen, speak across three language groups, only one of which is in the census (Suzman, 2002). Consequentially the census does not accurately capture the self-identification of all its diverse peoples. Namibia's inclusive constitution, negotiated by all elected parties, protects various pre-independence positions, to prevent discrimination, particularly against White people (Krüger, 1998). Implementation of this provision has stymied the process of reversing past colonial injustices, such as vast areas of commercial land being predominantly owned by White farmers (Töttemeyer, 2013). Namibia's status as one of the most economically unequal countries (World Bank, 2017) needs to be understood in this context. The constitution not only called for vigilance against the scourges of apartheid and colonialism, but also against tribalism (Hatchard and Slinn, 1991). Tribalism, although part of everyday discourse, is not explicitly defined in the constitution, though it is an apparent nomenclature for division and discrimination between indigenous Namibian ethnicities.⁷⁰

Töttemeyer (2013) argues ethnocentrism, favouring one's own ethnicity over others, is a more accurate term for ongoing problems in Namibia. Most Namibian

⁷⁰ Lindeke, Wanzala and Tonchi, (1992) argue tribalism is a product of colonialism and apartheid, specifically the separate, divide and rule apartheid methods described above. However, the term tribe is rejected by some scholars for having been imposed on Africans by European colonisers and colonial social scientists (see Mafeje, 1971; Ngaruka, 2007).

ethnicities have sub-groups, inter-changeably described as traditional groups or cultures, though more frequently, tribes.⁷¹ Whilst intra-ethnic tension may exist, the more substantive challenge to national reconciliation relates to tensions between ethnicities (Krüger, 1998; Töttemeyer, 2013). Foremost among these tensions have been concerns that the Oshiwambo majority is over-represented in political leadership and public office. Cooper (2016, p.7) assesses “widespread fear and resentment of Oshiwambo dominance” is “one of the best-known and most deep-rooted conflicts” since independence. Therefore, the condemnation of tribalism by the political elite (even if misnamed) is at odds with perceptions of practices by the elite (Kamwanyah, 2014; 2018; Töttemeyer, 2013).

Concerns about ethnocentrism in government practice are evident in the contentious issues of land allocation (Kamwanyah, 2018b)⁷², government’s refusal to recognise some groups as traditional authorities, groups previously co-opted by colonial SA (Hinz, 2008; Töttemeyer, 2013)⁷³, and treatment of veterans that served colonial forces who were excluded from claiming a pension under the 2008 Veteran Act (Bolliger, 2018)⁷⁴. In this context, inter-ethnic relational tensions and disparities linger. Metsola (2010) argues government controlled public narratives of Namibia’s pre-independence past, shape current socio-political relations, with resultant lingering divisions evident in regional, rural–urban, generational, educational, and most notably, ethnic differences. However, highlighting ethnicised differences and disparities is discouraged, and often met with allegations of tribalism (Gargallo, 2010).

3.2.2 Conflict, VAWG and Women’s Movement Relations

⁷¹ For example, Oshiwambo ethnicity is made up of eight sub-groups: the Kwanyama, Ndonga, Kwambi, Ngandyela, Kwaluudhi, Mbalanhu, Nkolonkadhi and Unda

⁷² Gargallo (2010) explains government policy is to distribute land bought from White farmers without regard to the ethnicity of those previously dispossessed of land, so as not to replace one form of apartheid with another. However, allocation of land to Oshiwambo-speaking people, not previously dispossessed of land, fuels concern that ethnocentrism drives land allocation processes (Melber, 2019).

⁷³ This lack of recognition prevents traditional leaders from being able to allocate communal land and forces people from one traditional group to live on communal land of another group/authority (Suzman, 2002)

⁷⁴ Campaign groups, including the Communist Party of Namibia, challenge this exclusion as unconstitutional, given the promise to treat Namibians equally (Muraranganda, 2013).

Conflict and VAWG

Colonial and conflict-related VAWG are multifaceted and specific to each place, and an analysis of them requires historic and political contextualisation. Rather than seeking to detail VAWG through Namibia's long history of colonisation, I focus here on the latest period, the independence struggle, which is in the living memory of several research participants. Some examples of women and children being disproportionately affected by violence meted out by SA forces are part of public memory in Namibia.⁷⁵ Other violations of the time, such as injecting Black Namibian women with Depo-Provera to decrease their fertility, either without their will or knowledge (Lindsay, 1986) appear less well known. There is a dearth of literature relating to everyday violations experienced by women and accounts tend to be more event focused. Available literature focuses on two main forms of VAWG in the context of the struggle; SGBV perpetrated by armed colonial state forces in Namibia, and intragroup SGBV in exile, including against detainees.⁷⁶

Sexual violence by state forces does not feature heavily in literature pertaining to the early phase of the independence struggle starting in 1966. Initially, few allegations of rape and sexual violence featured among the various accounts of SA forces harassing and violently interrogating SWAPO supporting women (Akawa, 2014). Some young women who joined the SWAPO Youth League (SYL) were made to carry out hard labour for traditional leaders on the colonial payroll, and there are accounts of some being subjected to public flogging (Akawa, 2014). However, when the Koevoet was established in the 1970s, allegations of sexual violations increased (Becker, 1995). Testimonies made to Hinz and Leuven-Lachinski (1989), gathering evidence of human rights abuses, caused them to suggest it was orchestrated that mainly Namibian SWATF and the Koevoet members carried out gang rape of young and old women. Hinz and Leuven-Lachinski (1989) highlighted gross underreporting was highly likely, due to stigma, risk of reprisals and the absence of a justice system in Namibia for indigenous women to address these crimes. Further, the International Defence and Aid Fund

⁷⁵ The Massacre at Cassinga, Angola, when over 600 mostly women and children were killed by a South African Defence Force airstrike, is the most commemorated example and is a public holiday in Namibia.

⁷⁶ See Akawa (2014) for the most comprehensive account of gender relations and VAWG during the independence struggle. Whilst Akawa critiques Trehwela (2009) for focusing on the harms experienced by men at the expense of the gendered violations experienced by women, Trehwela (1993) provides extensive detail of women's testimonies of SGBV.

for Southern Africa reported that SGBV was targeted at some girls and young women who took part in schools boycotts in the late 70s and 80s (see IDAF, 1981). Such accounts echo findings from Chapter 2, about how SGBV can be used strategically, not only to punish / deter resistance, but potentially to control Namibian colonial troops by alienating them from other Namibian people.

Although few SWAPO women activists went into exile in the early stages of the struggle, they comprised 40% of the exiled by the end (Olsson, 2005). The mass exodus, often of young people, taking a hazardous journey from Namibia on foot to overcrowded, insufficiently resourced exile camps peaked in the mid-1970s (Becker, 2010). Akawa (2015) argues inequalities in gendered power relations in the camps were not just in relation to the military structure but were also more generalised. She argues there were occasions when women and girls were threatened of being accused of spying by male comrades for refusing their sexual advances and also points out sex was sometimes transactional, due to women and girls being in absolute poverty in the camps and lacking access to basic provisions, such as soap. For these reasons she concludes “the number of possible incidents of rape and sexual abuse should not be underplayed” (Akawa, 2015, p.250). However, the extent to which exploitative and sexually abusive actions against women fit the description of systemic abuse is contested.⁷⁷ What archive documents do show is that there were insufficient procedures for addressing sexual violence, so, although SWAPO Women’s Council (SWC) received complaints of “forced pregnancy” directly from women, they were not authorised to investigate these complaints (Akawa, 2015, p.249). Instead, SWC was required to forward complaints to the male dominated Central Committee of SWAPO, which prioritised other concerns over this issue (Akawa, 2014).

Sexual exploitation and abuse were perpetrated against SWAPO/PLAN women in exile camps by men who were their comrades. Perspectives vary about the extent

⁷⁷ Former detainees lobbying on the issue at independence allege sexual violence in the camps was systematic (see Political Consultative Committee, 1990). Akawa (2014, 2015) notes a range of contrasting positions from literature and research participants, including outright denial, but also acknowledgement that some camp commanders abused their position, and systemic levels of abuse.

to which this was opportunistic sexual exploitation or militarily co-ordinated abuse (Akawa, 2014). Whether or not it was co-ordinated, it was pervasive:

Some commanders and various men who were in positions of power used the 'no comrade says no to another comrade unless you are an agent' line to get to sleep with women. With the security complex that was common to many guerrilla movements (and that led in Namibia's case to incidents such as the Lubango dungeons or the 'spy drama' of the 1980s), no one wanted to be labelled a spy; so many of the women would just give in. This would mainly happen to the new arrivals who were not yet familiar with how things worked in the camps. The commanders liked these new arrivals.

(Akawa, 2015, p.245)

Allegations that women detainees held in 'the dungeons' accused of spying for South Africa were raped and sexually violated, were shared with international human rights organisations from the mid-1980s and were reported by international media prior to independence (Basson and Motinga, 1989; Raditsa, 1989). Some published accounts of the time share explicit details of these violations such as women detainees being internally examined/raped following accusations that they had razor blades hidden in their vaginas to kill fellow SWAPO members, and women losing babies in childbirth without assistance and in inhumane conditions (see Political Consultative Committee, 1990; Trehwela, 1993). However, although the detainee issue was a major topic in Namibia, particularly during the transitional period before and just after independence,⁷⁸ it is noteworthy that sexual violations are far from prominent in retrospective analyses. Concerns about SGBV as part of the detainee issue range from being absent (see Höhn, 2010; Kamwanyah, 2014), to being included as footnotes (see Dobell, 1997). This may be because rape may not have been seen as serious in contrast to other crimes perpetrated against the detainees, many of whom disappeared, presumed dead. Such a perspective echoes the argument by Ayiera (2010) that where lives have been lost in conflict situations, rape can be overlooked as lacking importance. Given this low profile, conflict-related SGBV is not prominent in current discussions about the detainee issue or wider calls to acknowledge and reconcile past harms in Namibia. In any

⁷⁸ Paul Trehwela assesses the rape of women detainees in the pits/dungeons at Lubango, Angola, and possibly elsewhere, as systemic (see Lush and Trehwela, 2010).

event, because of the blanket policy of amnesty, SGBV perpetrated against detained women is among a litany of harms inflicted on Namibian people during colonisation and the liberation struggle, that are not subject to redress.

Women's Movement Relations

There is a paucity of literature on women's activism relations in Namibia. However, available sources on the independence struggle and transition to independence show it to be a significant time in terms of explaining subsequent division.⁷⁹ SWAPO curtailed women's activism within Namibia prior to independence, whilst simultaneously using the language of liberation for women as part of national liberation discourse (Becker, 2010). This contradictory approach appears to be a contributing factor to the split which formed during the struggle and deepened thereafter. In the 1980s SWAPO loyalists in the Women's Council accused community-based women activists in Namibian Women's Voice (NWV) of weakening the national liberation struggle with a feminist agenda, thereby prioritising gender over nation (Akawa, 2014; Becker, 1995). Becker (1995) analyses this as misguided and indicative of SWC feeling threatened by the success of NWV, which did actively promote women's participation in the liberation struggle. However, NWV also focused on income generation, literacy and campaigning against Depo-Provera (Hubbard and Soloman, 1995). One consequence of NWV dismantling under pressure from SWAPO, was there was no strong grassroots movement in place when Namibia became independent (Akawa, 2014). The split continued after independence despite several rounds of negotiations and efforts to unify a women movement across political parties, and between parties and newly set up NGOs (Becker, 1995; 2019). Initially discussions were conciliatory, noting the need for solidarity and collectivity among women, given national liberation was secured (Becker, 1995). However, hopes of a cross party/NGO coalition collapsed due to disagreements about structure, with NGO activists expressing disappointment at being sidelined (Becker, 1995).⁸⁰

⁷⁹ See Becker (1995) for an account of the women's movement from 1980 to 1992.

⁸⁰ This resulted in two news organisations being formed, one being Swapo Party dominated and the other seen as linked to opposition parties (Hubbard and Soloman, 1995).

The general unpopularity of the term feminism in the early years of independence could be explained by the fact that most people had not encountered it, given the UN Decade of Women had minimal reach in Namibia (Becker, 1995; Hubbard and Solomon, 1995). However, this unpopularity deepened when, as had happened in several southern African countries (see Chapter 2), political leaders in Namibia conflated feminism with homosexuality in public statements of condemnation:

Ostensibly, Namibia's nascent lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) movement was the sole target of SWAPO's vitriol. Closer scrutiny reveals that Swapo leaders did not reserve political homophobia only for LGBT activists; Swapo leaders deployed political homophobia more generally to silence political opponents. By using political homophobia, Swapo leaders quelled political dissent and pre-empted criticism of their leadership.

(Currier, 2010, p.110 and 111)

In 1996 the then President Sam Nujoma deviated from a scripted speech to make homophobic remarks at Swapo Women's Congress (Gunzel, 1996). Swapo Party Women's Council or SPWC (the name changed after independence) referred to homosexuality when denouncing the work of feminist activists. For example, SPWC rejected a feminist campaign for 50/50 gender balanced political party lists, human rights for minorities, and anti-VAWG and reproductive health measures, alleging it had a homosexual agenda (Frank, 2000; Frank and Khaxas, 2004). The feminist initiative was boycotted at a 2007 press SPWC conference on the basis that:

It has no other intention but to confuse the Namibian women and divest them from the core concept of gender equality... homosexuality should not be linked to the struggle for gender equality as gender deals with the relationship between women and men.

(SPWC Press Statement in Akawa, 2014, p.192)

Currier (2010) argues political homophobia was expressed in gendered, xenophobic, anticolonial, and nationalist statements and threats, and assesses this practice was ultimately designed to enable the post-independence government to strengthen its masculinist authority.⁸¹ Interpreting this issue using Bourdieu's field involves acknowledging that politicalised expressions of homophobia exert power over feminist (and other) dissent and create a political culture that makes such domination over feminism seem acceptable and achievable. As such, in the activism field, the political culture of homophobia threatens feminist groups by backlashing against them. In such a backlash, women activists are faced with difficult choices about whether to stay silent about feminism and same-sex sexualities, to disapprove of one or both or, to explicitly support both in their activism (Currier, 2011). A small number of feminist groups/organisations that were set up with international funding after independence aligned with LGBT rights groups to challenge the homophobic and anti-feminist hegemony (Courrier, 2011; Lorway 2015). Activists' accounts of this backlash and wider relational division in women's activism are analysed in chapter 6.

3.2.3 Anti-VAWG Measures, Services and Activism

Despite splits in the women's movement detailed above, considerable progress was made in ensuring the legal provision of rights for women and girls in the nation-building phase. The constitution of Namibia acknowledges the discrimination traditionally experienced by women and the need for legislation and policy implementation to encourage women to play a full and equal role in all aspects of Namibian life (Ambunda and de Klerk, 2008). Progressive legislation on combating rape, improving equality in property rights between married men and women and combating domestic violence followed, albeit slowly (Bohler-Muller, 2001; Visser and Ruppel - Schlichting, 2008). The more progressive aspects of this legislation were not only informed by anti-VAWG activists but driven by them in a coalition of NGOs, a few prominent politicians, and civil servants (Becker,

⁸¹ Some analysts suspect political homophobia was used to coincide with successful efforts to amend the constitution to allow a third term for former President Nujoma (Melber, 2005). Although the threats of imprisonment issued in speeches were largely not realised, and political homophobia reduced when a new Swapo President was elected in 2004, the discourse of homophobia recurred in subsequent years (Lorway, 2015). At the time of writing political homophobia appears to be experiencing a resurgence.

2019; Britton and Shook, 2014). Indeed, this coalition approach proved vital when prominent male parliamentarians sought to resist legally recognising marital rape (Becker, 2019).

Although following extensive campaigning legislation was successfully passed, there are significant gaps between anti-rape and domestic violence clauses and the resources, procedures, and practices to ensure their implementation (Britton and Shook, 2014; Rose-Junius and Kuenzer, 2006). There is also an ongoing delay in determining exactly how gendered customary court proceedings impact in VAWG cases (Mukungu and Kamyawah, 2020). Further, whilst the state's National Gender Policy emphasises the oppression caused to women by some harmful traditional/cultural practices (Andima and Tjiramanga, 2014; Becker, 2019) as earlier noted, the constitution bolsters the position of most traditional authorities. Contradictions between different laws, and between the letter of the law and its implementation, mirror a wider pattern when it comes to gender rights in Namibia. The development of progressive, internationally benchmarked rights-based legislation on one hand is tempered by conservative control of women's sexual morality and an increase in VAWG on the other (Becker, 1995; Akawa, 2015). Such setbacks cause Akawa (2014) to argue the expressed goal of liberation for women during the independence struggle, was short lived once Namibia became independent. Edwards-Jauch (2016) argues the violence of colonialism pervasively shaped violent masculinities in Namibia. This only makes the challenge to address the problem of VAWG beyond legislation more urgent in the post-colonial stage.

State procedures for dealing with VAWG cases involve a variety of professionals in criminal justice agencies from court through to prison. Central to these are designated Women and Child Protection Units comprising police officers, health practitioners from the Ministry of Health and Social Services, and workers from the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare⁸². Anti-VAWG organisations within the NGO sector have become less explicitly feminist in recent years. Feminist activism groups developed quickly after independence thanks to international

⁸² This ministry was previously named the Ministry of Women Affairs and Child Welfare (from 2000 to 2005) and before that, was the smaller Department of Women Affairs (from 1991), which, not being a Ministry, had no seat in the Namibian Cabinet (Becker, 2019).

funding, including the emergence of a specialist NGO focused solely on addressing VAWG in the community, Women's Solidarity (Hubbard and Solomon, 1995). However, as Melber (2005) notes, various international donors then moved on from funding development projects in Namibia. Feminist NGOs experience a double bind in relation to this withdrawal of international funding as, being denounced by government, they are also unable to benefit from state funding, meaning previously prominent feminist groups have had to periodically reduce the work undertaken since the early 2000s. Women's Solidarity closed completely in 2004 due to lack of resources (Rimmer, 2004), though it re-opened on a much smaller scale several years later. As such, concern expressed by Mohanty (2003) that the input of Northern donors may inadvertently result in disempowering outcomes for feminism in the global South, due to lack of sustainability, appears to be relevant in Namibia. Conversely, a new GBV service organisation, Regain Trust, was established in the same year interviews took place in 2015, and has since expanded, employing social workers to co-ordinate psychosocial support for victims of GBV.

Several additional groups and projects were active in the capital city, at regional and national level, and in online spaces at the time of the research visit. There is one refuge in Windhoek, for victims of GBV and their children, Friendly Haven, which is church run. Counselling organisations, Lifeline/Childline Namibia and Philppi Trust, which is explicitly Christian, respond to various issues, include working with victims and perpetrators of GBV. Self-help groups, set up voluntarily/organically by survivors of GBV were operating both face to face and through social media, and awareness raising work was being done by a variety of media, arts, and women's groups, as well as one men's project. Also some health particularly HIV focused organisations expanded to incorporate VAWG awareness and intervention work, under a sexual and reproductive health remit.⁸³ A coalition of several of these NGOs/groups, which features heavily in subsequent chapters, emerged in 2013. This coalition engaged in protest, collaborative awareness

⁸³ When I worked in Namibia, I was concerned that international donors, such as PEPFAR, encouraged HIV organisations to incorporate anti-VAWG work, whilst VAWG organisations were underfunded. Prioritising HIV reduction in a country with peak prevalence rate of 21.3% of 15–49-year-olds in 2002 (UNAIDS, 2004) is understandable. However, I contend, effective anti-VAWG work has VAWG reduction as the primary aim and utilises VAWG expertise.

raising work with young people, women's groups, prisoners, and the public, as well as advocating for improved state resources to address VAWG.

Not only have public demonstrations of anti-VAWG activism increased in recent years, as driven by the coalition, but also political and public awareness of the problem of VAWG show signs of increasing. Regular headlines about gruesome VAWG murders prompt increasing debates about GBV in broadcast media, social media, and everyday conversation. The term "passion killing", has entered everyday discourse, although it is being challenged by some analysts (see Whittaker, 2014). In 2014 a National Day of Prayer on Gender-based Violence took place as instructed by President Pohamba (Amulungu, 2014) whose term of office ended in 2015.⁸⁴ Edwards-Jauch (2012) found feminist activism to be largely absent from university student culture, perhaps unsurprising given the backlash against feminism detailed in 2.2 above. However, there is evidence of change since then. Following a lengthy period of abeyance, a surge of feminist activism driven by young people, and focused on GBV, is currently in motion.⁸⁵ Although this development is most noteworthy since I was in Namibia, it showed signs prior to and then during the 2015 interviews with research participants.

Returning to Whittaker's (2011) damning analysis of colonialism, it is clear the legacies of the subjugation of Namibian people and the struggle to overcome colonisation are far-reaching. Increases in VAWG since independence are seen by some analysts as symptomatic of this problem. Post-colonial political leadership, which has been critiqued in Namibia as being dominated by the majority ethnicity, has taken measures to quell analysis of past harms and deter dissent. Such messaging from political leaders, including politicalised expressions of homophobia, have been directed at feminism and have impacted on the environment in which women's anti-VAWG activism takes place. However, because in recent years, the problem of VAWG has attracted such widespread

⁸⁴ Since the interviews took place, the current First Lady, Monica Geingos, has become an active campaigner on the issue of GBV, particularly challenging the culture, values and attitudes which allow GBV to take place (see Ngutinazo, 2019).

⁸⁵ In 2020 #ShutItAllDown anti-GBV protests took place in Namibia, influenced by similar developments in South Africa. Namibian protestors have called for the resignation of the Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare and several dozen arrests took place during protests, two indicators of change in activism/state relations (See Geller, 2020; Melber, 2020; Shikongo, 2020).

attention, there appears to be widespread reflection about what can be done to address it. Just as the colonial and conflicted history of Namibia delayed feminist activism, conflict in NI has disrupted feminist activism, which I go on to analyse as part of a wider analysis of NI's conflict and post-conflict context.

3.3 Northern Ireland

My goal here is to contextualise current ethnonational division in NI by critically exploring key developments since the invasion of Ireland by Britain. As mentioned in Chapter 1, current division in Northern Ireland is often misunderstood as being about religious differences between Catholics and Protestants (Mitchell, 2013). Whilst religion is the ethnonational marker in Northern Ireland, theology largely lacks relevance to the current political situation (McGarry and O'Leary, 1995). However, at different points in history theological conflicts were at the centre of British colonialism and conquest in Ireland. In Chapter 1, I stated the timeline leading to the Troubles started in 1169, when the Kingdom of England first invaded Ireland, though several iterations of English/British colonisation of Ireland followed. Here, I focus on how pertinent historic developments and events relate to present internal division in NI, which is somewhat challenging as Rolston (2010) highlights, communities in conflict in NI have been accused of fixating on history to the point of mythologising it. However, I start with the seventeenth century, particularly turbulent in the island of Ireland, because events that occurred then are commemorated in Northern Ireland to this day. I trace aspects of conflict from this period and analyse their enduring relational legacies, before specifically locating VAWG and the women's movement in more recent societal conflict.

3.3.1 Ethnonational Division as a Legacy of the Past

Background to the Formation of Northern Ireland

Colonial states often use settlers to consolidate their expansionist policies, which people in colonised places may try to resist (Lustick, 1993). Unlike previous settlers, the Scottish and English Protestant settlers that came to Ireland in the

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, did not integrate with indigenous Irish-speaking Catholic people (McGarry and O’Leary, 1995). The political and economic ascendancy of the settlers was violently imposed during the Cromwellian Conquest of Ireland, which included the massacre of Catholics in Drogheda in 1649, the expulsion of Catholics from towns to the rural west of Ireland, the confiscation of Catholic owned land and the banning of Catholic clergy (Canny, 1988). The infamous Cromwellian phrase, “to hell or to Connaught”⁸⁶ is widely known in modern Ireland (Ellis, 1988). The 1690 Battle of the Boyne,⁸⁷ when Catholic King James II failed to retake his crown from Protestant King William III (or William of Orange) is continually revisited in NI (Canny, 1988). The battle anniversary on 12th July is the pinnacle of the marching season organised by Orange institutions⁸⁸ and an often-tense event, as I later revisit.

In 1800 the Act of Union subsumed Ireland into the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, marking the start of a difficult century for indigenous Irish people.⁸⁹ The lowest point was undoubtedly the Great Famine, which resulted from failed British policy in Ireland as much as from the potato blight that had affected much of western Europe (Bew, 2007). However, due to the system of absentee, often ruthless, landlordism, protectionist legislation on grains (corn laws), supplies of grain were regularly shipped from Ireland to Britain, and leaving subsistence farmers over-reliant on just one variety of potato. Famine related death, exacerbated by British political inaction, and migration, reduced the population of Ireland by two million people (Gray, 1999). Britain’s role in the famine remains part of Ireland’s collective consciousness.⁹⁰ The devastation of the famine set the scene for various forms of resistance, including the land war

⁸⁶ Connaught is the province in the west of Ireland where Catholics were given the choice to go or be killed.

⁸⁷ This battle took place in Co. Meath in what is now the Republic of Ireland.

⁸⁸ These institutions are the Orange Order, the Royal Black Preceptory and the Apprentice Boys of Derry. Prior to the Troubles, 12th July celebrations had the status of a state ceremony (Ruane and Todd, 1996). Although not an official state march anymore, ‘the Twelfth’ is still a public holiday in NI.

⁸⁹ The Act of Union technically marks the end of the British colonisation of Ireland, by bringing Ireland into the British realm. However, for those seeking Irish independence, this constitutes colonisation by another name.

⁹⁰ This collective memory explains why Prime Minister Tony Blair wrote an open letter of apology to the Irish people, at the 150 year famine commemoration. This unprecedented apology was designed to bolster the NI peace process and accentuate reconciliatory relations between Britain and Ireland (Edwards and Luckie, 2014).

(tenant rights and right to land ownership), Home Rule,⁹¹ and an armed struggle for an independent Irish republic (Bew, 2007).

Understanding division in NI requires appreciating the divergent paths taken before NI was formed, by those seeking increased Irish governance and those wanting to maintain the union with Britain. When Home Rule approval by Parliament seemed certain, it was resisted by a substantial number of Ulster Unionists, descendants of Protestant settlers in the industrial north of Ireland. Almost five hundred thousand Unionists signed the Ulster Covenant denouncing Home Rule in September 1912 and by mid-1914, almost ninety thousand men joined a new armed resistance group, the Ulster Volunteer Force (Lewis, 2006). Thus, partition needs to be contextualised in respect of this divergence and the threats posed.⁹² The Government of Ireland Act of 1920 made provision for two temporary self-governing entities, Northern Ireland, comprising six of nine Ulster counties, configured so Protestant/Unionist people were in a majority, and Southern Ireland, the remaining twenty-six counties (McGarry and O'Leary, 1995). Initially the two entities were to remain part of the Union, and later combine to form a single Council of Ireland, in effect, Home Rule (Bew, 2007). However, following the highly contested Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, civil war erupted in Ireland, and the partition of Ireland become fixed.

Northern Ireland Before the Troubles

The legitimacy of NI was disputed from the outset. The 1921 Treaty included a process to determine the boundaries of NI, although Unionists refused to engage, and no changes were made. Consequentially, half a million Northern Nationalists, cut adrift from the rest of Ireland, became a minority in a state treating them as a threat (Cousins, 2020). Lustick (1993) argues disputed lands in divided societies indicate failed state building projects. Even before partition, the police and

⁹¹ Home Rule, an Irish parliament within United Kingdom, was passed twice by the House of Commons but refused by the House of Lords. It was due to be passed a third and final time when the First World War broke out.

⁹² There had been a failed attempt at an uprising by the Irish Republican Army in Ireland in 1916, which the British violently quelled. This response precipitated the Irish War of Independence, also known as the Anglo-Irish War, from 1918-21.

members of members of Unionist parties and Orange Order expelled several thousand Catholic/Nationalist workers and some Protestant trade union activists from Belfast shipyards in 1920 (Lynch, 2008), thus making clear the felt need to quell organising and dissent by Nationalists. What followed for almost seven decades is widely acknowledged as 'a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people', a phrase misquoted to the first Prime Minister, whose actual words were 'a Protestant parliament and a Protestant state' (Bew, 2007). McKittrick and McVea (2002) argue Unionists have a long-held self-image as a frontier group, needing to defend their territory and position from the enemy within, often feeling the rest of the United Kingdom should be more supportive. Relationally, this helps explain the context in which discrimination against Catholics/Nationalists was imposed. Further, given the ethnonational make up in NI, maintaining a Protestant state relied on structural discrimination against Catholics/Nationalists (Shuttleworth, 2015). The development of NI was ethnocentric (Pullan, 2013) in that systematic discrimination in democracy regarding the configuration of electoral wards, employment and housing, heavily disadvantaged the Nationalist, Catholic minority (Farrell, 1980). In response to this discrimination, and borne out of need, Catholic and Nationalist communities began to foster self-help and community development practice, which in the 1960s included setting up credit unions and housing associations (Lewis, 2006). This form of community organising went hand in hand with civil rights activism, which takes us to the next significant phase of the history of NI, the Troubles.

The Troubles and Subsequent Peace Process

The 'Troubles' are widely agreed to have commenced in Derry in 1969. In the late 1960s, civil rights groups, inspired by Black US activists, campaigned to end discrimination in housing, voting and employment, with expressed commitment to non-violence (Bosi, 2008). Having been met with police brutality and following intercommunal tensions surrounding an Orange parade, violence erupted in the Bogside area of Derry between the Catholics barricaded in and the police and Unionists surrounding the area (Maney, 2007). Subsequent intercommunal rioting displaced people from communities in Belfast and Derry thus increasing segregation (Kennedy-Pipe, 1997). The British Army was temporarily deployed to

restore order although they stayed for almost four decades (Bosi, 2008). The descent into violence following non-violent campaign efforts renewed illegal republican paramilitary groups, primarily the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) (Ferguson and McCauley, 2017; Smithey, 2011). Similarly, in the context of Unionist narratives of siege and defence with slogans such as 'what we have we hold' and 'not an inch', there was a corresponding emergence of loyalist paramilitaries (McKittrick and McVea, 2002; Smithey, 2011). Whilst conflict incidents occurred throughout Northern Ireland and various parts of Britain and Ireland, there was a concentration of explosions, shootings, and spontaneous outbreaks of violence in Belfast. The Troubles resulted in the deaths of between 3,500 and 4,000 people (Janowitz, 2018) and approximately ten times as many were injured (McKittrick and McVea, 2002). The 1994 Republican and Loyalist ceasefires were followed by the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, with the agreed principle that NI's constitutional status would remain unless majorities north and south voted to change it (Dixon and Kane, 2014).

Implementing the GFA means finding long term responses to contentious issues including how to accommodate contrasting expressions of ethnonational identity, such as language, flags, and parades. This is extremely difficult because, when ethnonational groups are being asked to give way, the sense of threat they may experience gives a heightened importance to these expressions of identity (Nic Craith, 2002). For example, almost as soon as GFA was signed, the agreement and the wider peace process were on the edge of being derailed by a standoff relating to a contentious Orange march through a nationalist area. Sutton (2013) argues the situation was fuelled by the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), which was opposed to the agreement. However, the standoff represents a deeper and longstanding aspect of the relationship between Unionism and Orangeism, which is, when Unionists feel their Britishness under threat Orange marches provide a platform to reassert their Britishness and decry whatever is attacking it (Morrow, 1997, Nic Craith, 2002; Smithey, 2011).⁹³

⁹³ Further, although after NI interviews, the perceived threat to the British identity of Unionists/Loyalists is pertinent in the context of Brexit, given the March/April 2021 riots and the DUP threat to collapse the Assembly should the NI Protocol not be removed (Archick, 2021).

Progress is undeniable in that although political leadership of ethnonational groups still express the same macro political goals in relation to Britishness and Irishness, the ways these goals are pursued have transformed. To remain part of the United Kingdom, in 2007 the DUP accepted a form of power sharing with Republican party, Sinn Fein, which was a particularly significant move given that the DUP opposed the 1998 Agreement. Similarly significant is that Sinn Fein, the party associated with the Provisional IRA, has committed to strive for the re-unification of Ireland politically, rather than militarily (Dixon and O’Kane, 2014). The armed struggle has all but ended except for acts carried out by what Brown *et al*, (2011, p.5) refer to ‘spoiler groups’ on both the Republican and Loyalist sides. However, although NI entered a post-conflict phase after the GFA (Brown *et al*, 2011), paramilitary structures have not disbanded. In the year I conducted research interviews in NI, various publications focused on how to tackle their continued recruitment of young people and their dominance in communities.⁹⁴

Post Conflict Developments and Relations

In the post-conflict context, political time is measured by milestones such as elections and implementing political agreements, designed to move society away from violence (MacGinty, 2016). Given NI has been beset by a series of political crises since the GFA, crisis has become an ongoing feature of how politics operate (Deiana, Hagen and Roberts, 2022). Establishing and operating Northern Ireland Assembly institutions have been difficult and the Assembly has periodically collapsed (Hayes and McAllister, 2013). Although designed to protect peace, the way consociationalism⁹⁵ is structured around the two ethnonational groups, with elected members required to designate themselves as Unionist, Nationalist or other, risks prolonging and worsening ethnonational division (Bean, 2011; Taylor, 2006). The focus on ethnonationalism is at the expense of other components of peoples’ identities, needs and rights (Deiana, Hagen and Roberts, 2022; Nagle, 2016). The prioritisation is structurally fixed in the veto power of the petition of concern. Built into the Agreement to protect ethnonational minorities from

⁹⁴ See Alderdice, McBurney and McWilliams (2016), Morrow et al (2016) and Campbell, Wilson and Braithwaite (2016).

⁹⁵ This is the power sharing system in place in the Northern Ireland Assembly

majoritarian ethnonational policies, any petition of concern signed by thirty elected members, requires the relevant motion to have majority Unionist and Nationalist support to pass (Schwartz, 2015). The DUP used the petition of concern to block same sex marriage on several occasions, including in 2015, when most elected members were in favour for the first time (Hayes and Nagle, 2016). The irony is that an inbuilt feature to prevent policies that harm ethnonational groups, is instead used to block other equality rights by religious conservative politicians. In this context one may wonder what the incentive to end ethnonational division is, given it carries such power. Guelke (2012) warns about the intractable nature of conflict in divided societies because of the cleavage of competing notions of nationalisms, yet NI risks having an intractable post-conflict status beyond which politics is unable to progress.

Everyday inter-ethnonational relations occur in in what MacGinty (2016) calls, sociological time, which, although distinct from political time, can be disrupted by political events and developments.⁹⁶ Lysaght (2005) draws our attention to people's spatial practices to minimise risk when navigating segregation in working-class interface areas of Belfast. People recognise the 'other' and know they are similarly recognised, so they modify clothing, cross the road at certain points and stay on certain sides of the road to minimise the risk of provoking an attack (Lysaght, 2005). As Browne and Dwyer (2014) argue, several interface communities in NI share characteristics of poverty, deprivation, outbreaks of violence, and a resultant ghetto or fortress mentality. In that respect, although ethnonationally dichotomous, there are shared aspects of how they experience restrictions and struggles. Fear of crossing interfaces has been exacerbated by paramilitary groups discouraging people from doing so (Hargie, O'Donnell and McMullan, 2011). Reconciliation between ethnonational communities and social and economic development have been core priorities of four rounds of Peace Programmes, which vastly increased the number of projects engaged in cross community (ethnonational group) work (Byrne *et al.* 2009; Creary and Byrne,

⁹⁶ Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) conducts an annual survey to ascertain peoples' views on whether relations between Protestants and Catholics are better now than five years previously. Results often correlate with big picture issues. For example, when the ceasefires of 1994 took place the numbers of respondents answering yes, sharply increased from the previous year. Since 2016, the numbers answering yes have decreased annually (see NISRA, 2019).

2015)⁹⁷. Relationship building in funded projects has variously been assessed as significant and superficial (Byrne *et al.* 2009). The first round was effective in participatively engaging grassroots leaders (Buchanan, 2008), although Racioppi and O’Sullivan See (2007) highlight a risk of over-reliance on grassroots actors to tackle division, when relations between elite political leaders have been problematic and cooperation found wanting. However, by the end of the third round, grassroots actors reported feeling increasingly disempowered by the emphasis placed on expert consultants (Creary and Byrne, 2015).⁹⁸

Even with the passing of time, Roulston *et al.*, (2017) argue segregation is so pervasive different groups effectively live separate lives, and that ethnonational boundaries continue to shape people’s personal mobility and use of space. Various segregated residential areas are separated by so-called peace walls and more are in place since the GFA than before (Geoghegan, 2015). Space in non-residential urban centres has also been segregated over time (Leonard and McKnight, 2014). Seven percent of pupils are educated in integrated schools, with other schools being overwhelmingly Catholic or Protestant (Roulston and Hansson, 2019) which demonstrates how much of everyday life is carried out within, rather than between ethnonational groups. Given the risks of returning to violence and ongoing segregation, the rather pessimistic view expressed almost twenty years ago that “Northern Ireland is unlikely ever to know perfect peace” (McKittrick and McVea, 2002, p.xi), remains relevant.

3.3.2 Conflict, VAWG and Women’s Movement Relations

Conflict and VAWG

Literature identifies two main contexts in which SGBV was incorporated into the Troubles, state violence targeted at Republican and/or Nationalist women, and

⁹⁷ These programmes have been funded by the European Union (EU), the International Fund for Ireland (IFI), and the British and Irish Governments

⁹⁸ At the time of writing four rounds of peace funding have been completed, each with different priorities sitting under an overall peace remit. These rounds are in line with a sequencing approach to peacebuilding, whereby different priorities, such as socioeconomic development, are proposed in the order they are assessed as needed by funders/policy makers/academics (Walton 2016).

intragroup VAWG by conflict actors. That is not to suggest there were no intergroup incidents of violence in which women and girls were affected, but rather that SGBV was not strategically targeted across ethnonational lines by paramilitary groups during the conflict (Green, 2018; Swaine, 2015).⁹⁹ Sexual violence was utilised by armed state forces to intimidate women in working class Republican communities, and to police/punish Republican women deemed to be involved in subversive anti state/paramilitary activity (O' Keefe, 2017). Research on everyday state VAWG in NI is not readily available, although Harris and Healy (2001) documented testimonies of Catholic, Nationalist and/or Republican women's experiences of sexualised harassment by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (or RUC)¹⁰⁰, the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) and British Army. Women spoke of sexualised harassment by police and soldiers in both rural and urban areas, on foot patrols, in passing vehicles, and in watchtowers, with incidents ranging from sexual slurs and gestures to intimidatory gunfire. This abuse did not occur in the same sexualised way when women were in male company or, when visiting relatives in nearby middle-class areas (Harris and Healy, 2001). Class was noted by Pickering (2002) in Unionist women's experiences and attitudes towards the police, in that middle class women reported more positive experiences and supportive attitudes than working class women, although neither disclosed being sexually harassed. Pickering (2002) highlights disparities in police and army conduct when dealing with dissent or protest from women in different ethnonational groups. The police used violence, including sexual harassment, against Nationalist women and acted like event marshals with Unionist women (Pickering, 2002). Accounts of the frequency of experience of sexual harassment Republican women experienced in custody, in police and army vehicles, detention /interrogation centres, and prison (Wahidin, 2016) underscore how these violations occurred in a context of impunity (Aretxaga, 1997).

Tarring and feathering is a form of community violence specifically associated with the earlier years of the Troubles. Meted out by paramilitary groups and supporters, this form of punishment usually involves tying a person to a lamppost,

⁹⁹ Here I focus on violence that has a specific gendered component as opposed to generalised conflict violence in which women and girls were caught up.

¹⁰⁰ In November 2001, the RUC became the PSNI (Police Service of Northern Ireland)

pouring hot tar over their head, and sticking feathers to the tar (Feldman, 2003).¹⁰¹ Tarring and feathering was a known punishment for women from Nationalist/Republican areas suspected of having relationships with British soldiers or policemen, although it was also alleged to have been inflicted on a Republican prisoner's wife in the early 1970s for refusing to store weapons (McDonald, 2009). When meted out against women, tarring and feathering was usually carried out by women, with hot tar often replaced by black paint, following the shaving of women's heads (Feldman, 2003). Domestic violence was found to be exacerbated by perpetrators using weapons and paramilitary connections, whether real or falsified, to intimidate victims and dissuade them from reporting the abuse, (McWilliams and McKittrick, 1993; Doyle and Mc Williams, 2018).

Incidents of intragroup sexual violence, allegedly perpetrated by members of different paramilitary groups, were publicised post-conflict, although many date back to the Troubles. There is a recurring theme of impunity in these incidents as I go on to show. Swaine (2015) analyses activists' and media accounts of alleged rape and child sexual abuse by paramilitary members, and the cover up of these offences by paramilitary groups. This analysis highlights that, whilst some of the VAWG perpetrated by conflict actors may appear ordinary, the events that unfold thereafter are clearly conflict-related (Swaine, 2015; 2018). A well-publicised alleged rape by a prominent IRA member in the 1990s, brings conflict-related processes into focus. One of three alleged victims, Máiría Cahill, named here because she waived anonymity when she went public, was sixteen at the time of the alleged rape. When she reported the crime to the IRA, she was required to face her alleged rapist in a 'kangaroo court' and was asked to retract her allegation (Swaine, 2015). Following collapsed criminal court proceedings in 2014, the official review was highly critical of the Public Prosecution service and the police, who were contemporaneously aware of IRA kangaroo courts for such abuses, and did not intervene (Gilmartin, 2018). This inadequate response, potentially because the perpetrators were conflict actors, denied victims access to justice.¹⁰² Activist

¹⁰¹ In the early days of the Troubles men were tarred and feathered for alleged crimes which carry stigma, such as sexual offences (Feldman, 2003).

¹⁰² Family members of a victim of rape in the 1980s expressed concern the perpetrator was permitted to serve part of his sentence in the Ulster Volunteer Forum (UVF) prison wing, as well as later joining the Orange Order (see Barnes, 2018).

groups Relatives for Justice and Northern Ireland Rape Crisis Centre also provide accounts of paramilitary groups covering up sexual violence allegedly perpetrated by their members (see Breen, 2005; Murphy and Stiúrthóir, 2010).¹⁰³

Just as SGBV in the dungeons is not part of the dominant discourse of Namibia's detainee issue, state and intracommunity VAWG is not usually brought into accounts of the Troubles. The issue is absent from much academic writing on conflict-related victimisation in Northern Ireland, which largely focuses on intergroup violations (see Brewer, 2006; Dawson, 2007). Zalewski (2013) argues mainstream historical accounts have downplayed gendered aspects of the NI conflict on the basis all societies are patriarchal, so patriarchy is not unique to the Troubles. Dismissing patriarchy in this way prevents analysis of how patriarchy combines with conflict in gendered experiences of violence (Zalewski, 2013). Recent academic works cited here, that challenge dominant discourses of the conflict by providing a gendered focus, are therefore important.

NI has various processes in place for dealing with the harms of the past. Issues of conflict-related violence and victimhood have been taken forward by a range of reports, inquiries, consultations, groups, and processes in Northern Ireland, which commenced even before the GFA was signed (Bloomfield, 1998). As recently as January 2020, legislation was introduced regarding a Troubles related victims' payment scheme (Moffett, 2020). However, state-defined parameters are narrow, with a focus on death and physical injury (O'Rourke, 2012). Further, processes have fallen short when it comes to gendered aspects of past harms (Schulz and O'Rourke, 2015b; O'Rourke and Swaine, 2017)¹⁰⁴. Attention to conflict-related VAWG may have been more forthcoming, had the United Nations Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security (1325) been applied to Northern Ireland by the United Kingdom (UK) Government, given it has such a strong emphasis on gendered security (Hamber *et al.*, 2006). The UK Government's

¹⁰³ This NI Rape Crisis Centre closed due to the withdrawal of government funding in 2008 (Foster, 2018) leaving NI without a dedicated Rape Crisis Centre until one was relaunched in Belfast in March 2020.

¹⁰⁴ The 1998 Bloomfield Report makes no reference to or provision for gendered violence perpetrated within communities, by paramilitary members or members of the security forces (see Bloomfield, 1998). The next major publication acknowledges a conflict/domestic abuse link and whilst trauma support is recommended, no legal or human rights interventions are suggested (see Consultative Group of the Past, 2009).

rationale for omitting Northern Ireland from its 1325 plan was because the situation in Northern Ireland did not meet the international law thresholds to be defined as an armed conflict (Law and Gray, 2014). This highly contentious position had the effect of defining the Troubles as a crime wave rather than a political conflict (Hoewer, 2013; Kilmurray, 2013). This crime wave label does not stand up to scrutiny, bearing in mind the process to bring the Troubles to an end culminated in a peace agreement in which the early release of political prisoners, was “a major factor in securing peace” (Dwyer, 2007, p.779). Several analysts argue there is a hierarchy of conflict-related victimhood in NI based on problematic and politicised conceptualisations of innocence and deservedness (see Hearty, 2016: Rolston, 2000). Crudely, those presumed innocent are at the top of the hierarchy and those suspected of acting outside of the law in a conflict role, which often includes victims of state crime, are at the bottom (Jankowitz, 2018). Whilst not disputing this point, evidence points to victims of VAWG being absent from, as opposed to being low, in that hierarchy.¹⁰⁵

Women’s Movement Relations

The manifold nature of relations in places and time-spaces discussed in Chapter 2.5 is notable when one analyses the breadth and diversity of academic perspectives on the women’s movement during the Troubles and the arguably unfinished peace process. I list diverse positions here that I go on to analyse. Activism was beset by intractable sectarian division (Sales, 1997a). Activism was restricted by feminist activists so focused on gender, they avoided challenging the state to the alienation of Republican feminists (O’Keefe, 2013). Activism addressed feminist issues seen to be synonymous with Nationalist and Republican issues (Ashe, 2006) which alienated Protestant, Unionist and/or Loyalist women (Ashe and McCluskey, 2015). Finally activism included a network of grassroots women’s groups successful at working across ethnonational difference without asking women to compromise their ethnonational identity (Cockburn, 1998; 2000). These perspectives need not be considered as mutually exclusive, but rather

¹⁰⁵ This hierarchy is potentially on the cusp of being disrupted, as at the time of writing, NI is moving towards a widely opposed and globally unprecedented blanket amnesty imposed by the UK Government for all matters pertaining to the conflict (Carroll, 2021). This amnesty, is believed to be about ensuring the impunity of British army veterans, as it includes crimes already under investigation/being prosecuted, is vehemently opposed by human rights academics and activists and political parties in NI (Carroll, 2021). In short, it is egregious.

indicative of the range of dynamics in women's and feminist activism relations throughout the Troubles, as I go on to show. What is clear is that the second wave of feminism in Britain, analysed in Chapter 2.1, was interrupted before reaching the shores of NI in the 1970s:

In Northern Ireland we didn't follow the same path as American and British women... We were caught in the midst of a war, prison struggles and sectarian assassinations, where unionist and nationalist became more and more grimly divided and where political divisions were almost as bitterly experienced within a community as they were between opposing communities.

(Ward, 1987, p.1).

As the above quote makes clear, various conflict-related dynamics within and between ethnonational groups impacted on women's and feminist activism.

Women made notable contributions to peace activism which began and peaked in the 1970s. They set up Women Together for Peace in 1970, Derry Peace Women (1972-77) and the Women for Peace Movement in 1976, which later became the Peace People, in response to violent incidents. These groups brought thousands of people onto the streets calling for peace in the 1970s, but were unable to sustain momentum (Hammond Callaghan, 2011). Given their focus on peace through reconciliation between communities, they were critiqued for not taking a strong enough stance on state violence, even though Derry Peace Women publicly denounced state violence and was subject to counter insurgency measures from the state (Hammond Callaghan, 2011). Using archive documents, Hammond Callaghan (2010) highlights a British Government strategy of treating some women's peace groups favourably, affording them access and opportunities denied to others, which added to fragmentation among women's groups. Although peace groups later decreased in size, they provided opportunities for cross community relationship building and leadership development (Kilmurray, 2017).

As violence and division increased during the Troubles, religious conservatism was exacerbated within both ethnonational groups in highly gendered and sexually controlling ways (Sales, 1997a). Nationalist and ethnonationalist representations

of women often focus on their role of mother and reproducer of cultural norms (Yuval-Davis, 1996; 1997). Imagery of Catholic, Nationalist women often invoked mythological depictions of the suffering of mother Ireland and the Virgin Mary, although later in the conflict Republicanism also portrayed women as freedom fighters (Sales, 1997b). Women activists in Republican areas tell of going through a dual process of challenging state repression and community patriarchy (Hackett, 2004; MacCrossan, 2010). As MacCrossan (2010, p.126) argues in relation to women in a Republican/Nationalist area of Derry, “this was a war fought on two fronts — one against an enemy army and the other against gender and class restrictions within their own political and social communities”. Similarly, Protestant women in Loyalist and Unionist communities lacked visibility not only due to the dominance of men but also because pressure to be loyal to churches and state made it difficult for Protestant women to be seen to argue for their own interests (Ashe and McCluskey, 2015). However, as the conflict continued, Protestant women did become more active in seeking change in their own communities (Sales, 1997b; Kilmurray, 2017)¹⁰⁶.

Explicitly feminist activism operated within the “field of ethnic conflict”, however much feminists initially tried to avoid this (Ashe, 2006 p.576). The Northern Ireland Women’s Rights Movement, set up in 1975, resisted taking a stance on nationality/the constitutional question, committing instead to reaching working class women on both sides of the divide (Kilmurray, 2017). However, coalescing around campaigns for legal reform - a key feature of liberal feminism - was problematic on an inter-ethnonational basis, as many Unionist women did not wish to criticise the Northern Irish/British state, and many Republican women refused to engage with the state on the grounds of its illegitimacy (Coulter, 1998; Rooney, 1995). Socialist and radical feminist collectives that emerged in the late 1970s were also fragmented by these divisions (Malcolm and Roulston, 1980; Rolston and McDonagh, 1980). Evason (1991) reflected how women activists in NI were acutely aware of the extent of division and lack of unity, which they internalised as their deficiency. She adds that, rather than deal with the complexity of campaigning amidst this division, activists often found it preferable to focus on providing support to address VAWG, through groups such as Rape Crisis and

¹⁰⁶ For a current grassroots articulation of feminism within Loyalism, see <https://herloyalvoice.com/>

Women's Aid (Evason, 1991). However, acting as if VAWG was separate from tensions surrounding the state proved futile, as the two issues intertwined.

State VAWG against prisoners intertwined with Irish Nationalism/Republicanism which deepened the challenge of women working together, whether across ethnonational or ideological difference (Ward, 1991). Disunity was brought into focus in the 1980's campaign to highlight the situation of Republican women in Armagh Gaol on the "no wash" protest, including systematic strip searching, as a form of sexual violence (Loughran, 1986). When some feminist groups/individuals refused to take a stance on this issue, Republican feminists interpreted this as an endorsement of state sponsored violence (Rooney, 2000). Non-committal feminist groups were criticised as irrelevant to Republican working-class women at the forefront of prisoners' aid and anti-internment activism (Loughran, 1986; O'Keefe, 2013). The Armagh Gaol protest not only drew attention to state violence but also helped raise feminist awareness within the Republican movement (Loughran, 1986), a factor O'Keefe (2013) argues is widely underacknowledged.

By the 1990s several women's groups and centres had set up in NI (Evason, 1991; Killmurray, 2017), addressing what Cockburn (2013a) called frontline feminism issues. Although these groups and centres mostly operated within their ethnonational communities, many were involved in notable examples of grassroots cross-community dialogue examining the gendered and socio-economic roots of conflict (O'Rourke, 2012; Rooney, 2002). Arising from this work, the Women's Support Network (WSN) was set up in 1989 after a women's centre in the Protestant Shankill community spoke out against cuts to statutory funding of the women's centre in the Catholic Falls community (Mulholland, 1999). Described by Rooney (2002) as a 'courageous alliance', Cockburn (1998; 2000) credits this network for being skilled facilitators of transversal dialogue, despite being ridiculed by paramilitaries for doing so. Yuval-Davis (1999; 2015) explains that transversal dialogue has the potential to encourage peacebuilding across interethnic/ethnonational divides:

Using the tools ... called “rooting” and “shifting”, i.e., being self-reflective regarding one’s own positioning and yet attempting to understand the situated gazes of the other participants, the resulting common transversal epistemology is used as a basis for a political solidarity.

(Yuval-Davis, 2015: 98)

Women’s centres/groups came together under the banner of the network because they were affected by NI policies “rooted in sectarian and sexist polities” (Mulholland, 1999, p.4) and were concerned that state community development managed rather than eradicated inequality (Rooney, 2002). Their activism had the purpose of empowering women to address inequalities within their own communities, whilst also arguing for changes to state policy and practice (Cockburn 2013a; Mulholland, 1999). In seeking to understand the lost impetus of this work, Cockburn (2013a) highlights the changed landscape and women’s centres’ reliance on state funding to run essential community services.

By the time the peace process gained momentum in the 1990s, women were active in community relations, community development, and feminist activism including transversal women-focused activism. All these forms of activism laid the groundwork for the formation of the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition (NIWC), which Murtagh (2008, p.46) calls a ‘transversal party’. The quick formation of NIWC, following the announcement in 1996 that elections would enable the ten parties with the most votes to take part in substantive peace negotiations (Byrne, 2014) was nothing short of ground-breaking. NIWC participants came from all sections of women’s activism, established peace groups, community groups, NGOs, women’s centres, feminist groups, and academia (Fearon and Rebouch, 2006). The coalition made a well-documented contribution in terms of helping engender an atmosphere that would result in the GFA before disbanding in 2006 (see Cowell-Meyers, 2014; Racioppi and O’Sullivan See, 2006).

Building meaningful, lasting cross-community alliances among women remains a challenge post-conflict, due to the depth of societal division (Ashe, 2006), as well as a concern that discussing how structural inequality impacts ethnonational

groups might be viewed as fuelling sectarianism (Rooney, 2008). On one hand, Cockburn (2013b) laments the loss of frontline feminism in post-conflict NI.¹⁰⁷ However, on the other hand, she and other analysts (see Deiana, 2016) express optimism about emergent feminist grass-roots activism, much of which is driven by younger women. Therefore, with interviews taking place in NI in 2016, the timing is interesting in relation to how activists of different ages relate to issues of identity whether feminist, ethnonational or other aspects of identity.

3.3.3 Anti-VAWG Measures, Services and Activism in NI

Recent improvements in criminal justice VAWG measures do not negate that, for most of the post-conflict period to date, selective political interpretation of the law in NI limited the rights of women and sexual minorities in manifold ways, particularly in relation to responses to gendered violence and the criminalisation of abortion (Ashe, 2009; Thomson, 2016).¹⁰⁸ Anti-VAWG measures in NI still lag the rest of the UK and NI is the only UK region without a strategy on VAWG, despite having among the highest rates of femicide in Europe (Women's Resource and Development Agency, 2021). Although police responses to domestic violence improved significantly between 1992 and 2016, there are a range of systemic problems still to be addressed (Doyle and McWilliams, 2019). Rape conviction rates are lower in NI than in England and Wales, where they are widely known to be problematically low. Less than 1 per cent of recorded rapes and 18 per cent of prosecuted rapes in NI result in conviction, with England and Wales standing at 5 per cent for recorded rapes and 58.3 per cent prosecuted cases (Iliadis, Smith and Doak, 2021).¹⁰⁹ Wilkinson (2021) argues the slow progress on VAWG and sexual

¹⁰⁷ Although Cockburn (2013a) acknowledges her focus was on older activists with whom she had prior contact in the 1990s.

¹⁰⁸ Post field work, improvements in criminal justice VAWG measures have been introduced, such as the inclusion of coercive control in a newly defined crime of domestic abuse. The Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 was delayed by the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly from 2017 until 2020 (McGuigg, 2021).

¹⁰⁹ A highly publicised rape trial in 2018, again, after field work, resulting in acquittal of four high profile rugby players, not only divided opinion in NI, but also brought into focus the ill treatment of complainants in NI (McKay, 2021). Following street-based protests and media coverage throughout the island of Ireland, the 2019 Gillen Review in the Laws and Procedures in Serious Sexual Offences took place, with a range of changes suggested for the future in relation to safeguarding the dignity of complainants and setting a standing for ensuring consent is explicit (Iliadis, Smith and Doak, 2021).

and reproductive rights more broadly, is a political paradox, given the extent of human rights legislation that has been introduced in NI, post-conflict¹¹⁰.

The range of anti-VAWG services and interventions in NI at the time of my visits, resemble those in Britain, although they are fewer with a less favourable geographical spread.¹¹¹ NI has a federation of various Women's Aid branches, Victim Support services, a single Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) procedures apply in respect of high-risk domestic violence. Dedicated women's centres in cities and larger towns often provide information and support in relation to VAWG, although a range of women's groups meet in urban and rural areas. Several activism groups address VAWG, some exclusively by focusing on issues such as street harassment and abortion access, and some as part of a wider range of feminist and women's rights work. Several coalitions and loose intergroup networks exist, with individual and group members from support services, activism groups, trade unions and infrastructure organisations. These coalitions incorporate VAWG and abortion access into a wider remit of issues for which they campaign for change. Having discussed each country separately, I now go on draw out some key reflections.

3.4 Bringing it all Together: the research questions

In both countries multifaceted effects of the conflict of colonisation and resistance to it compounded division, although the conflict processes and post-conflict landscapes in Namibia and NI are distinct. Ethnic division is downplayed in Namibian public discourse, although as I shared in Chapter 1, I experienced Namibia to be a country with many interfaces and divisions. I also encountered people with strong opinions about other ethnicities and heard allegations about

¹¹⁰ The recent reduction of the criminalisation of abortion, won during a period of direct rule from Westminster, has since been unsuccessfully challenged by the Northern Ireland Assembly, which has actively sought to thwart the commissioning of abortion services (Wilkinson, 2021). Thus, the paradox and resistance show conservative religiosity persists in NI politics.

¹¹¹ The similarly with services in Britain has increased since Rape Crisis opened in March 2020 and an Advocacy Service with a combined focus on domestic and sexual violence was launched in October 2021. Although there was no Rape Crisis Centre in NI during field work in 2016 although there was an Independent Sexual Violence Advocacy (ISVA) run by Victim Support NI, which had been in place since 2005 until it was wound down to make way for the new combined advocacy service.

ethnic discrimination in resource allocation. These discussions felt familiar to me in how they reminded me of division in NI. As Töttemeyer (2013) argues, inter-ethnic tensions interrupt and threaten national reconciliation in Namibia. Conversely, in NI the lingering issue of ethnonational division is so publicly understood it determines the very workings of the power sharing government.

The literature review above highlights the complexities of acknowledging and addressing VAWG during conflict, which can affect groups in specific ways (Davies, True and Tanyag, 2016). State and intragroup VAWG have been part of conflict in both places, though in underacknowledged ways. In Namibia intragroup VAWG was highlighted at the time whilst in NI there was considerable delay in details emerging from within different ethnonational groups. Women's activism relations have also been impacted by features of the conflict and post-conflict situations. I experienced the division between pro-government/Swapo Party gender equality activists and NGO feminists when I lived in Namibia, but at the time, I did not understand the context. I vividly recall feminist groups being impacted by political homophobia, though I lacked understanding of this being a post-colonial measure to quell dissent in Namibia and other nearby countries. In NI, long standing tensions in women's activism have surrounded whether and how ethnonationalism and feminism can accommodate each other, again with a sense of everyone being aware of the division. I now reflect I was influenced by unity/bridge builder feminism, though perhaps with not enough emphasis on feminism. As such, my wish to see peace through reconciliation may have subconsciously discouraged me from sufficiently questioning the gendered nature of structural inequalities in NI. This acknowledgement only reinforces my current sense that understanding women's activism relations can provide useful insights into wider societal conflict and post-conflict issues.

Bringing together the reflections arising from the literature reviewed thus far and my lived experience, I developed the following three questions towards the overarching goal of understanding relations in women's anti-VAWG relations in post-conflict Namibia and NI:

- What are anti-VAWG activists' perspectives on the impact of conflict and the post-conflict context on their lives and activism?
- How do women activists come together in anti-VAWG activism and exercise agency across ethnic/ethnonational and other differences?
- How do post-conflict factors shape anti-VAWG activism relations?

3.5 Conclusion

My analysis of the unique narratives of Namibia and NI shows a contrast in their conflicted histories and the legacies of conflict in terms of how each society acknowledges ethnic and ethnonational divisions. My examination of accounts of conflict-related VAWG focused on state and intragroup violations, whilst noting that gendered harms are largely absent from the discourses of both conflicts. My analysis of literature on how conflict and post-conflict dynamics have touched women's activism shows contrasting levels of detail. In Namibia, the narrative is of a single story of how the split between pro-government women activists and autonomous feminist activists, and the anti-feminist actions of government actors have damaged feminism. In NI, diverse perspectives exist about the multifaceted ways women's activism has been touched throughout and following conflict. Having developed questions from academic analysis and reflections on my lived experience of the places and anti-VAWG activism, in the next chapter I analyse how I approached answering these questions.

Chapter 4: Researching Women's Anti-VAWG Activism

4.1 Introduction

Researchers achieve transparency when they provide a full honest description, justification, and assessment of how they conducted their research, chose their methods, and collected and analysed their data (Silverman, 2010). In this chapter I argue that my methodology allowed me to explore how activists perceived their post-conflict situations and their relationships with other activists/actors, although I encountered ethical dilemmas on how to recruit participants, facilitate their presence in the research, and analyse their life histories. I develop the chapter in four sections. Firstly, I justify and explain my feminist research paradigm and choice of qualitative life history method. Secondly, I assess how I handled the recruitment of twenty anti-VAWG activists, showing how my planned approach was helped along by opportunistic breakthroughs in recruitment through social media and with the help of intermediaries. Thirdly, I analyse my approach to conducting life history interviews without harming participants, which required me to reflect on the potential impact my positionality may have on participants, as well as respond to challenges that emerged. Finally, I explain my approach to thematic analysis of life history transcripts. Not only did this involve devising a tool to organise categories and themes, but also resolving my dilemmas about which data to include, and therefore exclude from, my thesis write up.

4.2 Developing a Feminist Research Paradigm

Whilst knowing from the outset I approached this research as a feminist endeavour, it took further reading and extensive reflection to translate this intent into a feminist research paradigm. Here I specify the ontology, epistemology, and methodology of my feminist research paradigm. I then analyse my choice of life history method as the most appropriate qualitative tool available to me to answer the research question.

4.2.1 Integrating My Feminist Ontology, Epistemology and Methodology

A Qualitative Feminist Ontology

Ontology, the philosophical enquiry into the nature of reality, or of being, asks whether social entities should be perceived as being objective or subjective (Krauss, 2005). In this research, I adopt a position of subjectivism, also known as constructivism or interpretivism (Bryman, 2016). Subjectivism posits that social entities or phenomena are subjective, and that, rather than there being a single, objective reality, multiple versions of reality exist (Bryman, 2016; Krauss, 2005). So, an anti-VAWG activist living in post-conflict society experiences multi-layered relationships and positionings in a society, also subjectively constructed. There is no single truth about the activist or the society in which she lives. Qualitative research is based on the belief that the best way to understand a phenomenon is to view it in its subjective, ever-changing, relational context (Krauss, 2005). The choice to make this research qualitative was therefore straightforward, as the study is committed to achieving a contextual understanding from activists' different perspectives. Developing an understanding about how anti-VAWG activism occurs in post-conflict contexts requires engaging with activists about their experiences and perspectives.

Feminist researchers have been instrumental in promoting qualitative approaches, providing a necessary alternative to the preceding positivist paradigm that dominated natural and social science, which strove for objective, verifiable facts (Braun and Clarke 2013; Jenkins, Narayanaswamy and Sweetman 2019). Qualitative research facilitates opportunities for participants to give their voice to the issues being studied, according to their situation (Tracy, 2013). This situatedness is important because, as feminist researchers recognise, the world is made up of intersecting hierarchies such as gender, race, ethnicity and class, which shape peoples' different experiences and realities, according to their position in them (Acerley and True, 2020; Arvin, Tuck and Morrill, 2013; McCall, 2005). Ontologically, this inequality requires researchers to critique how such hierarchies appear in context, and to ensure they are not inadvertently reproduced

in the research (Ackerley and True, 2020). In the last part of this sub-section, I analyse my approach to guard against reproducing hierarchies, binaries, and inequalities by applying an intersectional approach, as part of the feminist ethic of this study.

An Epistemological Dilemma

Epistemology, the philosophical theory of knowledge, considers how we know what we know, what counts as knowledge and who can be a knower (Ackerly and True, 2020; Anderson, 1995; Scott, 2014). In development research, feminist epistemologies have a pro-women stance, emphasising the validity of women's knowledges and lived experiences to inform development (Jackson, 2006). Such a stance is integral to this study as, not only are the participants expert women in their own situated knowledges (Kobayashi, 2001) but, as anti-VAWG activists, they also seek to influence development responses to VAWG. The integrity of the study is therefore reliant on understanding participants' expert perspectives of how the post-conflict context appears in their lives and activism, and how they come together with other activists. In other words, the understanding of relations in post-conflict anti-VAWG activism comes from holistically exploring the lives of activists, according to a feminist epistemology.

Engaging with feminist postcolonial epistemology scholarship resulted in a dilemma as to whether I should conduct research in Namibia. Postcolonial scholars challenge global North/South inequalities, the framing of development actors from the global North as experts, and the dynamics of people and places of the global South being viewed and re-depicted through a global North lens (Baksh and Harcourt, 2015; Butler, 2001; Kothari, 2002; McEwan, 2014). This outsider research is criticised for not sufficiently appreciating the knowledge of people being researched or facilitating their input (Apentiik and Parpart, 2006; Scheyvens and Storey, 2003). This critique, coupled with the observation by McEwan (2001) that white Western academics regularly research women in other cultures and the reverse rarely occurs, led me to query whether I should add to this imbalance. This uncertainty persisted despite me having research questions that were informed by my experiences of conflict and post conflict-related divisions in both the global

North and South, specifically in NI and Namibia. However, feminist approaches not only problematise the inequalities that enable certain forms of research, but they also argue that North/South research discussions can be non-exploitative and empathic encounters, provided safeguards are put in place (Dwyer and Limb, 2001; Scheyvens, Novak and Scheyvens, 2003). I therefore resolved my dilemma by committing to integrate appropriate safeguards as part of my interpretation of a feminist ethic, which I now go on to analyse.

Research Methodology: Applying a Feminist Ethic

Feminist scholars point to ways researchers can guard against exploiting participants, not only from the global South, but all participants. All knowledge is geographically, historically, and contextually situated and acknowledging this situatedness is a core aspect of respecting research participants (Wong, 2002). The feminist ethic I have developed for this research is comprised of four parts, working towards feminist change, being transdisciplinary, valuing participants, and, applying an intersectional approach.

- Working towards Feminist Change

Feminist research in development should reveal power inequalities to inform interventions to address these inequalities (Jenkins, Narayanaswamy and Sweetman 2019). Feminist critiques of development interventions highlight that positive sounding concepts, such as women's empowerment, require changes to the status quo in the distribution of power and resources (see Aguinaga et al 2013; Batliwala, 1994; Cornwall and Edwards, 2014). Researchers should therefore seek to be change makers through critical research that has disruption of unequal power at its core (Mellor, 2007; Murray and Overton, 2003; Tracy, 2013). In the context of this study, working towards feminist change requires drawing attention to activists' struggles to challenge imbalances in power relations through their activism. However, I hesitate to assume activists' voices will be amplified through participation in this research. I recognise activists amplify their own voices through activism. Raghuram and Madge (2006) argue researchers should be prepared to

take up justice issues raised by participants. There was one issue raised by participants that required me to change my approach. I was initially keen not to engage in an analysis of violence or write in detail about it. This reluctance was based on my view of the research as being about activism, by which I mean responses to violence rather than the perpetration of it. However, because some activists spoke in detail about intragroup conflict-related VAWG and the difficulties of taking forward activism responses to it, it became imperative to analyse this violence. Activists' reflections on the ways in which this issue endures as a relational concern in activism has become a significant focus of this thesis. I recognise a responsibility to relay this issue to those interested in this study, to highlight difficult power relations which contribute to this ongoing situation.

- *Being transdisciplinary*

Confusion can exist between being transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary. I adopt the position of Mama (2017) who argues transdisciplinary research seeks to disrupt the division of knowledge in different silos, unlike interdisciplinary research, which brings established disciplines together. Mama (2017) argues feminist researchers should embrace transdisciplinarity to disrupt academia's division of knowledge that separates mind, body, society, politics and humanity. Hughes (2002) supports this position by arguing that integrating transdisciplinary insights prompts new ways to address feminist concerns about knowledge, power and gender. I locate this study as development research which is transdisciplinary (Sumner and Tribe, 2008). I drew deeply from the architecture of a wide range of disciplines, which was necessary for me to understand key concepts in this study as comprehensively as possible. For example, my analysis of agency spans often feminist perspectives, from disciplines such as psychology, sociology, social movement studies, development studies, and philosophy, whilst my awareness of the concept of relational agency comes from education studies. I recognise the extent of transdisciplinarity in this thesis makes it somewhat difficult to place, in terms of building on established literature. Further, engaging with such a breadth of disciplines added to the time and work involved. However, it was only by traversing different disciplines that I could develop feminist insights on how relations in context shape agency, which adds to a key contribution of the thesis.

- *Guarding against exploitation: Valuing participants through reflexivity*

Whether one ascribes to a feminist ethic, it is imperative that researchers take all possible steps to ensure they do no harm to research participants (Apentiik and Parpart, 2006). As part of the application for ethical approval, which was granted by the Social Sciences Department Ethics Committee at Northumbria University, I confirmed the various safeguards built into this research to minimise the risk of harming any activist with whom I came into contact, or any of their associates. These measures related to my recruitment of participants and facilitation of interviews, including ensuring informed consent. Several circumstances required me to show the value I placed on participants through my actions. Noteworthy examples guided by the feminist ethic of this research include advocating to change my approach to pseudonymity and recognising the wellbeing issues of a potential participant took priority over arranging an interview with her. I analyse these circumstances and my responses in more depth in Section 3 and 4 of this chapter. I have already covered the recommendation by Raghuram and Madge (2006) to take up the issues raised by participants under working towards feminist change, above. Raghuram and Madge (2006) further argue for researchers to make research findings accessible to participants as a way of guarding against being exploitative. From the outset I was committed to sharing research findings as widely as possible among anti-VAWG activists and discussed with relevant agencies in both research sites how this might be achieved. I view this as usefully taking up the issues that activists raise, as reflecting these issues back to them may stimulate further conversation.

Reflecting on positionality means recognising how an individual's geography and intersecting identities, shapes their understanding of context (Reddy *et al.*, 2019). I already discussed in Chapter 1 how this research endeavour links to my biography. I add here, that, at different points in the research, I needed to apply feminist reflexivity to manage two of my biases: over-identifying with activists with feminist perspectives like mine; and finding anti-feminist viewpoints of some activists challenging. However, our awareness of our own biases may not be enough to shield us from them, particularly when researching a topic such as VAWG, which can evoke passionate responses (Etherington, 2004). Recognising

that this was most pertinent during data analysis and the write-up stage, I revisit this challenge in section 5 of this chapter. It is critical for feminist researchers to reflect on and be sensitive to how their positionality may affect participants in their study (Jenkins, Narayanaswamy and Sweetman, 2019). For me, undertaking this research according to a feminist ethic means presenting myself authentically to participants, without focusing excessive attention on myself. This approach is in hope of giving space to the participants to focus on their own lives without having to wonder about the person with whom they are sharing. In section 4.1 of this chapter, I reflect on how I handled presentation of my ascribed ethnonationality, ethnicity, and race, aware my name and other identity markers may leave participants unsure.

- *Applying an intersectional approach*

As a concept, intersectionality extends beyond the theory discussed in Chapter 2 and is an approach well suited to qualitative research (Bowleg, 2008). As mentioned above, applying an intersectional approach holds researchers accountable for critiquing their own methodology (Abrams *et al.*, 2020), particularly to guard against reproducing hierarchies in the research (Ackerley and True, 2020). This study focuses on how activism toward gender justice may be interrupted by ethnic/ethnonational division, and, as such, it was conceptualised in the intersection of gender and ethnicity. There is an inherent risk of me, as the researcher, focusing on this intersection at the expense of other relevant aspects of identity. It is therefore important that intersectionality is applied as a research principle in ways that challenge the homogenisation of the women who participate (Carbado *et al.*, 2013). I commit to recognising the heterogeneity of participants by reflecting on the unique ways they talk of being impacted by factors such as class, sexuality, disability, age etc. and getting to know the individuality of participants' thoughts, experiences, and aspirations beyond these intersections (McCall, 2005). This places a dual responsibility on me as a qualitative researcher to recognise structures that shape activists' lives and to see each activist beyond these structures. My commitment to doing so stems from not wishing to view activists in a reductionist manner. I believe the research method I chose, the life history method, aids me in that holistic approach, as I discuss in the next subsection.

Another way this study seeks to be intersectional is to attune to the ways activists and, informed by their accounts, the people they support, have been impacted by processes of power and exclusion. Beetham and Demetriades (2007) promote integrating diversity into research to pay special attention to how exclusion and marginalisation occur in respect of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, age and (dis)ability etc. Although not able to determine the diversity of participants in advance, and not seeking to exclusively interview marginalised activists, I did undertake participant recruitment in a wide variety of groups and networks with diversity in mind, which I discuss in section 3 of this chapter. First, I analyse the life history method I chose for this research.

4.2.2 Challenging Dominant Narratives through the Life History Method

I identified two research methods as potentially suitable for understanding relations in anti-VAWG activism in post-conflict societies: ethnography, and life histories. The ethnographic method requires engaging in participants' daily lives over an extended period and formally gathering data via sources such as documents and interviews (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Whilst satisfied that ethnography would lead to a depth of understanding of anti-VAWG activism in context, I was concerned whether it would enable access to a diverse and broad enough range of activists. Ethnographic research in development is often located within a single organisation or group, such as the study into the everyday practices of a women's organisation in Philippines over three years by Hilhorst (2003) or the changing nature of development education through the experiences of a development education organisation in the UK by Humble (2013). Given that my enquiry focuses on how activists come together across divisions to practice anti-VAWG activism, I was not convinced this question was best answered within a single group or organisation within a research site. Additionally, from my experience, anti-VAWG activism is often carried out on an intermittent and voluntary basis and one activist might operate across several anti-VAWG groups and issues. At doctoral level, ethnographic research sites often need to be small and contained to be manageable, whereas I had opted to conduct a two-site study. Whilst I could have chosen either Namibia or NI as a single research site,

operating across more than one site enables research to investigate a phenomenon in diverse settings (Darke, Shanks and Broadbent, 1998). Further, just as the initial research question grew out of experiencing both places, it felt important that the study incorporated both settings. My combined concerns about the efficacy of ethnography to answer the research questions, and feasibility across two sites in a part-time doctorate, led me to discount the method. The very reasons I decided against ethnography were the same ones that convinced me of the suitability of the life histories approach, which I now explain.

The life histories approach is part of the biographic or oral history tradition, which elicits the narratives of individuals reflecting on their life, usually in interviews (Baillie Smith and Jenkins, 2017). In the life history encounter participants are asked to consider how the time, place and conditions in which they live impact on their lives (Leydesdorff, 1999), which Miller (2000) analyses as a form of micro/macro interplay. By placing themselves in a wider web of meanings, individual participants weave agency and structure together in their biographies (Yarrow, 2008). Not only does this make the life history method appropriate for the questions posed in this study, but it also centres the research participant as an actor. This perhaps help to explain why, although the life history method is relatively new in development research it is, as Baillie Smith and Jenkins (2017) point out, gaining in popularity. Proponents favour the potential of this method to challenge dominant narratives by enabling more nuanced perspectives (Harding, 2006; Lewis, 2008) which potentially reveal the extent of oppressive meta-narratives (Bathmaker, 2010). Perspectives shared in this research bear out this nuance, for example, one NI activist reflected at length on what would need to change in activism to address intragroup VAWG by conflict actors and other contentious conflict-related issues, based on her wish to determine whether and how these changes could be achieved. Indeed, Sizoo (1997) highlights a real strength of life history research in feminist development, which is that it provides women with an opportunity to reflect on their local web of relations to re-orientate towards desired change. Similarly, one Namibian participant discussed her concerns about the split in women's activism, from the 1980s onwards at length, and how she, and other feminist activists, were oppressed by pro-government gender equality actors. She spoke as somebody wanting to reflect on whether this dominant relational problem in her activism biography could be resolved for the

future. Attending to participants' priorities from their own histories fits the activist oriented nature of this study and, as Rustin and Chamberlayne (2002) argue, humanises the research process.

The life history approach is not viewed as problem free: as Lewis (2008) argues the inherent difficulty in generalising from life history interviews is a potential weakness. However, the lack of generalisability is not seen as problematic by feminist scholars who employ this method precisely because it can uncover the diversity of women's experiences and highlight issues that have previously been ignored (Ojermark, 2007). To be sure, accounts generated in life history encounters are based on subjective interpretations, rather than scientific or objectively verifiable facts (Bertaux and Kohli, 1984; Miles and Crust, 1993; Harding, 2006). The spoken history of the participant is not simply a chronological account of events but is a conversation created by the participant and researcher, who together decide which issues to explore and to what depth (Harding, 2006). That said, as qualitative research findings, analysis of life history interviews may have a 'fittingness' to other contexts, as opposed to generalisability (Ward Scholfield, 1993). This not only applies to other studies, but to the two research sites in this study.

Life history interviews are usually semi-structured to allow flexibility (Harding, 2006). This loose structure enables space for participants to express their priorities which increases the researcher's understanding of the world from their point of view (Kvale, 1996). Yarrow (2008) recommends being clear with participants about the specific nature of how the researcher wants to pursue data collection, and I took various opportunities to reinforce my interest in an open conversation about each participant's activism. The benefit of enabling participants to place themselves in their broader societal context is supported by Bathmaker (2010) who argues that, although the life as lived is the starting point, each person's life is placed in social relations of power, even before birth. In other words, everyone enters a story that has already begun (Harnett, 2010). From an intersectional feminist perspective, I value this method and being able to learn about the lives of the women as told by them. Whether born into societal conflict, or post-conflict circumstances, an environment of open discussion or closed

silence about VAWG, those who go on to be activists are shaped by the norms of their time and place, and the interviews allow their subjective interpretations of these factors to be revealed.

On a pragmatic level, life history interviews can be completed in a single meeting, making this method logistically suitable for the demands of conducting research across two sites. The method also enables recruitment of diverse activists from a range of groups and organisations, which is pertinent to the research question of coming together across difference. As such, this is the method I chose. Rather than structured questions, I developed a series of interview prompts: see Appendix A. I first used these prompts in a pilot interview I conducted with an activist in the North East of England and, after refining them, I also shared them with trusted former colleagues in both sites. Doing so allowed me to sense check their meaning and applicability, which gave me confidence in the appropriateness of my approach. Having analysed the method and overall research paradigm in depth, I now go on to analyse the range of approaches I employed in participant recruitment.

4.3 Planned and Opportunistic Participant Recruitment

In this research, I supplemented a planned approach to participant recruitment developed pre-field work, with a spontaneous social media call out for research participants, which drew me further into online and social media engagement as a form of recruitment. I also availed myself of opportunistic support from intermediaries who were acquaintances of mine, in the research sites, as an unknown number of friends/colleagues and their associates generally promoted my research. Whilst this support was most helpful to me securing interviews with participants, it raised the issue of how to effectively use gatekeepers in my research. Here I analyse the recruitment approaches I used in this study.

4.3.1 Pre-Fieldwork Recruitment Planning

During research design I aimed for the stretching target of twelve interviews each in Namibia and Northern Ireland. I gauged this to be the maximum number feasible in the time available in each site, as well as being sufficient to provide the necessary data to answer the research questions, assuming there were no major data quality concerns (Mason, 2010). It is important that the size of the research task matches the time available to reduce the risk of collecting inaccurate or incomplete data (Hoddinott, 1992). Although, as a part time researcher and full time professional, I was restricted in the time available for overseas research, I maximised it by combining annual and unpaid leave in July and August 2015 for a single trip to Namibia and three trips to Northern Ireland March, April, and June 2016, in the following annual leave year. Perceiving field work time constraints as a potential challenge, I regularly reflected on this target of twenty-four participants prior to and during field work (see section 4.4 of this chapter). I applied measures to overcome time constraints recommended by Hoddinott (1992) including carrying out a pilot interview, and extensive pre-fieldwork research on activism groups to identify and profile activists. Much of this background research on activism groups was online, with the purpose of identifying a long list of potential research participants before fieldwork and increasing my understanding of the context in which different activists operate. Whilst keen to have extensive information on activists, I decided not to make firm arrangements with too many participants in advance, especially in Namibia, where I would have more time to recruit from within the field.

In section 2.2 of this chapter, I expressed commitment to interviewing diverse participants, an approach recommended by Ackerly and True (2020) when looking at how issues under study impact different identities. I wanted to recruit a spread of activists across age ranges, from neighbourhood level to public level and, where possible, activists addressing marginalisation in their anti-VAWG activism. My awareness that neighbourhood level activists were less likely than well-known ones to appear in on-line searches affirmed my decision to be flexible about recruiting whilst in the field. Conducting research outside one's own cultural milieu is complex (McEwan, 2001) and prior to fieldwork, I reflected that being sensitised to 'conversational conventions' (Francis, 1992) was advantageous to minimising inaccuracies and misinterpretation in interviews. I also knew my experience in both areas would enable me to negotiate the practicalities of fieldwork - using

public transport, finding interview venues, and securing accommodation efficiently. Minimising the time needed for orientation to the field site enables maximising valuable research time. Based on these reflections I decided to proceed with my stretching target of twenty-four participants.

4.3.2 Recruitment through Social Media and Online Contact

The use of social media to identify, access and recruit research participants became an invaluable tool for me in ways I had not foreseen prior to this research. This recruitment occurred in two ways: by using my own social media account to issue a call out for participants; and by joining a range of open and closed online groups and fora to issue recruitment invitations. In a small number of instances, I identified individual members as suitable to interview, based on their presence in online groups. The first breakthrough was an opportunistic post I wrote on my own Facebook page on 9th June 2015 which received high levels of support (see Appendix B). I counted 35 shares of this post from people on my friends list, though I have no way of determining how many of their friends did likewise. On 12th June 2015, I received a private message from *Deborah*¹¹² expressing interest in taking part and providing her email address. Follow-up contact with *Deborah* established that she had many years of anti-VAWG activism experience. Although from Windhoek, she had recently moved over 700km to north Namibia. Given this distance from the capital, I doubt I would have been able to identify her for recruitment by my other planned methods of internet and social media profiling of groups for potential participants, and traditional face-to-face snowballing techniques. This positive experience with *Deborah* spurred me to proactively make use of anti-VAWG activism and feminist social media groups I came across or joined, as part of my general background research of field sites. This proved particularly useful during my fieldwork in Northern Ireland, where I had short periods when physically in the field to recruit.

In total I recruited seven women through social media groups, four of whom responded to recruitment call outs in the groups. One other social media call out

¹¹² Not her real name

in a feminist group resulted in a participant being recruited through a family member's recommendation. Just as the post presented in Appendix B, the tone of all recruitment messaging was open to women to self-identify as anti-VAWG activists, without being prescriptive about what that should entail. This may have been significant for one woman who came forward, *Claire*,¹¹³ as much of her previous activism had been individual, as she challenged the perpetrator through court and used her art to abstractly express the impact of the trauma of VAWG in her life. Survivors of VAWG may conduct activism through their personal struggles in ways that may be overlooked as activism, unless they go on to represent their personal experiences publicly (Pain, 2014). Although *Claire* had recently become involved in activism, she had not made a public disclosure, and this was something she wanted to explore further in the interview. Like *Deborah*, it is unlikely that I would have identified *Claire* through the other recruitment methods utilised, which reinforces benefits of recruitment call outs among relevant networks enabling potential participants to opt in (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015).

Due to the spontaneous start to my social media recruitment, I did not set up an account specifically for this research. This is something I would consider in future research as, in total, I contacted or joined seventeen closed and open on-line and social media forum groups. As the significance of social media recruitment became increasingly known to me, so did my awareness of the need to safeguard participants contacted this way. Most groups required advance approval before joining and for me to express why I wanted to join, which was when I explained my research. I had positive interactions with group moderators, all of whom I found helpful and supportive. There was one public group in which I did not interact directly with moderators, as there was no vetting in place before joining the group nor advance moderation of posts. Regardless of the rules of each social media group, I wanted to prevent the identity of potential or actual interviewees becoming known in social media groups. I therefore highlighted the importance of anonymity in recruitment messaging and asked people not to express interest or tag others in the thread, which nobody did. Instead, I asked people to contact me via my university email address, although nobody did, all preferring to private message instead. I was aware that many activists from my background research long list

¹¹³ Not her real name

were members of the same groups I had joined. As I had already identified aspects of their activism and contact details by other means, I did not seek to utilise the groups to contact them and primarily contacted them by email.

Some people find online spaces safer and more sociable than in-person engagement for expressing themselves and engaging in identity work (Broad and Joos, 2004; Bülow and Felix, 2014; Denissen, Neumann and van Zalk, 2010; de Zúñiga, Puig-I-Abril and Rojas, 2012). I interviewed three women based on their online group presence, whom I invited to participate via private message. Deciding to leave the social media group space to contact individual members for recruitment was complex for me, which I now explore. A concern emerged for me about having an online presence in groups before going on to contact a group member by private message to ask if they wanted to take part in the research. I felt conflicted about whether to contact individual members this way in case my invitation to participate was unwelcome or seen as intrusive. However, I was conscious that for my feminist research to be ethically responsible, I was required to negotiate participation from the outset (Birch and Miller, 2002). I was concerned that sharing online space with potential participants before recruiting them might compromise my authenticity.

Unable to find a depth of material on social media recruitment in development studies research, I turned to health research, specifically an interactive study by Barratt and Lenton (2010) with social media groups for people who use drugs. Whilst the context and method of Barratt and Lenton's (2010) research were different to my study,¹¹⁴ their experience gave me grounds to reflect on my presence in online groups. There are ethical concerns about online 'lurking' by researchers, that is, covert observation without the detection of those observed, and the associated invasion of privacy (Brownlow and O'Dell, 2002; James and Busher, 2012). Even though I had no desire to be covert and was not recording or capturing communication between people as data for my research, I felt like I was lurking because I was using my presence in the group to build a profile of women I might interview. I resolved to minimise time spent in the group before contacting

¹¹⁴ Barratt and Lenton (2020) utilised the social media interactions as research data, which became contested, and result in legal and safeguarding concerns associated with illicit drug use.

potential interviewees, which I undertook to do as soon as possible. For this reason, as a general approach I only used private messaging when I did not have alternative contact details for an activist. I received positive responses from the three women I recruited from online groups having proactively approached them. This suggests my concerns may have been unfounded, although being reflexive has reinforced the need to act responsibly and with authenticity in online spaces with potential participants.

Virtual environments are brought about by people sharing similar goals or values, and the online world enables them to create different types of interaction and social structures (James and Busher, 2012). With that in mind, inhabiting and recruiting from collective online spaces that focus on VAWG and feminism, enabled purposeful sampling. This form of sampling is summarised as a technique that effectively uses limited resources to access individuals who are especially knowledgeable or experienced about the topic of interest (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015). Online engagement with participants enables researchers to travel to the field virtually rather than physically (Hine, 2008), particularly useful in international development research. I believe this study was enhanced by online participant recruitment. I am excited about the potential for researchers to cross geographical boundaries and reach participants online who might not be easily found offline, particularly when time and resources are tight. Of course, there are limits to online recruitment in terms of who does and does not access such spaces, so I suggest it should complement, rather than replace other recruitment methods in a study such as this. Alongside my enthusiasm, I support calls for further discussion and guidelines in research about the interactive nature of recruitment using online forum groups (see Barratt and Lenton, 2010; Brownlow and O'Dell, 2002).

4.3.3 Recruitment through Intermediaries

An intermediary is someone who introduces the researcher to a target research participant (Healey and Rawlinson, 1993). Much literature on intermediaries and gatekeepers is devoted to their role in settings where the researcher is unfamiliar and either formally employs an assistant or utilises a gatekeeper for induction or

sensitisation to the local community (Dowler, 2001; Devereux and Hoddinott, 1992a). In my case, intermediaries were former colleagues and friends from the field sites who took this on without being asked, beyond my general social media call out asking people to share posts about my research. Opportunistic utilisation of eleven intermediaries featured in the recruitment of seven participants in this research of which I am aware.

Four participants in Namibia would most likely not have taken part in this research without the support of intermediaries, as they were activists of whom I was not previously aware. Two were grassroots activists in their informal settlements, recruited by a women's rights organisation, to which I had been introduced by an intermediary. Although clear I was focusing on the lives of activists rather than organisations, several staff expressed their belief in academic research generally, and support for this project, on the basis that women needed to come together to challenge violence and that any research that might add to our understanding of women's unity against violence was welcome. The organisational director provided assurances that they would not disclose the activists' participation in the research to any third party and asked that I share findings with them, to which I agreed. The other two participants were activists with a public profile who were not on my long list of potential participants. In one case this was because the activist operated outside of my main search area, Windhoek. The other activist was not long listed because, although involved extensively in anti-VAWG work at grassroots level, she was known to me for her public level peacebuilding work. The two intermediaries who identified the activists as suitable, contacted them independently and asked if they would agree to be contacted by me.

Due to intermediaries being better contextually embedded, they may positively influence a potential research participant in the decision about whether to participate (Petkov and Kaoullas, 2016). Although I have no way of knowing, it is possible the remaining three participants recruited through intermediaries may have otherwise been recruited by me, as they were well-known activists I wanted to interview. The first was an activist in Namibia whom I had emailed some weeks earlier without reply. Soon after an independently sent introductory email from an intermediary, the activist replied to my original email to say she would see me

when back in the country, which we later arranged. Convinced by the usefulness of intermediaries following this example, the following year in Northern Ireland I held off contacting activists early in case self-appointed intermediaries in my circle would do so, which indeed happened. I received a message from a former colleague, a well-known community activist in Belfast, who suggested I contact an anti-VAWG and abortion rights activist who was willing to see me. This activist was somebody I had identified as a potential interviewee, although I was aware gaining access to her might prove challenging, given she appeared to be in great demand. I found out when I met her that she had been told of my research by more than one intermediary, which reinforces how well known she is for her activism. The ideal intermediary has been described as somebody supportive of the research aims, knowledgeable about the work and personality of the target participants, and well connected to them (Petkov and Kaoullas, 2016). I appreciate being supported by several people who stepped forward with such qualities. However, I deliberately did not ask intermediaries to contact activists, as I saw that as breaching my own processes on anonymity. Further, every time I was contacted by an intermediary suggesting an individual to approach, I clearly informed them that I would not update them about whether the interview took place, due to the participant's right to anonymity. I found I had to keep very detailed recruitment notes to keep track of who recruited/contacted whom.

4.3.4 The Participants Recruited

Twenty anti-VAWG activists participated in the study, leaving me to conclude the recruitment methods I used were suitable. They were aged between 22 and 58 at the time of interview, though were mostly spread across 30s, 40s and 50s age ranges. The activists held a mixture of voluntary and paid roles, from neighbourhood level to national level activism and beyond. All were involved in more than one activism group at the time of interview and all but one talked of being involved in activism collectives/networks with people from other groups. All the collectives/networks were active on VAWG, some exclusively so. Due to most participants having long activism biographies across multiple groups, organisations, and networks, most anti-VAWG groups in Belfast and Windhoek featured in interviews. However, activists' biographies, rather than anti-VAWG

groups/organisations are my entry point for accounts of activism. Mindful that individual and organisational biographies can overlap and be difficult to disentangle (see Baillie Smith and Jenkins, 2017), I am careful not to foreground the history, development or identifiable features of the groups that feature in the research. Not all invited activists participated in this research, as I had contact with eighteen activists whom I did not go on to interview. Whilst I cannot be sure of all the reasons activists chose to decline, I acknowledge that a life history interview is a demanding process. Other factors may include lack of availability, out of date contact details, or the research information not being sufficiently clear (Williams *et al.*, 2007). Ten activists did not reply to correspondence, and I suspect out of date contact details featured with four of these activists. Seven activists indicated interest but were prevented due to diary clashes, illness, or not responding in time to arrange an interview. One further activist declined my telephone request due to being too busy. Having accounted for how I came to interview activists, I now go on to analyse the life history encounters with them.

4.4 Carrying Out Life History Interviews

Life histories are produced through interaction and the willingness of a flexible interviewer to ensure each participant has space to focus on the experiences and relations of importance to them (Baillie Smith and Jenkins, 2017; Harding, 2006). My reflection of the interviews that took place for this research is that they were open, in-depth explorations of a range of personal and political experiences and conditions that affected the participants' lives and activism. Rather than detail every encounter, in this section I focus on my main methodological interventions to help ensure the interviews were as fruitful as possible. I start with a reflection on how I managed the way I presented my identity to participants. Two connected sub-sections follow which relate to how I facilitated the presence of participants in the research by attending to their wellbeing in the interview process. I learned from some activists that their sense of wellbeing in the process was contingent on me and the research acknowledging them by their actual name and not a pseudonym, as initially planned. I close with reflections about how I would know I had carried out enough life history interviews, upon realising that I would not achieve the target number of twenty-four research participants.

4.4.1 Reflecting on My Positionality and Encounters with Participants

I provided extensive detail about my background in Chapter 1 and here I reflect on further aspects of my life that may be pertinent to my encounters with participants. Reflexivity in feminist research involves recognising the importance of the researcher's relational position within social structures, particularly with respect to those being researched (Butler, 2001; Jenkins, Narayanaswamy and Sweetman, 2019; Whitson, 2017). However, self-assessing one's multiple positionings is complex and researchers may have limitations in determining how these may be perceived by participants (Apentiik and Parpart, 2006; Rose, 1997). I realise this may be the case with the participants I interviewed, as I cannot claim insight into how they experienced the encounter. In Chapter 1, I shared that I grew up along the border, was a youth worker in Belfast and worked as development manager in Windhoek. Thereafter I moved to the north of Namibia where I met, then married a Namibian man. My husband grew up in a family who were subsistence farmers just south of the Angolan border, with an Angolan father and Namibian mother. He was a publicly known member of Lironga Eparu (Learn to Survive), the movement for people living with HIV at the forefront of campaigning for access to anti-retroviral therapy. When he passed away, I took his surname because I thought it would minimise bureaucratic problems to have the same surname as my Namibian step-daughter, who I lived with and later adopted. My daughter and I moved to a working-class area in North East England and when I remarried, I retained my daughter's surname. My husband and I have raised our two daughters, one mine and one his, to adulthood. By the time I commenced research interviews, I was leading a women's organisation, combining work with a part time doctorate.

I felt participants *may* feel unsure about aspects of my identity either before or during our meeting, given I have an Angolan/Namibian surname, white skin, a north of Ireland accent, and am affiliated to an English university. It is a challenge to ensure self-reflexivity is useful to the research rather than merely self-indulgent reflection (Kobayashi, 2003). Out of respect for the relational nature of the interview process, I sought to eradicate any vagueness about me, as the

interviewer and I developed some considered approaches. Firstly, based on my southern African surname, some participants might not have expected me to be white, so I enclosed my photograph in pre-interview correspondence where possible. It is inescapable that my White European identity has connotations that may impact my encounters with participants (Kobayashi, 2003; Faria and Mollett, 2016), particularly in Namibia. I felt it my responsibility to bring my 'Northern' self into each relationship (Baillie Smith and Jenkins, 2017) before the interview. That said, sharing my photograph also had the practical advantage of enabling participants to recognise me when meeting. One activist expressed surprise at my being white and she was one of several Namibian participants who enquired about how I got my name. My intent to engage each participant with ease, respect, honesty, and appreciation to encourage reciprocal expressions (Sikes, 2010), required me to answer various questions about my background and identity. On several occasions this extended to exchanges about issues that are core to this research. Having not changed my surname, research participants would likely not have known my present marital status or family situation without asking, which several did. This led to follow on questions from two Namibian activists who were widowed, and who disclosed their late husbands' families' actions to dispossess them of marital assets. Both activists enquired if I too had had experienced this form of VAWG and I willingly engaged in these exchanges.

I am aware my southern African surname, unlike my previous Irish sounding name, restricts NI peoples' ability to gauge my ethnonational background. Names have ethnic and other identity-based connotations (Lahman *et al.*, 2015). Further, my accent, although clearly from the north of Ireland may be difficult to pin-point. In interviews with NI people, I took opportunities to mention where I grew up along the border and other pertinent details that fitted our conversation. Sometimes opportunities to share a relevant detail presented pre-interview, when going through the logistics of discussing pseudonyms, recording the interview etc. I occasionally shared detail about myself during the interview, such as when participants spoke of holidays in Donegal or working in ethnonational communities different to their own. Etherington (2004) argues that we can enrich our research by sharing aspects of our personal histories to engage with others whose experiences bear some relation to our own. It felt important to be open about how my identity aligned with salient aspects of this research, such as working across

division, whilst keeping the participant's life experience the forefront of the interview. Wright Mills (1959, p.204) advises the researcher to learn to use one's own life experience in intellectual work arguing "the social scientist is not some autonomous being standing outside society". The depth with which activists discussed their experiences of division assured me the interviews were open encounters. I was also encouraged by several participants positively reciprocating my appreciative interest. This interest was often shown at the end of interviews, by participants asking me about how I felt about apartheid, where I worked and how I found living away from home.

I am aware of a single occasion when identity issues caused a moment of strain with a participant. This was during an end of interview chat, when the participant expressed disapproval that Nyemba people were campaigning for increased recognition in Namibia.¹¹⁵ The basis of the participant's disapproval was that Nyemba people should not seek rights as Namibians because they are Angolan. I strongly sensed her instant realisation that my southern African family name is Nyemba, as she looked downwards and closed her eyes in an uncomfortable expression. Baillie Smith and Jenkins (2017, p.961) argue:

We cannot escape the relations we may want to problematise but should reflect critically on how and where our approach actually reinforces such relations, where it may open up spaces to unsettle them, and when it may do both.

One might assess this moment as an opportunity to unsettle problematised relations relating to the rights of the minority Nyemba group in Namibia. However, in that moment I felt the participant's embarrassment was unsettling for her and my overriding sense of responsibility as researcher was not to exacerbate this discomfort. As part of the meeting wrap up, I reminded her I would not be sharing details of what we discussed, outside the research context. I got the sense this reassured her, as she replied "sorry, sorry, thank you for that". Her comment was

¹¹⁵ Nyemba people, part of the Ngangela ethnicity, have been split between Namibia and Angola since the Berlin Conference of the late nineteenth century, when Germany and Portugal moved the border between Angola and what was then South West Africa (Moser, 2008). However, Nyemba tends to be the term used for all Ngangela people who came to north Namibia from Angola during the Angolan War of Independence, 1961-1974 and then the Civil War, 1975-2002.

exclusionary toward my Black Namibian family. However, having brought my White European self into the interview I did not want to exert what Green and Sonn (2006) refer to as white researcher privilege by disapproving of her perspective. I may have responded differently had this meeting been outside of the research context and in a purely social setting. However, I could not find words to challenge her comment without risk of alienating her, so I posed no challenge. That said, I did not collude with or express support for her view. Whether I reflect favourably on my response, or view it as a missed opportunity, I recognise it was an instant response in an unexpected situation. The example demonstrates the complexities of being part insider, outsider, both or neither (Mullings, 1999). Having reflected on how my identity may have had a bearing on the life history encounters, I now set out how I sought to undertake the interviews with the wellbeing of participants in mind.

4.4.2 Safeguarding Participants' Wellbeing

The concept of ethical research has become an overt aspect of research planning and practice (Brydon, 2006). As a minimum, the research process must ensure the dignity, privacy, and safety of participants (Scheyvens, Novak and Scheyvens, 2003). In other words, research must follow the 'do no harm' principle (Walford, 2005). It is particularly important to attend to the emotional and physical wellbeing of participants in research that discusses VAWG (Skinner, Hester and Malos, 2005). Whilst committed to ensuring the interview would not cause harm, my goal was that it would surpass the absence of a negative by being a positive experience for participants. To that end, I put in place a range of measures. Firstly, to meet with each woman in a setting in which she would feel comfortable, as recommended by Scheyvens, Novak and Scheyvens, (2003) I made provision for this in my health and safety planning pre-field work. On arrival in Windhoek, north Namibia, and Belfast, I visited public venues I thought would be comfortable and would offer privacy and quietness, such as libraries and cafes. Staff in one library agreed to make a room available by prior arrangement and staff in a cafe kindly agreed in advance to turn down background music if requested. I used some venues while other factors were not required, usually due to the participant having a preferred meeting space, which I was happy to use.

I provided each activist with a Participants' Information Sheet (Appendix C) and an Informed Consent Checklist (Appendix D), which I forwarded in advance where possible. I discussed informed consent in-depth with participants at the beginning of each interview. This discussion was useful as I was aware not all participants could be expected to read instructions in English and, having previously been a research participant, I was aware not everyone reads documents in advance of interviews. Before commencing the interview, I satisfied myself that each participant knew the various ways she could withdraw her consent before, during and after the interview, both in writing and verbally. I also explained that the notes and interview recordings would be stored safely under lock and key and that the content of the interviews would be anonymised as soon as possible, although the process for anonymity changed after the first field trip which I analyse in the next section. I offered additional written information detailing all the security measures to securely store and anonymise data for any who wanted further reassurance, although nobody requested this.

I understand the argument by Wilson (1992) that promising confidentiality is unrealistic in that the whole point of research is to make known the details provided in interviews. I did however opt to include the word confidential in pre-interview discussions because my experience as a practitioner tells me that it is too important to be omitted. I told each interviewee her participation would be confidential because her details would remain anonymous, which I am satisfied is the correct context. Except for the interviewees who refused anonymity, I invited each woman to choose her own pseudonym. Only when I knew the chosen name would I switch on the Dictaphone to commence the interview. Although I rarely had occasion to do it, I used the pseudonym in the interview, mainly to steer the activist away from using her own name out loud. I did this as a safeguard in case interview recordings went missing before being secured. I didn't get a sense it impacted the interactions, beyond reminding the participant that we were leaving her name out of the study. When interviewees waived anonymity, I did not address them by their name in interview.

I am aware researchers may experience challenges when choosing to study a sensitive issue that relates to the situations of research participants (Letherby, 2000). In this research there is a mix of activists - those who came forward to participate because they self-identify as anti-VAWG activists, and those I identified. This includes activists who are both public and private about their own survival experiences. I was aware that some women's involvement in activism might have been preceded by such direct experiences of VAWG, which they may have wanted to discuss or avoid discussing. In this regard I put several measures in place. I sought to minimise the risk of participants experiencing emotional distress by being clear that the focus of the interview was their life history experiences of activism. Within that, I encouraged activists not to feel pressure to divulge anything that they thought might cause distress to them or anything they would prefer to keep private. At no point did I initiate questions about whether a participant had been violated or ask her to elaborate having disclosed having been violated.

Most participants shared experiences of being violated as a woman or girl, usually in a matter-of-fact manner, and I mainly listened without questioning. I believe my experience of providing face-to-face support to women affected by violence and abuse was helpful, in that I was comfortable about maintaining silences, pausing to focus on supporting participants and was also confident about stopping the interview, if required. Two interviewees began to show signs of distress, one who wished to carry on talking about her experience and one who wished to side-line it from the interview. In both instances I took their lead. I had gathered information about onward support services in advance, although I expected the participants would be familiar with those services. This proved to be the case with one activist with whom I discussed possibly accessing support for past trauma. By setting a tone in interviews and asking each woman to go into detail about her activism, I anticipated that participants would be encouraged to focus on their coping skills and resilience in relation to this difficult topic and I believe that is what mostly happened. Only on one occasion did I feel the need to move the discussion on when a participant started to focus more on the life experiences of the perpetrator who violated her, than her own life history.

I conducted one interview with the aid of an informal language interpreter, whose voluntary input I appreciate. The informal interpreter is an activist who provided this support at the request of the participant. The use of language interpreters in development research is complex, carrying a risk that the researcher misinterprets the original meaning of the participant (Baillie Smith and Jenkins, 2012, Devereux and Hoddinott, 1992a; Maclean, 2007). I have past experiences of providing counselling and training with the support of interpreters and appreciate the complexity involved. Prior to fieldwork, I reflected that whilst my preference would be not to have a third-party present in interviews, I did not wish to exclude any participant because we spoke different languages. Therefore, despite not having designated funds for language interpretation, I was keen to find solutions when required. At one point in this interview, when we were talking about the participant's experience of widow abuse, the informal interpreter interjected to agree with our discussion that widow abuse was a big problem and to share a similar experience from her own family. Temple and Edwards (2002) argue it is important for cross-cultural, qualitative researchers to understand the deliberations and decisions of those translators. My sense is that she added this detail in support of the participant being interviewed, as a way of reinforcing the significance of the problem of widow abuse. However, I also believe the informal interpreter picked up on my cue when I reverted my eyes and comments back to the participant, to reflect on how much she has overcome. From this point onwards, she did not offer further examples from her own life and the interview concluded smoothly and, I believe, without compromising the wellbeing of the participant.

In recognising multiple demands on activists there is a general need to be flexible when arranging life history interviews (Kakuru and Paradza, 2007). This applied to several interviewees, including some who could not make room to participate. In another situation I declined the offer of one potential interviewee to do her best to meet for an interview. She explained she was in poor health and going through a difficult time emotionally. I responded that her wellbeing was much more important than our interview and that I would prefer us not to proceed, rather than have her feeling obligated to participate. I thanked her for being committed and agreed to her request to contact her when the research was concluded due to her interest in the findings. Sikes (2010) applies an acid test in her decisions and

actions with research participants, by asking herself how she would feel if her family or friends were being treated in the same ways. I find this approach effective, not least because of its simplicity, and I adopted it. My reflection is that I would feel positive had my family members or friends encountered a researcher who prioritised their wellbeing and dignity as I did. I hope to demonstrate this further in the next section on pseudonymity.

4.4.3 Respecting Participants' Right to Reject Pseudonymity¹¹⁶

During two separate pre-interview discussions, Rosa and Sarry¹¹⁷ unexpectedly refused to adopt a pseudonym for the research, each saying they would only take part in the research if they could use their actual name. I proceeded with the interviews, though was explicit about not being sure if I would be able to use the interview content in the research. My uncertainty was due to my needing ethical guidance from the Social Sciences Department Ethics Committee at my university as to varying the agreed approach to anonymising research participants. Each participant provided reasons for their decision. Rosa explained she was a long-time public campaigner on VAWG, and, as well as not feeling ok about using a different name, she thought people would be able to identify her anyway. For Sarry, using a different name felt wrong on the basis that she had supported women to go public with their experiences of VAWG. Sarry posed a challenging question to me as the researcher: "how can you write about a person who does not exist?"

I recognised this as a feminist epistemological issue requiring a reflexive response to activists' participation in research from a personal and political perspective (Birch and Miller, 2002; Gordon, 2019; Jenkins, Narayanaswamy and Sweetman, 2019). I consulted scholarship questioning the standard social science approach of allocating pseudonyms to participants¹¹⁸ and successfully sought approval to use a mix of actual first names and pseudonyms. The Social Sciences Department Ethics Committee granted approval subject to me giving the same

¹¹⁶ See Mukungu (2017) for a more detailed account of this methodological dilemma.

¹¹⁷ Both real names

¹¹⁸ This includes Grinyer (2009) who accommodated research participants by giving them a choice to use a pseudonym or their actual name and Sales (1997a) who utilised a mix of pseudonyms and actual names in her book on women's activism in Northern Ireland, opting for real names with well-known activists.

naming choices to all research participants. No other Namibian interviewee changed her mind retrospectively, even though two activists expressed a preference for using actual names during the pre-interview discussion. To be clear, I continued to recommend pseudonyms to participants, unless they were strongly motivated against them. Some participants asked for time to consider this and came back to me either during or after interviews. In Northern Ireland, where activists had a choice from the outset, three participants chose to use their own name, although one was not widely known by her actual name, which she had shortened to make her religion less identifiable.

Giving participants a choice to waive anonymity carries risks, especially in high-risk arenas like women's anti-VAWG activism (Jenkins and Boudewijin, 2020). Researchers also have responsibility to protect third party individuals and organisations (see Guenther, 2009b).¹¹⁹ The way I present participants in this write up is that first names in *italics* are pseudonyms and first names in roman text are the participants' own names. Further, the country in which they were interviewed is written in parenthesis. Where content is sensitive participants names, whether actual or pseudonyms, are removed and replaced with a code letter. This additional safeguard is to prevent anyone from being able to link the sensitive content to other content from the interview. Each time I have opted to use letters rather than names, it has been to safeguard participants, third parties, or a combination of both. In acknowledging the subjective nature of deciding when to use letter codes, I am aware of my own tendency to be cautious. My caution may be at the expense of the participants' presence, so important to Sarry and Rosa, which makes it a compromise. During my preparation for the ethics committee, I came across methodological approaches, such as process consent,¹²⁰ that disrupt traditional research methods by giving research participants the ability to completely steer how their data is used. Discussing these matters with participants after interview would have been an interesting way to balance risk and participation. However, whilst interested in this practice I had

¹¹⁹ For a fuller discussion about how every attributable datum, including the wording of quotes and anecdotes risks identifying participants, even with pseudonyms in place see Lahman *et al.* (2015), Scheper-Hughes, (2000), Snyder (2002) and Walford (2005). I add I have also read several examples of research, where I believe I know the identity of participants, despite the use of pseudonyms.

¹²⁰ Process consent, where the researcher iteratively secures consent from participants for data included in the final write-up and subsequent publications (Ellis, 2007; Smythe and Murray, 2000).

not build it in before interviews and could not introduce it retrospectively, due to lack of ongoing access to several participants. I accept the mixture of names and code letters can make it more difficult to form a full picture of each participant's life history content, but I feel the need to safeguard sensitive data overrides this inconvenience in line with the paramount requirement to do no harm.

4.4.4 Deciding I Had Undertaken Enough Interviews

There is no formula stating a fixed number of participants are required for a particular research method, as the constraints, influences and determinants vary (Baker and Edwards, 2018). At various points in the research process, I reflected about how many research participants would be enough. This was especially so during my final week in Namibia, when it became clear I would fall slightly short of my target number of twelve participants. Although I had recruited twelve Namibian activists, I interviewed ten, as one activist cancelled because of illness and one other asked to rearrange to a time when I was unavailable conducting another interview. Researchers inspired by Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory, often carry out field work until they reach what they call theoretical saturation, when they determine no new theoretical insights are being generated from the data. This was not possible for me because I was not due to commence data analysis in earnest until I returned from Namibia. I knew I would not have enough time in the field to combine sampling, data collection, and data analysis, as a single process, which Bryman (2018) points out is the way of determining theoretical saturation. Importantly, this uncertainty about saturation would have applied even had I interviewed my target number of activists. Instead, I opted for a simpler approach in line with Kvale (1996), which was to ask myself had I found out what I need to know to answer the research questions. I listened repeatedly to interview recordings in Namibia, to determine whether the data collected were rich enough to enable me to stop. I was satisfied the responses from all Namibian interviewees placed their own unique experiences and perspectives into focus in response to the enquiry. Whilst I did not have a sense of theoretical insight that may be generated, I was sure I had a range of data that could answer the specific research questions and the overall research focus.

As a further check, I focused on the interview in which an interpreter was utilised, as it was most restricted in terms of language. I reflected on some of the areas in which we were prevented from achieving the desired level of depth. For example, we could not explore in detail whether her activism was feminist, as the word feminist does not exist in her language. Whilst unfamiliarity with the word feminism also applied in another interview, we were able to discuss feminism based on my explanation of the term. However, this approach did not work with the interpreter as the participant was still unclear about the question. Even with that gap the interview was still rich in detail about the participant's activism, the relationships she formed in activism and her perspectives on her life Namibia before and after independence. Thus, whilst this interview was less nuanced than others and contained fewer words, I didn't have a sense that the meaning was compromised. Towards the end of my stay in Namibia I moved from the position of wanting a sense of security of achieving the target number, to questioning the relevance of the target. I also resolved that, when in Northern Ireland I would seek to match, rather than exceed the number of Namibian interviews.¹²¹

With my work and activism background, I felt comfortable about interviewing activists, and was familiar with how to build in wellbeing safeguards and respond to participants' wishes to dispense with ones that were unhelpful. What I was much less prepared for, was how to analyse and write about the life histories generated with participants, in a way that would produce a doctoral thesis, which I now go on to analyse.

4.5 Data Analysis and Write Up

Qualitative research exists to facilitate the process of meaning-making (Krauss, 2005). I had to work my way through and develop various data analysis methods as I sought to thematically analyse and make meaning of the largest body of data I had ever collected. A theme is simply defined as "an idea that can be seen running through several responses" (Harding, 2013, p.6). Through experience I learned that there is no single formula or magical tool for data analysis and theme

¹²¹ Mason (2010) found the mean number of life history interviews in PhD research in the UK was twenty-three and the range of interviewees went from one to sixty-three, which further assured me.

development, and that researchers need to continually engage with data to interpret their meanings (Kvale, 2007). For me this eventually required creating my own system for analysis after several unsatisfactory attempts. In addition to listening to interviews extensively in the field, transcribing them post-fieldwork enabled me to identify some new perspectives on the data in ways that either did not fully emerge during the interview or did not stay in my memory of the interview. It was at the point of having a newly transcribed set of interviews from Namibia, with a set of initial notes in the margins identifying possible codes (see Rivas, 2012; Wengraf, 2001), that I experienced my first significant data analysis challenge. This was a feeling of being overwhelmed at the volume of data and, what felt like limitless connections and parallels between various data.

I created documents with loose headings containing relevant data from interviewees and my interpretations. Whilst this interesting process brought me closer to the data, I realised I was essentially moving data around (therefore increasing the overall data page count) rather than distilling them through a process of analysis. I believe I then responded to the challenge of having hundreds of pages of data by focusing too narrowly on data that had an obvious fit to my three research questions. This prevented me from being open enough to the less obvious themes and insights that might otherwise take shape. So, whilst, unsurprisingly, I could show how data were relevant to my pre-fieldwork thinking, it was dissatisfying to reflect it was due to a lack of in-depth analysis, not a result of analysis. I was unsure about how I would proceed when even more data would be in place following NI field work.

Reading an example of data analysis by Rivas (2012) demystified the process of turning data into codes, codes into categories, and turning both categories and codes into themes. I then created a simple spreadsheet with a page for each site, and in which each interviewee was lettered as a column. Each row was numbered as a broad category, rather than theme. For the lists of category titles from both field sites please see Appendix E. Each spreadsheet entry is cross referenced to a margin note on the individual transcript. As part of this cross referencing the spreadsheet cell details are added to the interview transcript with the relevant transcript text highlighted. For example, row 2 of NI interviews is loosely entitled

'Effects of the Troubles on Activists', so cell C2 includes all references from participant C about how she was affected by the Troubles. In the interests of confidentiality, I may not include the full spreadsheet details, but I illustrate the approach with a summary of Row 2 headline comments from all NI participants in Appendix F. As Clarke and Braun (2017 p.297) point out:

Thematic analysis can be used to identify patterns within and *across* data in relation to participants' lived experience, views, and perspectives

Looking for patterns of similarity or differentiation provides a method of linking diverse or juxtaposing experiences together through codes and helps to form and situate them within broader thematic ideas or concepts (Bryman, 2016). You will see from Appendix F, that activists were affected by the Troubles in a range of ways from having had family members injured, killed, and imprisoned, through to women recognising the Troubles as a backdrop to their lives, rather than involving specific personal traumas.

Helpfully, the approach I developed to open coding and category development enabled me to add a new row every time I wanted to distil codes further into categories. Staying with the same example, row 2 decreased in size and scope as the analysis progressed. Instead of containing all participants' references to the Troubles as it originally did, row 2 became about direct incidents, experiences, etc. in the activists' personal lives. As coding increased with analysis, new categories emerged from some codes that had previously been in row 2. These include row 9 - Dealing with the 'Other'; row 10 - Political Perspectives; row 11- the Troubles and anti-VAWG activism, etc. This open coding spreadsheet, although unwieldy, remained meaningful to me throughout. The spreadsheet enabled me to place related content side by side in a single place and explore what it might be saying. Further, the use of colour coding enabled me to connect different categories and codes together into themes. As an example, the overarching theme of activism across age ranges in feminist activism linked together codes from various data rows in both Namibia and NI, as can be seen in Appendix E. After a worrying period when data analysis seemed beyond me, developing my own approach

satisfied my commitment to developing thesis themes driven by participants' data, rather than my pre-conceived expectations.

My next challenge was primarily a writing one, which I believe was motivated by concern that I should not misrepresent research participants. I agonised about leaving out anything that seemed significant from life history encounter, which became problematic as early iterations of findings chapters comprised extensive life history content with insufficient analysis. A breakthrough moment occurred in supervision, when I accepted my responsibility to resist reproducing life history interviews and to instead ensure my analysis offers a new argument, insight or theoretical perspective on the important issues addressed in my thesis. Whilst accepting this obviousness of this point, it significantly enabled me to let go of huge amounts of life history content and go deeper into a narrower range of issues, such as the difficulties of addressing some forms of conflict-related VAWG.

My final challenge relates to my concern that my over-identification with some activists whose feminist perspectives I value, and finding some activists' anti-feminist views challenging, would impact on the criticality of my writing. When research participants tell us about their lives, they make decisions about what they put in and leave out and researchers do the same in their writing. This political process carries a heavy ethical burden and responsibility to represent participants respectfully, and not misuse narrative power as the research writer (Sikes, 2010). By applying feminist reflexivity, I increased my commitment to studying the contextual explanations for feminist and anti-feminist views among activists in the field sites so I could improve my understanding of both. This increased the importance of activists' situated feminist and anti-feminist perspectives and lessened the importance of my personal responses to the opinions that activists expressed. Further, the breakthrough I summarised about not needing to present all data from all participants, reminded me I need not linger on views I find particularly endearing or challenging, unless central to my argument. I am therefore hopeful that I write about issues respectfully for all participants.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I addressed the need to show transparency in research in several ways. I explained the research paradigm as feminist, and how I interpret this in relation to ontology, epistemology, and the ethic of the methodology. I then explained the reason for my choice of life history method. I analysed the planned and opportunistic approaches to participant recruitment, which, although effective, did pose some dilemmas to ensure recruitment practice was ethical. I analysed pertinent aspects of the life history interview process, beginning with a reflection on how my positionality might impact encounters with the participants in both field sites. This reflexivity is essential to good quality and ethical feminist research and reinforces the need to value the knowledge and subjectivities of participants, even when doing so seems challenging. Through my responses to varied challenges relating to how to facilitate the presence of participants in the research and how to analyse and write about participants lives, I have sought to demonstrate in this chapter how much emphasis I place on ethical research. By that I mean research that both safeguards and acknowledges participants, and shows commitment to honest, data-driven, respectfully written thematic analysis. Over the course of the remaining chapters I set out my contribution to knowledge that emerges from this approach.

Chapter 5: Understanding Conflict-Related VAWG as a Difficult Activism Issue

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I argue that legacies of conflict, evident in activists' testimonies of intragroup¹²² conflict-related VAWG, endure in their continued concerns about the difficulties of addressing this specific form of violence. I develop this argument in four sections. Firstly, my analysis of accounts by activists that encountered intragroup VAWG by conflict actors shows that activists were impacted by the violence and the context of impunity surrounding it at the time. I argue that some activists see this impunity as having continued after the conflict, leading on to a discussion of the political deprioritisation and ongoing pertinence of this form of VAWG. Thirdly, I analyse the relational challenge of addressing intragroup VAWG by conflict actors from the perspective of concerned activists. Sensing unwillingness from peers to address this conflict-related violence leaves concerned activists hesitant about how to address it. This hesitance stems from an awareness that pursuing activism on this issue is contentious and may be divisive. By examining activists' accounts of their often discreet efforts to take this issue forward, I contend that the combination of their hesitance and persistence, helps us to understand the slow temporalities of activism addressing certain forms of conflict-related harms.

5.2 Activists' Accounts of Intragroup VAWG Perpetrated by Conflict Actors

Activists who lived through conflict provided far reaching accounts of how it touched their lives. Testimonies of everyday violence, harassment from police, army and, in NI the 'other' side, were provided alongside accounts of major events. These events included the loss of mostly male family members through imprisonment, death, and disappearance, and forced relocation. Many of these

¹²² Recognising groups can be variously defined, in this context intragroup means, from within the same side in the conflict or within the same ethnonationality/ethnicity.

examples relate to intergroup violence, in line with the dominant narrative of conflict. I highlight intragroup violence, specifically VAWG perpetrated by conflict actors, because of the unique challenge it poses for anti-VAWG activism. That challenge is the inherent difficulty of highlighting this violence in anti-VAWG activism because it is contentious and potentially divisive within communities, and because it is generally deprioritised in the wider political field. As such, the near absence of intragroup VAWG from hegemonic accounts of both conflicts discussed in chapter 3, should be critiqued with this difficulty in mind. Despite the relative invisibility of the problem, participants provided extensive accounts of intragroup VAWG, which I include here. Participants discuss their experiences and perspectives from different contextualised positions, victim/survivor, friend or family member of the victim/survivor, and activist responding to the victim/survivor.¹²³ Not only do activists' accounts shed light on different forms, contexts, and potential purposes of intragroup VAWG by conflict actors, but also evidence the impunity with which conflict actors violated, impunity that extended into the post conflict era.

5.2.1 Gendered Domestic and Community Violence

Activists' accounts illustrate the ways domestic community level violence by conflict actors were exacerbated by the conflict context. These exacerbations include the use of weapons in domestic violence, the link between the strain of being a combatant and the perpetration of domestic violence, and the enabling effect of the conflict when it comes to domestic and community level violence. In Northern Ireland, D (NI) shared several examples, starting with a childhood memory of being with her mother at the house of a family friend, who had just separated from her abusive husband, a member of a paramilitary organisation:

He was hammering the door and shouting for her to open the door and he was firing shots. And I remember my mum telling us all to get under the bed. To get down onto the floor and get under the bed and to stay there. And I heard my Mummy saying "I'll stay here with the kids because if he finds you it'll be worse. You escape out the back and go and get help". So,

¹²³ I wish to be clear that, although sharing accounts of peoples' experience of victimisation, I am not consigning them to the category of victim, acknowledging that people need to be defined by more than their victimhood experience. However, there is a complex relationship between agency and coercion / violence (Madhok, Philips and Wilson, 2013) which conflict exacerbates.

she had to actually escape out the back and run over fields. To go and get the police while he's taking pot shots at the house, while we were lying there – disgraceful! But he had access to a gun because he was a member of a paramilitary organisation. (D, NI)

Several other examples from D(NI) were characterised by a lack of protection from the police, such as when a woman was a young childminder in a house where domestic violence was taking place:

I don't know who called the police or how that happened but anyway the police arrived, and she was battered and bleeding. And of course, he is acting all bravado and the one policeman takes him away into the kitchen. And the other one is sitting comforting her “do you want to go to the hospital?”, stuff like that. So, the other policeman is in the kitchen saying, ach wise up big lad and all that sort of stuff. You know, make a cup of tea and everything'll be alright... And then she is sleeping with me and the two kids that night you know? Getting upstairs - getting offside - getting out of the road. And I just remember the knot in my stomach, waiting. Is the door going to open? Is he going to come back in again? (D, NI)

D (NI) went on to recall how, as an adult activist, women shared with her their experiences of how weapons were used against them in situations of domestic violence. “they were putting guns in their partners' mouths, you know?”. D (NI) explained women in the Protestant, Unionist and/or Loyalist communities, where she was active, were often unable to go to the police because the armed (ex) partner in question was usually either a paramilitary member or a police officer, adding the observation: “when you have police and paramilitaries who have access to weapons, they use those weapons”. From her perspective, this situation trapped women in ongoing violence and, contributed to domestic violence being grossly underacknowledged in her ethnonational group.

In Namibia, two activists described the physical violence inflicted on their mothers by their fathers, who were both conflict actors during the liberation struggle. Although both activists spent their childhoods in different parts of Namibia, and their fathers appear to have undertaken contrasting roles in the conflict, some of

the similarities in their experiences and perspectives are striking. This familial violence continued until each mother fled, in one case with and, in another, without her children:

My father was very abusive, so my father could really beat my mum. That was the worst thing in the house. Outside no one knows what we are going through. So, we were suffering as kids. My mum was suffering as a woman. Even my friends they could not see what I was going through. I remember when I was around 8 years 9 years. I was still bedwetting. I know that it was just because of the stress that was in the house. (C, Namibia)

In my own home my father abused my mother physically and emotionally. He had an alcohol problem, so he was an alcoholic. Really, I remember him as an alcoholic. So, for me I think in the sense that with the other kids and stuff you could feel that it wasn't all kosher. It wasn't fine and also, the conflict within my home sort of overshadowed everything else outside. So, as a child at night walking into the kitchen I remember my mother's pyjamas being torn and saying "please daddy stop" and things like that. (E, Namibia)

Each explained there was no discussion at home about the role her father was playing in the conflict or about the violence that was taking place at home:

The man was fighting, and he was fighting in silence. (C, Namibia)

There was no talk on the farm of what was actually happening in the country. However, the tension that the men brought back with was felt. There was a lot of anger, miscommunication, frustration that was felt, but never spoken of. (E, Namibia)

The silences surrounding the tension and violence they frequently witnessed may have limited their understanding of what was going on, yet each expressed growing up knowing this familial violence was conflict-related. In fact, each activist specifically attributed the violence perpetrated by their fathers to the conflict-related harm they had endured as combatants. Felton and Becker (2001) point to a correlation between domestic violence perpetrated by men in one region of

Namibia, their military involvement during conflict, and their withholding details about the nature of their involvement from families. Whilst this secrecy can apply whether military involvement was for the South African state or for those struggling for independence, it is understood that those co-opted by the South African military have more reason to maintain their silence, particularly once independence was secured (Hunter, 2010). E (Namibia), who left with her mother when she fled the domestic violence, shared that, although she had not discussed this with relatives, she suspects her father may have been a combatant for South Africa. E (Namibia) also expressed concern about the impact of familial and societal violence on subsequent generations. Not speaking about, or attempting to hide, details about conflict-related incidents is often a coping mechanism used by parents to protect their children. However, as Downes *et al.*, (2013) highlight, unspoken trauma can be transmitted inter-generationally via various unconscious processes.

One activist's memories point to how conflict situations can increase the status of some conflict actors, thereby enabling their perpetration of domestic violence. In Northern Ireland, C (NI) shared suffering extreme violence from her ex-husband, as a young woman several decades earlier. She elaborated that the community expected her to be loyal to him as a paramilitary activist and prisoner, she said she felt trapped in the situation for several years, without intervention from community members. Later in the interview, stepping out of her own experience of abuse, C (NI) also reflected on how the violent conflict affected the partners of prisoners:

I can tell you that the incidents were many - the situations were scary - the brutality was hard. I had a fractured jaw. I had to have a brain scan one time. In them days you didn't phone the police, you really didn't have law and order. You know you could have got beat senseless and nobody would have intervened. Because he was a Republican nobody would have said "here boy what you're doing is wrong" or whatever. So, what I was going through was a very hush-hush thing, even though everybody knew. (C, NI)

The Troubles had a big impact on women with regards to violence at home. I know for a fact that you still had men being controlling in the jail with their wives. I know for a fact that you still had men having the odd violent escapade during a visit. And then you had these men coming out of

jails. There was no normal life for the women and nobody willing to challenge the men because of who they were. (C, NI)

C (NI) was clear in her assessment that the political situation of that time extended her period of victimisation, because of the inaccessibility of criminal justice and the silence from community members. In Republican communities, reporting crime to the Royal Ulster Constabulary was seen as unacceptable (Hackett, 2004). Even taking the norms of the 1970s-1990s into account, when society and police were more ambiguous about viewing domestic violence as a serious crime (Doyle and McWilliams, 2018), some 'normal' domestic violence policing practices elsewhere in the UK were not rolled out in NI, because of the dominance of conflict-related security matters (McWilliams and Ni Aolain, 2013). Informal 'policing' was carried out in some communities by paramilitary groups, but they did not treat domestic violence as a priority (Hamber *et al.*, 2006) perhaps unsurprisingly, given the testimonies of how paramilitary members perpetrated it. C (NI) further explained that, during her marriage, her then-partner became increasingly aggressive to people in the community generally, something that made her feel "tainted".

As subsequent chapter sections show, in NI, participants spoke in several ways about the continued exertion of community level control by paramilitary groups. Dawn (NI) and Annemarie (NI) both reflected on the tarring and feathering, which Annemarie found humiliating for women. This punishment is known to have happened in Republican / Nationalist areas, although Dawn asserted it also happened in working class, Loyalist areas:

And the issue of women being tarred and feathered, again women were victimised because of their sexuality, so, for going with soldiers, or, in the case of Loyalist working class communities for going with Catholics. (Dawn, NI)

I found it hard to adjust to being back in Belfast after being away because the things that were happening were just awful. Women being tarred and feathered was part of the conflict, then. And there is a certain humiliation about women being tarred and feathered. (Annemarie, NI)

That Loyalist women were tarred and feathered for having relationships with Catholic men, as Dawn asserts, is a little-known aspect of the Troubles. As such, it is largely absent from the collective memory of the conflict. It is therefore also unlikely to be included in post-conflict truth processes. This omission points to the argument I discussed in Chapter 2 about the importance of having a detailed and nuanced understanding of conflict-related VAWG that occurs, as well as critiquing how some aspects of harm are acknowledged post-conflict, while others are not.

Community level control was particularly associated with interface communities. Kellie (NI) recalled a community work role with women in a neighbourhood with a strong paramilitary presence. She was surprised by how much this restricted her work, in terms of what she was permitted to do and when, and as such, how much paramilitary input held back women's progress. When she challenged aspects of paramilitary control in the context of this role, she became side-lined and criticised to the point she left her post out of frustration. She was scathing of how paramilitary members abused their power, analysing this as a merger of masculinity and militarisation:

The conflict allowed an umbrella cover and things were done in the name of the cause by paramilitaries because of the times that we were in. I think if you stripped the conflict away, those things would have still happened, but they would have been named different things or called domestic violence as opposed to something else. I think it was masculinity you know, all these guys with fucking guns, you know, hard guys. (Kellie, NI)

Kellie's perspective is interesting in terms of reflecting how everyday actions and aggressions of paramilitary members are shaped by masculine military socialisation processes. She describes them as so intertwined that they can effectively become one and the same. The overall climate of control Kellie spoke of above featured in accounts of sexual violence shared by participants, as I go on to show.

5.2.2 Sexual Violence Perpetrated with Impunity by Conflict Actors

Impunity for conflict actors who perpetrate VAWG manifests in two main ways: the inaccessibility of criminal justice processes, and the implicit impunity that comes with being a conflict actor (Swaine, 2015). Both forms apply in many examples provided by participants, of alleged sexual violence perpetrated by conflict actors. In Namibia, Rosa talked about being sexually violated by a fellow SWAPO activist when they went to get supplies for a gathering during the independence struggle. After fighting him off, Rosa decided to report the attempted rape to SWAPO. In Northern Ireland, J (NI) first learned about intragroup or intracommunity sexual violence by paramilitary members, when, as a young woman, she suggested to her friend they go to a particular social club for a night out.

So, I report it to the Central Committee and so, at least, there is this meeting. You know what they said? “You were not raped. He was just trying to, but he did not, so let us not anyway talk about that”. But that was my real experience! (Rosa, Namibia)

She warned me never to go to that club as it is paramilitary controlled. She said there was a lock-in and they all got drunk. And one of the RA¹²⁴ men raped her. And I was like, oh so even going up into the West where you would have thought it was all going to be Catholics and going to be all cosy and you were going to be like a member of the family, you know what I mean, you weren't going to be picked on, you know, you weren't going to be the outsider anymore because you are all one. And then I was thinking, fuck, it's like a war zone there too! But we knew there was nothing she could do. And that wasn't normal. Normal is the whole thing of going out and having fun. Or going to a club. Sure, there was fucking nowhere where you could go. (J, NI)

While in NI, J (NI), or more specifically her friend, had a sense there was nothing that could be done about an alleged rape, in Namibia, Rosa initially had a sense she could do something about being attacked. Rosa explained that going to the police was unthinkable. This is unsurprising as, in the legal void of apartheid, in

¹²⁴ Republican Army, short for Irish Republican Army or IRA

Namibia violations of black Namibian women and girls were not investigated by colonial police (Bennett, 2010). Not only was her experience of being violated not a priority for the police but she also told me she had been variously targeted, arrested, and violently interrogated by the police and army for her involvement in SWAPO. Instead, she sought a form of acknowledgement/redress through the SWAPO movement and having expected support, Rosa discussed her hurt and disappointment at considerable length, both at the outcome of the Central Committee meeting, which confirmed her alleged perpetrator's impunity, and at being ostracised by women in SWAPO for reporting the alleged attack. Indeed, being ostracised and criticised in the aftermath of this incident, signals both the deprioritisation of intragroup VAWG by conflict actors and the relational difficulties of addressing it in activism, as analysed in later sections of this chapter.

In NI, J (NI) appeared to learn several lessons from the moment she found out about her friend being raped in her local community, by a paramilitary member. She had sneaked off to her friend's neighbourhood, which she viewed as homogenous, from an ethnonational perspective, for respite from the harassment she regularly encountered, as part of an ethnonational minority where she lived. She believed she would be able to go out socialising in her friend's community and feel safe doing so. Likening different areas to war zones, J(NI)'s reflection about the lack of normality at every turn appears to shape her assessment of why nothing could be done about her friend being raped. One thing her friend could do was warn J (NI) never to go to the club, and it was the risk of J going there that preceded her friend's disclosure about the rape. This example provides an insight into the wider impact of heavy militarisation, in places where notions of security are primarily ethnonational/ethnic and do not seem to extend to security from sexual violence. In NI security was applied by force, by the police, army, and various paramilitary groups (Pickering, 2002), which strengthens impunity when any of these actors violate security by perpetrating SGBV. The result is what Oberhauser *et al.*, (2018) term, gendered insecurity.

As discussed in chapter 3, Namibian women exiles detained in Angola and Zambia, having been accused of spying for South Africa, were subjected to rape and sexually violent interrogation practices (Trewhela, 1993; Saul and Leys,

2003). A close relative of A (Namibia) was repeatedly raped while detained in exile. This violence became known to A (Namibia) during the transition period before independence and is something she has campaigned about since then:

And then there is disbelief, and it all runs through me regarding the whole question of women being raped. (Name) comes with a child and looks really very sick... People from the dungeons showed their bodies and how they were tortured. It was another horror and the people that have flesh cut out from their bodies and so on. Then my denial had to go away. Then (name) said how rape has happened and said, "I was actually just having to sleep with them like they wanted". (A, Namibia)

A (Namibia) explained she had to accept this crime took place and support her relative through a difficult aftermath, and that this damaged her sense of belonging in the new Namibia being formed. She told me this unease has stayed with her since. Another activist I interviewed refused to talk about her time in exile, the only interviewee to explicitly block access to a period of her life: "I stop there, because what has transpired, these are some of the sensitive issues". Although we had conducted an otherwise detailed life history interview, about her anti-VAWG activism, when she made it clear her time in exile was not up for discussion, I did not press her. However, I later read in an obscure journal article that she was detained under suspicion of spying and made a public statement about being repeatedly sexually assaulted.¹²⁵ Whilst I consider the post conflict complexities of campaigning on this issue, I acknowledge that both this activist and A (Namibia), just like Rosa above, spoke out about the alleged sexual violence at the time. However, doing this was not followed by procedural justice or a specific apology, as I explained in Chapter 3.

In chapter 3, I highlighted that strategic sexual violation was not found to be a conflict tactic of paramilitary groups in NI, but that some women and children were targeted by paramilitaries (O' Rourke and Swain, 2017). Dawn (NI) saw sexual violence by paramilitaries as an abuse of power within communities and highlighted the hidden nature of this aspect of the conflict. Two different activists

¹²⁵ Uncited here to protect the interviewee's privacy and dignity, given she chose not to disclose the experience in this research.

talked about supporting community members affected by sexual violence perpetrated in so-called 'safe-houses'¹²⁶. Here F (NI) talked about multiple forms of victimisation, including child sexual offences, in a safe house she believes was coercively acquired. The quote from G (NI), outside of the safe house context, speaks more broadly about situations when abuse by paramilitary members was suspected in communities where she worked, but not addressed at the time:

The conflict impacted women differently from men and sexual violence was used in the conflict here. Again, that's not widely known, not openly talked about but was certainly used. And used not only by state forces but more so by paramilitaries, as an abuse of power within their own communities. (Dawn, NI)

She was being bullied into hiding weapons and guns and ammunition for the RA. And the RA would have met in her house and gone up and abused the kids. And they were meant to be looking after them - they were physically, sexually abusing these kids and getting away with it! And then they come downstairs for their meeting with the big RA men. But she had no choice. She lived in an area where she had no choice, and she was the one that ended up serving time. (F, NI)

I remember hearing things about abuse you know, which was all kept kind of under the radar. Like paedophiles and whole families being abused and nothing ever happening because he was connected to the UVF or UDA or paramilitaries in some way. (G, NI)

However, G (NI) detailed one example, which she described as exceptional, when a paramilitary perpetrator of child sexual violence was convicted in the criminal justice system. That said, she also explained how the complainant, the mother of the abused children, was unsupported when she made the initial report:

I remember when she blew the whistle and the rest of her family fell out with her! He eventually did six months for child sexual abuse. (G, NI)

¹²⁶ Houses used for storing paramilitary weapons, hosting paramilitary meetings, or accommodating paramilitary members.

Activists' testimonies from Namibia point to the lack of justice following reports of intragroup sexual violence, whilst examples provided by activists from NI emphasise the difficulty of reporting sexual violence perpetrated by paramilitary members. In NI communities where paramilitary groups hold power, there is a taboo associated with reporting people from paramilitary groups to the police. Later in this chapter I analyse how this control and associated impunity extends into the post-conflict context, and how the implications of this affect anti-VAWG activism.

I close this section reflecting on how the nature of the VAWG perpetrated by conflict actors potentially adds to their need to later minimise it. Much of the VAWG detailed in this chapter, may appear gratuitous. However, where it contributes to an overall climate of control, it is also strategic and, I argue fits the conception of dual-purpose violence.¹²⁷ In Chapter 2, I established that intragroup VAWG can be used to punish and control (Wood and Toppelberg, 2017) and that it can be both tactical in the conflict context and expressive for individual perpetrators (Green and Ward, 2009). Therefore, thinking dichotomously about intragroup sexual and domestic violence as being either ordinary or conflict-related is sometimes misguided, as the dual-purpose violence concept highlights it can be both (Green and Ward, 2009). For example, sexual violence in the dungeons, could be argued as tactical interrogation or punishment of spies, but the account from A (Namibia) that her relative had to have sex with her captors "as they wanted" suggests it was also expressively perpetrated. Similarly, obtaining a safe house by coercion may be tactical,¹²⁸ but perpetrating sexual violence against children in the coerced family, as in the example discussed by J (NI), is expressive. This analysis can be further applied to other examples, but rather than continue the focus on whether violence was variously tactical or expressive, I instead highlight how it is in the interests of former combatants to downplay this violence. This need is especially pertinent for intragroup perpetrations, given the support base of combat groups comes from defending/liberating the very people

¹²⁷ Introduced in Chapter 2 as partially expressive, opportunistic violence and partially strategic, dual purposed violence was the term developed by Green and Ward (2009) who call more inclusive analysis about what constitutes conflict related SGBV.

¹²⁸ With notable similarities to the practice of 'cuckooing' in Britain discussed by Coomber and Moyle (2018) in relation to organised groups of drug dealers take over community members' houses, often by intimidation.

harmed. Acknowledging it is in the interests of (former) conflict actors to minimise attention on intragroup VAWG, and, intergroup violence is usually given primacy anyway, there is a clear challenge for anti-VAWG activists who wish to highlight intragroup VAWG when doing so is disincentivised. I analyse the experiences of some participants' activism on this issue later in the chapter. Next, I examine activists' perspectives of how intragroup VAWG has been thoroughly deprioritised in both Namibia and NI, as well as how impunity surrounding conflict actors persists.

5.3 The Harms of Deprioritising Conflict Actors' Perpetrations of Intragroup VAWG

Any country emerging from conflict has choices to make about how the legacy of the conflict is addressed and the process of determining what is remembered or forgotten is highly politicised (McGrattan and Hopkins, 2017). In Chapter 3, I explained that Namibia and NI pursued distinct post-conflict processes and noted the paucity of attention on gendered harm perpetrated by conflict actors in the scholarly accounts of both conflicts. Here I analyse activists' perspectives about responses to intragroup violence first in Namibia and then in NI. I then go on to analyse the difficulties for activists to address intragroup VAWG by conflict actors. Activists in both countries point to the various harms associated with deprioritisation. Whilst there is consensus that this violence had been deprioritised, activists' perspectives vary according to how they conceptualise the violence. Activists in both countries, concerned about intragroup VAWG as an abuse of power, highlight that perpetrators and enablers have progressed in powerful leadership roles post conflict. In NI, activists were clear the continued presence of combatant groups exerting control with various levels of impunity in communities means this form of violence persists. Namibian activists who saw intrafamilial violence as being connected to the combatants being traumatised by conflict, express concern at the consequences of not addressing this trauma.

5.3.1 Deprioritisation of VAWG and all Conflict Violence in Namibia

The Namibian government's expressed rationale for the amnesty on violations during conflict, was to promote reconciliation, as I explained in Chapter 3. However, despite the enormity and sensitivity of acknowledging past harms, promoters of truth telling after conflict argue a process of reconciliation requires it (Kulska, 2017). Concerned activists who discussed this issue, variously saw the lack of acknowledgement of past harms as a barrier to justice, reconciliation and healing.

Activists interviewed for this research are among those impacted by the detainee issue, having had friends and relatives that had disappeared, presumed to be dead. One activist, A (Namibia), campaigned on the detainee issue as she was the close relative of a survivor who was repeatedly raped in exile. A (Namibia) explained she was assisting with the preparations for the first ever democratic elections, when she found out about these rapes. She contrasted the general jubilation of that time to her own inner turmoil during the election: "I needed to vote. I can't vote, but then again, I have to vote - this is what I have been waiting for my whole life" (A, Namibia). She described trying to suspend her feelings until after independence as she believed there would be space then to address injustices that were carried out: "I told myself, let's just get the Boers out, just don't do anything until then. Let's just get the Boers out and then we will talk". However, she expressed being disheartened by campaigning on the detainee issue, as almost immediately after independence, she felt the government was not serious about the detainees. Procedural justice can be important for people in terms of giving them hope of that a fair outcome might be achieved (Tyler and Smith, 1998). Whilst A (Namibia) did not elaborate on what outcome she was seeking or what justice might look like, she appeared to acutely feel the absence of a process that could lead to an outcome. She said lack of justice for her relative who was raped, and her child born from rape, sometimes gave her a feeling of "anger that wants to push out of my chest. How can they abandon their own people like this?" (A, Namibia).

From A (Namibia's) account, the enduring impact of these violations, and lack of redress for her relatives, appears to limit how she expresses herself as a

Namibian person. She explained she has never participated in Namibian Independence Day celebrations: “I sleep when people are celebrating”. This is unusual as Independence Day is a major jubilee throughout Namibia every 21st March (Akuupa and Kornes, 2013). The account A (Namibia) provides is that she moved from being somebody who was actively involved in helping prepare for Namibia’s first democratic elections, to somebody who cannot bring herself to celebrate Namibia’s independence. She made clear the extent of the impact these unresolved issues when she spoke as if pained about the destructive effects of silencing survivors and the relatives of the disappeared:

The whole question of the dungeons and the silence surrounding it - the truth is there but is being ignored. Dealing with those issues are the things that can reconcile people. The people who are alive and were there, they are being ignored and being silenced about beatings and rapes and all those things. And those who are dead, their families are not told what has happened. All the time it's this kind of situation where we suppress, suppress, suppress. (A, Namibia)

The unresolved aspect of past harms was something Rosa (Namibia) also discussed in relation to the attempted rape she disclosed. She highlighted that those responsible for gendered intragroup harms are the same ones now in political leadership. She informed me the man she reported went on to become a senior Swapo Party figure, which appeared to accentuate the sense of injustice she felt. She said she struggled with the fact that political leaders were able to do as they pleased. Rosa added that the public knew the Swapo Party was guilty of covering up VAWG and that she saw this as a reason why VAWG was such a problem in society:

This situation is deep rooted. The politicians are very engaged at the personal level because of abusing and violating women and therefore they cannot speak. (Rosa, Namibia)

This argument has also been made by Britton and Shook (2014) who see the failure of accountability for conflict-related rape as having a bearing on subsequent gendered violence in society. Rosa accused the government of being insincere

when it comes to addressing VAWG, arguing VAWG policy achievements in Namibia were due to activists. However, due to what she saw as the lack of anti-VAWG interventions following government rhetoric, she called Namibia “the place of paper policies”:

We have seen the government make devastating mistakes. All they do is call conferences on violence against women. Then it's a Prayer Day. And then calling the killings passion killings, that really was a mistake. I was taken into a big conference where I was told I will serve on a high-level technical committee, a Presidential level technical committee. I have never been called to one meeting. (Rosa, Namibia)

Rosa's experience of sexual violence being inflicted on her during conflict and disregarded by SWAPO leaders, combined with experience that subsequent government measures to address VAWG are inadequate, places her in a difficult position. She views government actors as perpetrators of VAWG, yet she recognises the need to engage with those government actors to ensure future action follows.

As discussed in section 2.1, two Namibian activists who talked about their fathers' past violence, located this intra-familial violence being due to the damage caused to their fathers by conflict. For them, the main harm of deprioritisation, was the lack of healing from the conflict. In expressing the view that the absence of a discussion about what happened during the conflict prevents reconciliation, E (Namibia) felt this on two levels – for Namibians as a whole, and for herself and her own family. In relation to the latter, she found it challenging not knowing about her father's experiences of conflict and she connects continued silence about the past to ongoing domestic violence in Namibia. She criticised government inaction she saw in that regard. Similarly, C (Namibia) reflected on the need for former combatants to be able to access psychological help from anger and violence. She added it was only when she became an adult that she could reflect on how men in war are conditioned to become angry, because their anger has purpose:

As a nation we didn't have reconciliation we didn't talk about what happened except the propaganda and you know, those kinds of things. But to individuals and families there was no discussion about it, and we just

carried on for 25 years as if nothing had happened and now it shows in the abuse of women and children. It's boiling up in frustration and coming out in the wrong ways in personal intimate relationships. (E, Namibia)

I think that colonialism and apartheid fuelled it up... He was told, you are a man stand up, fight for your country you must never give up, fight with anger. Anger was the only thing to make things correct. It was only anger, no peace, you must fight with anger, use anger every time. Now I know, really Swapo did not help the fighters with their psychological pain after independence. Why? Even now they can still do it. (C, Namibia)

Both activists who saw VAWG as an expression of conflict-related harm expressed concern about the risk of ongoing violence in families. E (Namibia) discussed the need for people to understand that current trauma, anger and violence in Namibia are legacies of conflict, while C (Namibia) expressed concern about male anger and violence being transmitted to younger generations in her own family.

Whilst Rosa and A (Namibia) spoke of deprioritising intragroup VAWG in tones of it being an unresolved gender justice issue, C and E were more concerned about unresolved trauma as a legacy of conflict, which they attributed to the deprioritisation of conflict violence generally. Whilst the felt harms of disregarding past violence are related to the various ways activists perceived said violence, there was a clear sense that what happened during conflict affected what is happening today in relation to sexual and domestic violence. In NI, the connections to the present day were also recognised by activists, not least because of the continuation of combatant groups exerting control in communities in NI, enabled by institutions and systems that do not effectively intervene.

5.3.2 Deprioritisation and Continuation of Intragroup VAWG in NI

Activists' perspectives that recognising and tackling intragroup VAWG by conflict actors is deprioritised in post-conflict Northern Ireland were stated and re-stated. These perspectives were based on perceptions that post-conflict processes primarily prioritise male, intergroup, and ethnonational violence. Inadequacies in dealing with gendered violence were highlighted by activists. These shortfalls were

not just in relation to violations during the conflict, but ongoing violations perpetrated by paramilitary members enabled in post-conflict NI. *Erin (NI)*, who directly supported violated women in the past, expressed the view that, on a macro level, the needs of violated women always came behind those who exerted political violence. An example from H (NI), about a paramilitary feud, highlights that the paramilitary structures are still in place in NI, and individual paramilitary members are often able to act with impunity, just as during the conflict:

So, because women have always been put down, particularly here, and I think that's much easier to do when there is violence in the society, because the space is all taken up by men and the issues surrounding other things, women's issues and problems are pushed to the bottom. So, violence against women is pushed down because they are more interested in their own political agenda and it's about appeasing men. Political violence trumped violence against women and still, to a certain extent, does, even though it is meant to be all over now. (*Erin, NI*)

For example, this woman told us that her daughter sleeps with a knife under her pillow because her ex, a paramilitary member, is very violent and he keeps coming to the house and all the rest of it.... So, anyway this woman said that she went to the paramilitaries and said look, my daughter so and so is sleeping with a knife under her pillow and it's not right And they told her to take herself off. So, she went to the police. And she said my daughter has to sleep with a knife under her pillow. And it is your man and she named him. He's very violent he breaks into the house... And the police said "is that right? What's your daughter's name?" Because she was committing an offence, sleeping with a knife under the pillow! And you kind of thought, that is so, you know, that's awful and that's the police! Because they're dealing with two paramilitary groups fighting against each other, they are trying to keep them happy! That just shows that women's rights are right down there on the ground. (H, NI)

The details of this example are quoted in depth because they highlight key problems that activists expressed about the post-conflict situation. H (NI) thought it highly feasible that on-the-ground police officers would prioritise managing the threats associated with a paramilitary feud over protecting a family experiencing the ongoing interpersonal violence. This demonstrates the fragility of the post-conflict situation - where the need to avoid armed paramilitary conflict overrides other justice issues. Even if individual perpetrators are not particularly powerful,

the group in which they are a member is powerful, and police collusion exacerbates the impunity. Thus, what in another context may be everyday domestic violence, becomes bound up with the political violence of the place and takes on a more structural dimension (Scheper-Hughes, 1996; True, 2012). Activists expressed concern that the release of political prisoners as part of the peace process, added to the de-prioritisation of tackling VAWG. For example, *Olivia* explained how prisoner releases impacts on domestic violence, as violated partners of released prisoners would feel unable to report domestic abuse to the police, knowing it would result in their partners being recalled to prison for their original convictions. Activists did note improvements in responses in recent years, although these were tempered by ongoing concerns. For example, *Angela* thought some sections of the Northern Ireland Police Service were improving their response to domestic abuse, but this was far from across the board: “the few good ones show the rest up” *Angela* (NI). Similarly, due to the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons in NI as part of the peace process, *Chloe* perceived there was a reduction of weapons in instances of domestic VAWG.¹²⁹ However, she noted that those involved in the decommissioning process were unlikely to be aware of the of this benefit or be particularly motivated by it.

As discussed in Chapter 2, sexual violence in conflict can be mistakenly conceptualised as a phenomenon that exists separately from the society in which it takes place (Ayiera, 2010). This conception can lead to the expectation that it will end when the conflict ends. Activists’ testimonies portrayed a situation where intragroup or intracommunity VAWG, including sexual violence, did not reduce following the peace process. However, activists still view post-conflict VAWG as conflict-related because of it being perpetrated by conflict actors and being unaddressed for politicised reasons. These reasons include the police letting the issue pass to placate paramilitary groups (as in the earlier domestic VAW example with the knife under the pillow) and, as *J* (NI) discussed, because perpetrators were police informants who knew they could act with impunity without being arrested. Further, activists allege that paramilitary groups, who still have informal

¹²⁹ This perception about the reduction in weapon use in domestic abuse, was later confirmed in empirical research by (Doyle and McWilliams, 2018).

policing roles in communities, are still covering up sexual and other gendered abuse that is being perpetrated by group members:

Violence against women has been allowed to happen. The paramilitaries allowed it to happen in both communities and the police allowed it to happen. And all of that collusion is all still carrying over. So, yes, we've got some changes and we've got some good people who want things to get better. And we've got some really good partnerships with PSNI (Police Service of Northern Ireland) but overall? I see that it is still all carrying over. (H, NI)

It's still continuing to this day. You've still got the clubs and bars, the social clubs where they have lock-ins and they get the young women drugged up. And there's all sorts of abuse going on in there and that is still continuing and that is still covered up because of who is doing it. And that hasn't gone away. And nobody wants to bother with it. (J, NI)

I find it incredible that this abuse is still in place today, but it is. (Annemarie, NI).

Based on these testimonies, activists are concerned that the aftermath of the conflict enables ongoing abuse in many ways the conflict did. These accounts make it difficult to draw a line between the conflict and post-conflict eras in relation to intracommunity VAWG. Some activists found out about past intragroup VAWG that was hidden at the time of the conflict. Such secrecy in conflict is not uncommon, given conflict restricts peoples' opportunities for free movement and interaction with others. However, finding out new information on abuse required activists to rethink what they thought they knew about intragroup VAWG, the extent to which it took place and in which groups. G (NI) said when she learned about the case of Máiría Cahill, approximately a year and a half prior to our interview (detailed in Chapter 3.3), it had a big impact on her. As somebody who was active in a Loyalist/Unionist community, G (NI) had come across similar examples of intragroup VAWG being covered up by Loyalist paramilitaries, but this was the first time she knew of the same happening in Republican / Nationalist communities. J (NI) was, however, at pains to point out, that, not only was intragroup VAWG a problem in both ethnonational groups in terms of being

perpetrated by paramilitary members, but it was also a problem among state security forces:

I didn't actually think it was going on in nationalist areas, but actually it was, because it's just so prevalent. I still get quite shocked at the level of that violence that you just didn't hear about, but, of course, it was going on. (G, NI)

I think it's more obvious that people see it in Catholic communities, but maybe that's because of that woman, Máiría Cahill, who came out with her case... But I know what happened in both communities and also among the police and soldiers. (J, NI)

The passing of time can enable people to understand aspects of situations not always available whilst living through them, thus allowing people to assume new positions on the past (Sharf and Vanderford, 2003). However, it is worth bearing in mind that some activists were learning new details about the past, alongside the uncomfortable knowledge of how aspects of the post-conflict context enable ongoing VAWG. These revelations of poorly handled responses to past violations combined with current concerns may have fuelled activists' overall sense that this form of VAWG was not a priority in the past and it remains deprioritised.

Finally, one feature of deprioritisation at national level was discussed at length in interviews, specifically the British government's failure to extend 1325 to NI. Activists' dissatisfaction at this exclusion was expressed on several levels, particularly regarding the British government's lack of attention on how the post-conflict conditions relate to ongoing gendered violence in NI. Activists also argued the lack of application of 1325 to NI, resulted in extra work for them, even though the outcomes are not as impactful as they otherwise would be, as indicated by Annemarie below. Secondly, as a feminist activist widely known for Loyalist focused activism, Dawn noted the irony of being in conversation with Dublin about conflict-related VAWG and not London:

There is no reason why they (government) shouldn't implement the principles of 1325 even if 1325 isn't recognised. It's all about conflict and it all about prevention and protection. And that's where, in terms of even

domestic violence and violence against women and girls, participation and post-conflict rebuilding, that's what a lot of my work has to go into, even trying to push that along to keep those issues on the agenda. (Annemarie, NI)

So, I highlight issues through, believe it or not, through the Irish government. Westminster has never recognised that there was a conflict here. Northern Ireland should be included in a Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Action Plan. UN Security Council Resolution on Women Peace and Security requires member states to develop a National Action Plan. Westminster have an all-party group but they have never included Northern Ireland in it. (Dawn, NI)

The Republic of Ireland includes discussion on Northern Ireland in its 1325 activities, because of intense lobbying from activists on both sides of the border (Pierson, 2018a), hence why Dawn is part of these Discussions in Dublin. The Northern Ireland Assembly has an All-Party Group on 1325, which Annemarie discussed feeding into. However, 1325 discussions in Belfast and Dublin are largely symbolic (O'Rourke and Swaine, 2017) and do not ultimately change the fact that official national level post-conflict processes are devoid of a WPS plan for NI.

In sum, while the lack of a post conflict process to address the harms of conflict was universal in Namibia, in NI processes in place were not inclusive of the issue of intragroup VAWG by conflict actors. However, aside from this key difference, activists in both places highlighted that the perpetrators and enablers of intragroup VAWG progressed politically. The harms associated with deprioritisation of intragroup VAWG, whether as a stand-alone issue or as part of wider violence vary according to how the activists concerned perceived the initial violence and its root causes. Activists who see this violence as an abuse of power are left to draw the conclusion that redress for victims will be denied. For these activists to see perpetrators take up leadership positions after conflict or see combatant groups continue to keep hold of power and control in communities, appears to have undermined their belief in the likelihood of justice, however they envisage justice. However, activists who see intragroup VAWG as being the actions of damaged former combatants are left with a concern about how this trauma and damage will transmit through families. Having analysed activists' perspectives on how the

deprioritisation of intragroup VAWG is harmful in both settings, I now go on to investigate the relational difficulties of taking this issue forward in activism.

5.4 The Relational Difficulties of Intragroup VAWG By Conflict Actors as an Activism Issue

In this section, I analyse activists' perspectives that addressing intragroup VAWG by conflict actors risks causing interpersonal division or strain among activists. The contexts of these perceived relational risks are varied, though I summarise them here in two broad areas. The first broad area is the continued presence of conflict actors who enjoy varying degrees of support or power/hold over people. Articulated in the sub-section title below, as being in "that grip", these responses came solely from NI activists who discussed intragroup violence by paramilitaries in the community. The second section from Namibian activists continues the theme that some people respond negatively to victims of intragroup VAWG because of the celebrated status of the alleged perpetrators. Further, a view is expressed that some people maintain silence about the issue because they have also been violated and are unwilling to draw attention to themselves. Having examined these perceived risks of interpersonal division, I then argue that they, combined with the already discussed climate of deprioritisation, aid our understanding of the slow tentative nature of anti-VAWG activism in response to this violence. Understanding the reasons behind the slow temporality of activism on VAWG related to conflict is useful, not only in relation to the field sites, but also in relation to our broader understanding of interruptions in how and when people in post-conflict societies deal with gendered harms of the past.

5.4.1 "Still in that Grip": Continued paramilitary control in Northern Ireland

NI activists highlighted that, pre-ceasefire, underfunded community work was almost exclusively female. Some had a sense of the influence of women in community groups being diluted when ex-paramilitary prisoners became prominent in community work. *Erin* (NI) saw this dilution as particularly pertinent in relation to VAWG. For *G* (NI) the ongoing duality of the presence of paramilitary groups, in community work and organised crime, made challenging their power difficult:

A lot of the community groups now are run by ex-paramilitaries on both sides, and they have very well-paid jobs. So, it would be very difficult to go to someone like that about a domestic abuse problem or rape. But I could run you off an email here about loads of things going on, about suicide, about health but there's never, ever anything about violence against women. (Erin, NI)

Those military structures are still here and very much the criminal aspect of that as well. And it is about holding on to the wee bit of power and control you have in your own community, whether through community work, paramilitary activity, or both. And as the funding dwindles that power and control becomes much more aggressive as well. And as people feel more threatened, the more bullying they do. (G, NI)

The release of prisoners as part of the GFA was followed up with funding to reintegrate them into the community. The increased prevalence of male ex-prisoner community workers changed community work in NI, a cause for concern in some distinct areas, such as women's participation and VAWG (Kilmurray, 2013).

When carrying out interviews, I was initially unprepared for the extent to which intragroup VAWG by conflict actors would be discussed as a concern. However, as my awareness increased, I began to ask questions of activists of what could or should be done about this violence, and what stood in the way of action. Their hesitant responses made clear the difficulties of taking this issue forward:

Well, something has to come to it because otherwise it's going to carry on until eventually it's like a sore you know where things have grown over it. And it just becomes a big lump. You know that you can feel down there [*pointing to sternum area*] but you can't access. And nobody wants to bother with it.... And I don't know whether you look back on it and challenge it or how you do that. But we've got the six key themes to challenge on, so, you know, yeah maybe. It is just that the paramilitaries still have such a hold here whether you like it or not. J (NI)

I don't know how you tackle that because that's a divisive one for women because they are still in that grip... That is challenging to the very core, you

know? And even when Máiría Cahill lifted the lid off, that divided a lot of people, and it was very sad to see how much it did divide people. And I think part of that is that people can't acknowledge it because they are still in it. (H, NI)

A lot of that has to be opened up and acknowledged before we can move on and that's going to be really bad on both sides. And I don't see that starting to take place yet. (*Olivia*, NI)

Activists' explanations of the extent of how difficult it would be to campaign on this issue contextualised their state of inaction on that level, even though they were active in other ways in terms of supporting people affected. J (NI), who had supported victims directly, saw the need for some sort of truth and reconciliation process. Likening the effects of the violence to a sore that has become a big lump quite graphically suggests that the effects of this violence have not waned with the passing of time. However, she also queried whether this should solely be a truth and reconciliation process, or also include some form of legal challenge. Regardless of the goals, all three participants felt that opening discussion on this issue would be difficult to achieve, divisive at community level, and not likely to happen soon. The reference made by J (NI) to six key themes relates to her suggestion that such a difficult issue could perhaps be addressed through a NI feminist coalition, which explicitly works towards six themes, including women living free from violence. This coalition, which features in subsequent chapters, works publicly on issues that may be too challenging or exposing for groups to address alone. Even taking it on under the banner of a coalition seemed difficult for J (NI) to imagine. H (NI) assessed the responses to Máiría Cahill's public disclosure of being sexually assaulted by a paramilitary figure as divisive, which added to her overall sense of how difficult it would be to engage in activism on this issue. The negative responses towards women who have disclosed abuse, was also identified as a setback in Namibia, as the next sub-section now details.

5.4.2 "Why a Woman Will Choose Silence": Negative responses to victims of intragroup VAWG by conflict actors in Namibia

While NI activists talk of intragroup VAWG in the here and now, reflections from activists in Namibia about the relational issues of addressing this contentious issue are more retrospective. Hindsight, or retrospective understanding (Avalos, 1999) involves looking back on and making sense of lived experiences in the light of one's present situation (Bute and Jensen, 2011). Reflections from two Namibian activists that challenged intragroup VAWG, point to silence on the issue being connected to negative responses from others. One activist involved in campaigning on the detainee issue spoke about various activities in which she was initially involved. She reflected on the negative responses to which victims of intragroup VAWG were subjected and acknowledged that, even though her principles guide her to speak out on issues, she understood why somebody would choose to keep quiet about having such harm inflicted on them.

So, I started in *name of organisation* speaking for the people that didn't want to speak in public, continuing on the violence issue, really working on individual counselling, referring people to "name of organisation" and also looking at the legal side of things.... Really, the way some of the women were spoken to was very difficult. And these are very difficult, private things to remember, but they are also things that affect all of us as Namibians. I am a person who believes in adding my voice where there is silence, but really, I also understand why a woman will choose silence when the people you are accusing are the so-called heroes of our struggle. (A, Namibia)

I already highlighted gendered victim blaming as a problematic response to VAWG in Chapter 1. However, the celebrated status of alleged perpetrators as liberators and then political leaders, is an added dimension that may dissuade victims from speaking out. Even beyond the VAWG aspect, Curling (2001), speaking as a psychologist who supports former detainees, explains it is common for them to repress and even deny their experiences of being under suspicion of spying and being tortured, as the negative responses they have received from others adds to their trauma. I am aware that one activist I interviewed was a detainee who went public about her experience on her return; she later refused to discuss any details of her period in exile with me, over two and a half decades later. Whilst not speculating why she chose to omit this experience from the interview, it is important to appreciate her assessment that doing so was in her best interests.

In Section 2.2 above, Rosa shared she was side-lined and ostracised by women from SWAPO when she reported her SWAPO peer for attempted rape. She said having reflected on their actions she developed her own perspective as to why they behaved as they did. Based on testimonies from exiled women about rape and assault, her own experience and her observation of the dynamics in SWAPO and later in the Swapo Party, Rosa says she believes the women ostracising her were themselves affected by experiences of gendered abuse:

Then realising these women also suffer this trauma of being abused as women, all the time, and not being taken seriously. And trying to vie and fight for their places wherever they are and therefore suppressing all the other women. (Rosa, Namibia)

Without speculating on whether Rosa's belief is founded, it does reveal how she perceives relations in women's activism in post-conflict Namibia. Rosa portrays the Swapo Party/government as a group in which gendered dynamics are highly problematic. That she drew such a far-reaching conclusion about the effects of abusive gendered relationships rippling among women in competitive ways, suggests she has had tense encounters with women in Swapo Party. Based on Rosa's testimony, intragroup VAWG appears to be at the heart of those tense encounters. I discuss the conflict that persisted between women activists in Swapo Party and the autonomous feminist movement and women, in the next chapter. Next, I look at the factors associated with the slowness of activism responses to intragroup VAWG in both Namibia and Northern Ireland.

5.4.3 Slow Activism Temporalities on Intragroup VAWG

Following on from earlier discussion about the variance in temporalities that can occur in post-conflict societies when political time and social time are misaligned (MacGinty, 2016), I consider the slowness and delay in activism on intragroup VAWG in both countries. In Chapter 2 I set out an argument by Mueller-Hirth and Rios Oyola (2018) that politically imposed post-conflict processes, milestones, and deadlines, may be at odds with peoples' readiness for such processes. When looking at slow activism on intragroup VAWG in both sites, the factors that come into focus highlight how the pace of this activism needs to be understood in the

context of the post-conflict challenges against it. In explaining this position, I look at long-term activism in Namibia and emerging activism in NI. In Namibia political time was fast, in that most provisions for moving from conflict to post-conflict were implemented during the transitional phase. Once independent following democratic elections, the Namibian government introduced a blanket amnesty to draw a line under the past. Conversely, Northern Ireland has gone through, and indeed is still in, a protracted peace process, blurring the temporalities between conflict, post-conflict and beyond.

A (Namibia) had been involved in various forms of activism to support detainees over a span of twenty five years. She outlined her detainee focused work in the earlier sub-section, public speaking, emotional support to individual former detainees, and onward referral for counselling/legal support. Having initially found the pace of this work fast, she explained the intensity subsided: “At first everything was so busy but when the government would not shift, it later went quiet” (A, Namibia). Campaigning activists trying to pursue an issue the government is trying to block, come to understand slowness is unavoidable. In such a stalemate, movement is unlikely without extensive support and pressure from outside government, that is from the public or from international governments (Eyben, 2013). As support has not materialised to that level, the campaign for public support/political change is required to continue long term. A (Namibia) made clear the difficulty of maintaining momentum and a sense of urgency when no end is in sight. Burn out in long term activism is problematic (Levi and Murphy, 2006) and is certainly not unique to anti-VAWG activists. However, A (Namibia) discussed feeling that some involved in anti-VAWG activism, including those who were previously supportive, don’t want to devote attention to this violence anymore, which she found difficult:

When I speak about detainee rape and people look down, I know it means they don’t want me to speak. And some who used to applaud me now say, “my sister, you have done what you can. Now you can put your heavy burden down”. For me that is paining. I still speak, but not like before. (A, Namibia)

The quote makes clear the human toll of carrying out such activism long-term. To use the situational conception of agency developed by Menzel (2020), whilst A (Namibia) has maintained the motivational dimension of agency her sense of being able to effect change appears in decline. The decline appears connected to the fact that the people with whom she has had relationships in activism have become less focused on the issue. In other words, A (Namibia's) declining motivation is relational. An uneasy situation remains in which activism space is occupied by an issue not making the desired progress, yet not going away.

Slowness in activism in NI relates to a perceived concern that raising this controversial issue could upset relations among activists. Participants gave a sense of not being sure how best to take the issue forward and who could do so. One activist explained why the group in which she was active could not take a lead:

It's going to have to come from somewhere else. It couldn't be through **name of her group** - fucks sake - far too controversial! (J, NI)

I was somewhat surprised by the strength of J's response in terms of how emphatically she contended it was too controversial to address, given I knew she supported victims of this VAWG and had been clear about the need for more to be done, when she likened it as a sore that had grown into a lump. However, the thought of being identified in the public sphere as challenging the issue was inconceivable to J (NI). Her emphatic contention that it was too controversial for her group made clear that she found the issue untouchable in the public domain because of the relational challenges it would bring. However, she discussed the issue at length with me and appeared to be deeply involved on a discreet level, given the support she provided to victims. Therefore, her hesitance and inaction as relational as they are, are restricted to the public sphere. Another NI activist talked about being part of early-stage discussions with a group outside the women's movement, to raise the issue of rape and sexual violence during conflict. She did not specify whether she was doing this as part of a single group/organisation or a coalition. She also did want to elaborate because it was "still delicate". Ongoing tensions about the general marginalisation of women's groups in addressing the

legacy of conflict have already been highlighted. Two years after the NI interviews, Pierson (2018b, p.472) explains emerging workshop discussions about how to address sexual violence in conflict are underway, but due to the “ongoing highly sensitive nature of this issue”, this “remains out of the public domain”. Therefore, not only is activism on issue operating at a slow pace, but it is also discreet by design.

That activists continue to discuss and seek ways to incorporate intragroup VAWG by conflict actors into their activism shows an enduring persistence. Activism in Namibia commenced decades ago and lacks momentum or urgency. Conversely, activists in NI appear to be at the early stages of determining how to address ongoing concerns about VAWG perpetrated within groups and communities by conflict actors. That both forms of activism are slow and low level needs to be understood in the context of how various inhibitors faced by activists manifest. These inhibitors are the ongoing de-prioritisation of intragroup VAWG, the risk of damaging activism relations due to the continued grip held by conflict actors, and a generally perceived lack of appetite to address the issue. The lack of appetite is evidenced by negative responses to disclosers of abuse, which can silence victims. Whilst there are similarities in the inhibitors, the cumulative effect varies in each place, because of the distinct nature of each context. As such, there is a need to identify context specific factors, in order to understand the unique pace and rhythm of activism on conflict-related issues in each place.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed activists’ accounts of intragroup VAWG, by conflict actors. This VAWG was perpetrated in a variety of private, community based and distinct conflict settings and manifested in different ways. However, there was a strong sense across different contexts and in both countries that the lack of response and continued deprioritisation of the issue was connected to the identity of the perpetrators, that is, that they were conflict actors. Whilst different concerns existed about the effects of deprioritisation of this VAWG, whether in terms of the risk of ongoing trauma or an unresolved aspect of this gender justice issue, all concerned agreed it had been set aside since the conflict. Whilst a concern in

both countries, the continued environment of impunity was particularly pertinent in accounts of NI participants. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the continuation of paramilitary groups there. However, the claim that there is continued sexual violence perpetrated by paramilitary members is a key issue from this analysis which challenges the narratives of the peace process, the ending of conflict and subsequent development processes in NI. Activists' difficulties in progressing this issue in activism are all relational. Activists in Namibia, who have been raising this issue since independence, do not feel the support of other activists as they would wish. Activists in NI who while acknowledging having held back from publicly drawing attention to this issue, are stuck in a form of relational inaction, because of the perceived consequences of taking this issue into the public sphere. Our understanding of slowness in activism, therefore, should incorporate these difficulties from activists' perspectives. In the next chapter, I continue with the analysis of how VAWG issues are addressed in activism across time, by looking at the importance of relations between feminist activists of different ages.

Chapter 6: Contemporary Inter-Age and Long-Term Cross-Age Feminist Relations

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I analyse the role of inter-age relations between feminist activists in producing relational agency in contemporary activism and in sustaining anti-VAWG activism in post-conflict settings. In the first of two subsequent sections, I argue that feminist relations between activists of different ages (inter-age) relations can encourage younger women into feminist activism¹³⁰. I then analyse how agency develops in solidary relations that form between feminist activists of different ages. In the second section I take the focus away from contemporary agency and take a long-term perspective on the importance of continued feminist relations. I analyse feminist activists' recognition of interdependence between activists across age ranges and generations (shortened to cross-age). This interdependence is necessary not only for the general Sisyphean task of responding to VAWG and gender inequality, but also for activists to be able to understand and contend with the specific place-based threats to their feminist activism. Then, drawing on the concept of spillover, I examine activists' perspectives on long-term threats to feminist activism that come from the post-conflict context of each place. I go on to argue for the importance of continuity and long-term communication about the impacts of place-based inequalities on feminist activism across time.

6.2 Inter-age Feminist Activist Relations

In any society the process of becoming feminist can involve personal conflict as one begins to confront gendered injustices and potentially negative responses from others (Ahmed, 2017). In societies where divisions during and post-conflict have restricted women's rights, personal conflict when becoming feminist can be

¹³⁰ Throughout this chapter I refer to older and younger activists, without providing further detail. The point of referring to activists and older or younger is not about what age they are, but about the dynamic of the relationships between those older and younger activists, where they perceive age difference as relevant.

further compounded by negative reactions for prioritising gender rights over ethnic or ethnonational loyalty, as I discussed in Chapter 3. In the next sub-section, I analyse how relationships younger feminist activists formed with older, more established feminist activists helped embed them in activism and affirm their confidence and commitment to work towards feminist change. In the second sub-section, I analyse examples of how relational agency developed in the interactions between feminist activists of different ages, in ways that are pertinent to their age difference. I argue these solidary relations can help shape relational agency development in feminist activism.

6.2.1 Supporting Younger Women into Feminist Activism

Participants that recalled encountering older and more experienced feminist activists when starting out in activism, spoke of these relationships as pivotal to their progression and dealing with difficulties they experienced from the reactions of others. As this example from Dawn (NI) shows, meeting established, often older, local feminists can help early-stage activists understand how feminist and anti-VAWG activism emerged over time. Dawn (NI) expressed that she started out with a strong drive to challenge the injustices of VAWG, including forced birth, due to lack of abortion access in NI, but she perceived feminism as inaccessible because she associated feminism with Irish Republicanism:

I remember feeling very under pressure that feminism didn't represent me because feminism was Republicanism. Feminism within Unionism was like a dirty word, as it is seen as subversive and anti-state. So, I had to redefine that and explore that. (Dawn, NI)

Dawn found out about feminist activism as part of a local political history course, activism that contemporaneously passed her by. She explained how meeting older “inspirational” feminists who had been active from the 1970s enabled her to learn about how feminism and socialism became disassociated from Unionism in NI. After discussing this in depth with these older activists she satisfied herself that she could be feminist without being disloyal: “but it took me a long time” (Dawn, NI). From this she claimed her own feminist standpoint, which she described as:

“Not a Republicanism - not a Unionism - it’s how you live your life.” (Dawn, NI)

Rosa (Namibia) had been involved in political activism and community development with women for several years by the time Namibia became independent. During the latter stage of the independence struggle, she was disillusioned at having to disband a women’s activism group at SWAPO’s instruction, explaining she felt this would “leave women behind the men when independence comes” (Rosa Namibia). She explained it was on the cusp of independence that she got her first opportunity to engage in explicitly feminist anti-VAWG activism. During this time, she encountered older, feminist activists who encouraged her to read, discuss and create feminist literature. She reflected that together they explored women’s rights, VAWG, race relations, culture, sexual minority rights and healing from conflict. In addition to valuing the learning, she found the safety of the group comforting:

But there is another way out and this is feminism and somehow, I fit here. Do you? Yes. Ok, get on the boat. So, on I am.... With great women, beautiful spirits, where I find myself again feeling the safety that I have been losing since my childhood. (Rosa, Namibia)

D (NI)’s life had been affected by the conflict for as long as she could remember, having lost several members of her family to it at an early age. She talked about being greatly influenced by the mother of her best friend, a civil rights leader, former politician, and feminist activist. D (NI) believes that learning about historic and political injustices in her degree course had a radicalising effect on her. However, she credits learning about feminism and socialism informally from her friend’s mother as the “political awakening” that steered her from combat: “it removed me from the clutches, I suppose, of joining a paramilitary organisation” (D, NI). For her, these discussions were critical to how she began analysing the injustice of conflict, especially how women were subjugated by conflict actors. The impact of developing what Enloe (2008) describes a feminist intersectional response to exploitative war, extended beyond the conflict context for D (NI). She

articulated: “It was like somebody had just revealed the world to me”, and because of it, she now sees “everything through the gender lens” (D, NI).

For all three participants above, developing relationships with older feminist activists was an integral part of developing a commitment to feminism. Crossley (2008) argues the role models activists engage with in the early stages of activism are often older, so the inter-age dimension is not unique to feminism. These inter-age feminist relations were portrayed by participants as educational and supportive, enabling them to learn new knowledge and explore feminist values. Each participant described the inter-age encounters differently, referring to being inspired, fitting in, having sense of safety, and going through process of awakening, respectively. However, the importance of the relationships was consistent in these introductions to feminism that changed their trajectories. From these relationships emerged what Davis (2008) describes as the commitment to use knowledge for transformative feminist action.

Inter-age relationships with established feminist activists were also important to those in the early stage of identifying with feminist activism, in supporting them to develop strategies to withstand ridicule from others. Some activists experienced acute negative responses for taking a stand on LGBT rights, which for them went hand in hand with feminism. I illustrate this further with two examples. *Deborah (Namibia)* had worked for several years addressing VAWG and gender rights issues without associating her activism with feminism. She explained she had married outside of her culture and when widowed, had been displaced by her late husband’s family, following a so-called property grab: “I was feeling that, although Namibia was free, women were not free” *Deborah (Namibia)*. Soon after this displacement she found a new job, which was her introduction to feminism, through the people in her organisation. This experience also encompassed *Deborah’s*, first known encounters with openly lesbian activists which enabled her to learn about the struggle for gay, bisexual, and transgender rights, as part of feminist learning. *Deborah* shared being heavily derided for the position she took on feminism and LBGT rights, by members of her extended family:

I learned a lot from them really. Before being with them I would not say I was feminist, but now I do... Even, when I would do radio shows about women's choice and safety and rights, I knew a lot of the negative comments coming in on sms and through the phone where from my own family relatives – can you believe it?! I talked it through with *name* and *name* because I felt bad and was worried about my job being ruined. They made me feel better because they knew it was not on me. Then I just decided “this is my belief and my commitment so I can just make that sacrifice”. (*Deborah, Namibia*)

Although *Deborah* said she found the reading and discussions involved “a lot to learn and study”, she expressed gratitude to those who taught her about feminism. She added the initial nervousness she felt about unintentionally being insensitive when talking about sexuality or gender identity, gave way to confidence about interacting with diverse people. *Deborah* reflected that becoming feminist totally changed the kind of work she felt she should do, and she engaged in practice she would not have previously considered. This included outreach work with sex workers and campaigning to highlight unsafe abortion practices, due to criminalisation.

In Northern Ireland, feminism was “a revelation” for *Agatha (NI)* but for several years she was discreet about being feminist to the point of being secretive. She explained being held back by the need to renegotiate aspects of her cultural/ political upbringing and her relationship with her church. She highlighted the support of older activists made it possible to be more honest about who she is.

“It's great just being around kick-ass feminists who could stand up to anyone. Some genuinely don't care what others think and while I'll never totally be like that, I'm way more like that than I was. I've learned I'm as good as anyone else and my rights matter, like anyone else.” (*Agatha, NI*)

She was among several NI interviewees who recalled being accused of ‘getting too big for your boots’, in her case when speaking out about VAWG and homophobic violence. She credited older more experienced activist peers for showing her how to laugh off criticism. She spoke of the relief she felt about being able to be honest about her feminist, queer identity, with their support. However, she added that she regularly swings from relief to feeling frustration at living in a

country stuck in “green versus orange views”, where “equality and social justice is just frivolousness” *Agatha (NI)*. In other words, whilst she benefitted from the support of activist peers in taking her place in society as a queer feminist, her experience of society was that it was consumed by an ethnonational contest (“green versus orange views”). Therefore, her experience was that ethnonational domination was at the expense of the rights and protections of people violated because of their gender or sexuality.

Participants paid tribute to the willingness of more experienced, usually older, local feminist activists, for taking on the roles of social historians, emotional supporters, facilitators, listening ears and diversity educators. The above reflections from activists signal how the relationships they developed impacted on them at the early stages of being feminist. These relationships were defining for them in being willing to take a feminist stand and work towards feminist change, including addressing VAWG. These reflections from activists show how relationships can be pivotal to agency in feminist activism, which supports the contention by McGuire, Stewart and Curtin (2010) that exposure to activism groups and feminist leaders are important in inspiring participation and commitment in feminist activism. Below, I explore examples of how relational agency is produced through inter-age feminist activist relationships.

6.2.2 Developing Relational Agency in Inter-age Feminist Activism

Here I argue that relationships that form in inter-age feminist collaboration can become pivotal to the activism arising from it. In other words, inter-age feminist interactions can shape relational agency development in activists’ responses to anti-VAWG causes. The first example I discuss from Namibia demonstrates the development of relational agency in ways that were enhanced by the differences in age between the actors involved. What started as a spontaneous response to an injustice by one young woman, who had never engaged in activism developed into an inter-age feminist activism campaign. *Samantha* explained she always saw herself as a feminist although, for her, this did not previously include any interest in activism:

The whole activism thing never really appealed to me. I thought it was crazy people running around with posters, and you are never going to get anywhere with that. (*Samantha, Namibia*)

Samantha's lack of interest in activism changed quite suddenly in 2013, following media reports of alleged victim-blaming by a senior police official connecting sexual violence to how girls/women dress in provocative, revealing, and 'un-African' ways. *Samantha* spoke of the outrage she felt when she heard about this. Despite not being part of a feminist activism or anti-VAWG network, encouraged by her friends, she put out a call through social media, inviting people to join her in a protest. Thereafter she was contacted by Rosa, a feminist VAWG activist with a public profile, 27 years her senior. For *Samantha*, this encounter and the relationship that developed changed the course of the activism that followed:

She just blows my mind, blows the feet out from right under me because she is just, she's dynamic and she's full of spirit, and the love just oozes out of her. (*Samantha, Namibia*)

Together they co-facilitated a protest campaign drawing on their distinct and previously separate networks. Established VAWG activists provided information and analysis about sexual violence, legal issues, and the problem of victim-blaming, much of which was written into rally speeches and publicity materials. *Samantha* and other first-time activists expanded the means to share this knowledge by thinking up and implementing novel ideas to attract people to the campaign, mainly utilising new and social media. As *Samantha* (Namibia) pointed out: "I don't know how to go about challenging the law and politicians, but I do know how to mobilise people online". Similarly, Rosa said jokingly: "I am still learning how to work the Facebook but at least I know the Facebook works". They invited the public to participate in a rally with an optional dress code that challenged victim blaming, which received extensive broadcast and print media coverage. Rosa said she was struck by the large numbers of people that participated in the rally whom she had never encountered before, which she assessed as being "totally because of the energy and skills of the youth" (Rosa, Namibia). Rosa further highlighted that activists in Namibia had not taken a stand like that for several years because of how quiet people seemed to have become

about GBV. In turn, *Samantha* paid tribute to Rosa's skills at being at the front of the rally with motivational speeches: "really, she showed us we will always have to fight for women because we don't want to be raped and beaten." *Samantha* (Namibia).

The encounter was the beginning of a change in *Samantha's* biography, as she decided to become an activist on an ongoing basis, including organising solidarity fundraising events to support Rosa's work. The initial campaign also changed the biographies of a cohort of activists that decided to come together to form an informal coalition to build momentum on anti-VAWG work:

We formed an informal coalition to look at how to address messaging in the mainstream media around violence against women. So, the UN started the Orange Day initiative as a day to remember victims of violence and also to eliminate violence against women and children and we then followed up on that, so every 25th we would either do a media campaign and just talk about the issue or we would do a small event. We just wanted to have momentum - not to lose focus. We cannot just wait for the 16 days of activism at the end of the year, to make noise for those 16 days and then be quiet for the rest of the year. (E, Namibia)

We had to take on the Namibian Police and we stood up and it was a massive, massive gathering ... and because of that working together we decided to form an informal coalition on violence, which is made out of various groups and organisations and women. (Rosa, Namibia)

We're trying as a coalition together to get to a point where we can tell the NGOs that we are the platform. Bring us the issues and give us your views and we will take it to the Ministers and we will push, because you know the more of us there are the stronger our voice. (*Samantha*, Namibia)

When feminist activists of different ages collaborate, they can beneficially utilise their different histories and experiences to contribute towards shared processes and activism goals (Edell, Brown and Montano, 2016). *Samantha* and Rosa were part of a coalition reimagining what relations between established, mostly, older anti-VAWG activists and mostly younger, first-time participants could achieve. In so doing, they bolstered each other's activism, provided mutual encouragement,

learning, and inspired new forms of action to take forward their concerns about VAWG. The argument by Edwards and Mackenzie (2005, p.301) that relational agency “expands their interpretations and supports their responsive actions” applies to the organising activists that developed this campaign. More than that, the relational agency that developed through the feminist connections between *Samantha*, Rosa, and their respective networks, resulted in proactive as well as responsive actions. Because of the diversity in their experiences and histories, when they interacted to form their activism intentions, they devised actions that would have otherwise been inconceivable, which echoes Kennelly’s (2009) analysis of the importance of the relational in agency, as discussed in Chapter 2. Their encounter and subsequent interactions changed their sense of what their activism could do and be, which had an impact in the here-and-now and which then encouraged more actions. As Burkitt (2018) argues:

agency has to be reconceptualised as the power of interactants and interdependents to work from within the temporal-relational context to expand its horizon of possibilities and to create new goals of interaction

(Burkitt, 2018, p.523)

In Northern Ireland, *Angela* (NI) similarly described examples of anti-VAWG and pro-abortion choice campaigns in which she deemed the connections between younger and older activists as pivotal. Like the example in Namibia, *Angela* (NI) attributed the positive collaboration to older and younger activists focusing on what they do well. She saw older activists in her network as adept at making and maintaining connections with authoritative organisations, politicians and policy makers, and younger activists as strong in communicating to mobilise activists: “They have a good following of young ones - that social media is a good way of doing it” (*Angela, NI*).¹³¹ Inter-age collaboration extended beyond young activists’ social media organising and older activists’ know-how in engaging with policy and political actors. For example, *Angela* (NI) expressed her admiration of younger activists for having the confidence to articulate themselves:

¹³¹ I return to the digital capabilities of younger activists in the next section.

When I see these younger women coming through, I think its brilliant - it's really inspiring. Like I'm like jealous really. I wish I had some of, you know that confidence to speak and all that knowledge. It's really good that they're coming through. (*Angela, NI*)

Whilst *Angela* (NI) was inspired by the confidence of younger activists, *Agatha* (NI), a younger activist, was clear that the support from older and more experienced activists was important to her building confidence:

They have been activists for years and if it was time for me to lead something, they will be like, "yeah, away you go". They've been very supportive, and they were just creating a wee space for you to try out things. And this is the place where you can get a bit of confidence. Because you know that everyone in the room feels the same way that you do about all these issues. And here's your chance to do something. (*Agatha, NI*)

Agatha's testimony epitomises the pivotal role inter-age relationships can play in bolstering participation in activism. Knowing older, more experienced activists were willing her to succeed, believing they were unified in wanting to address injustices, and generally having trust in the activism group, fuelled *Agatha's* confidence. From this confidence, *Agatha* (NI) felt she could take on new responsibilities, thereby demonstrating the benefits of making space to develop relational agency within a supportive network.

Kellie (NI) acknowledged she previously tended to step in and steer younger peers or do tasks for them, before becoming aware this risked stifling them. Younger feminist activists can become disaffected when they feel older activists instruct rather than support their self-determination (Taft, 2011). When she developed an understanding of the need for younger activists to build confidence and skills through the doing of activism, she changed her methods:

When young people used to say, I don't really know what to say, I used to offer to write the speech for them - I don't do that anymore. Now I say, "you write something and send it to me, and I'll have a wee look at it, and if it

needs to be topped and tailed, I can do that". And then I try my very best not to change a word. (Kellie, NI)

Kellie laughed at having to "physically restrain" herself from joining a feminist group popular among younger women, instead providing some logistical support to them when they were organising a demonstration. She reflected how satisfying this was:

And you watch young activists leading that march and you're going, brilliant. Number one, fucking you didn't have to do it. Number two, you get to take your daughters to it, and you can just hang out and be a normal person. (Kellie, NI)

Whilst Kellie (NI) reflected on learning to be less directive to younger peers, *Janet (Namibia)* had to respond to the directiveness and expectations of older activists. From *Janet (Namibia)*'s perspective, the anti-VAWG coalition in which her student group was involved, asked too much from her and other younger activists:

So, we just needed that understanding that we're all in different levels and we all have different capacities. We are young students and are still learning. But the expectation came that everybody had to contribute equally. So, there was some tension and pulling... We felt a lot of pressure. (*Janet, Namibia*)

When *Janet (Namibia)* confided in an older activist from a different member group, that the expectation to contribute on a par with more experienced groups was challenging, she received a supportive response. She explained her confidante, whom she referred to as Aunty, arranged for her organisation to provide ongoing support to Janet and her peers:

They now recognise that we are young girls, and they are willing to build our capacity, and to invite us to trainings" (*Janet, Namibia*).

The need Kellie (NI) identified to be less directive to younger activists and the pressure *Janet (Namibia)* experienced at being directed by older activists, both highlight how age and seniority can be associated with authority and decision making. Inter-age activists are required to mediate power relations across ages and balance mentoring and working in partnership (Bent, 2016; Edell, Brown and Montano, 2016). Negotiating issues of power and culture occurs in all feminist activism groups (Gulbrandsen and Walsh, 2012), particularly coalitions that bring several groups and working cultures together into one activism entity (Cole, 2008). However, in inter-age activism the pervasive cultural expectation that younger people show respect and defer to elders (Whalen, 1999) may have an impact on the dynamic between them. *Janet (Namibia)* was among younger activists in Namibia who used the familial term Aunty, in reference to some well-known older activists. The esteem with which some older activists are held, may add to the feeling for young activists that it is difficult for them to critique or challenge them. I note, rather than voice her concerns in a coalition meeting, *Janet (Namibia)* opted to confide in an individual member. Whilst activism across age-ranges can create opportunities for relational agency, as examples in this chapter show, activists are faced with the challenge of ensuring they create an enabling culture to prevent inter-age dynamics from impeding participation. In the next section I move away from this focus on relational agency and immediate impact in inter-age activism. This is to consider how longer-term feminist activism across age ranges and generations responds to big picture post-conflict challenges in each place. In other words, I am focusing on cross-age activism that spans over time.

6.3 The Long-Term Importance of Cross-age Feminist Relations in Post-Conflict Contexts

In any context, feminist relations and collaboration across ages and generations are vital to the long-term survival of feminist activism. However, when examining macro level analyses of feminist waves in Chapter 2, much of the emphasis was on the differences or divisions between feminist waves and generations. Based on my analysis of participants' testimonies, I argue the generational differences identified on a macro level, can appear less magnified in place-based activism, where feminist activists of different ages work together to deal with locally contextualised issues. In the first sub section, I analyse activists' perspectives

about the importance of long-term, cross-age feminist activism relations to deal with specific place-based and post-conflict challenges. Essentially this involves determining how activists view the idea of continual interdependence between younger and older activists. My analysis shows how activists recognise this interdependence. In the second sub-section, I critically examine activists' perspectives on long-term and recurring contextual threats from each place, the under-participation of Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist (PUL) women in activism in Northern Ireland, and the politicised repression of feminism in Namibia. Drawing on spillover, I highlight the importance of younger activists having the opportunity to understand these place-based threats and oppressions levelled toward feminist activism, to make sense of their legacies.

6.3.1 Activists' Recognition of Cross-Age Feminist Interdependence

Activists that discussed this topic invariably showed their recognition of the need to have cross-age links in activism in order to have long-term impact. Hancock (2014) argues older feminist activists are usually more cognisant than younger counterparts of the need for perpetual feminist movements. However, this distinction was not apparent among the activists interviewed in this research. In both countries, younger activists showed awareness that the challenges in their places of activism were long term and that current activism struggles are connected to past activism. For example, in NI *Olivia* spoke of the insights she gains from older activists, whilst in Namibia *Lily* reflected on how the activism work of older activists needs to be continued on a multi-generational basis:

To know that there is a fountain, a wealth of information from older activists who just know the history and the law and the politics around these issues – that is just so valuable. Like, when we worked on the consultation on domestic violence legislation. I was surprised to learn from *name of person* and *name of group* about the awful ways the police responded to domestic and sexual violence, and how the Troubles was always given as the reason. When you think of these deep-seated issues we have had for a really long time, well, it's no wonder we are so behind everyone else, even now. And was important for us to be able to reflect on those unique factors in our submission. (*Olivia*, NI)

If you look at activists like Aunty *name* and *name* and drop their names in any setting, whether it is with the youth, or with older generation, they will all know that they speak out against gender-based-violence and promote policies on equality and healthy relationships, you know? And Aunty *name* is everybody's Aunty. So, people from anywhere in the community or in the country will call Aunty *name* to go and say a few words, when somebody has succumbed to intimate partner killing and needs to be buried, for example. I'm concerned about where we are as a nation and especially our children because they see that this violence is normal already. So, we have to take steps and talk about it and understand the root causes. We have to come up with strategies that can actually address these things, because it is such a huge challenge, it will take a multi-generational approach. It takes all of us to really come together and play a part and address it. (*Lily, Namibia*)

Olivia (NI) recognised how the input of older activists informed and enriched an activism contribution towards legislative changes. This recognition shows how feminist relations between activists throughout generations can help contextualise, politicise, and historicise place-based anti-VAWG struggles. In the example, *Olivia* (NI) learned new knowledge about how problematic responses to VAWG in NI have been bound up in the conflict context. Using the metaphor of a fountain, she points to the knowledge of older activists as a resource that can be tapped into when needed. This perspective is echoed by Sawyer (2010) and Taylor (1989), who argue strong cross-age and generational connections among feminist activists can help ensure feminist campaigns are amplified, when necessary. These connections continue to have value even when no active campaigns are taking place, for example, in/during hostile contexts, as they act as an abeyance structure, or a holding process, for future feminist activism (Taylor, 1989). Actors known for past feminist activism often engage in associated work, for example, in non-governmental organisations and in older age/retirement can be particularly active in the communities where they live (Slevin, 2005). Therefore, past activists not currently engaged in explicitly feminist work, such as in the named group omitted from *Olivia*'s quote above, can still benefit aspects of current feminist activism, where those connections exist (Chovanec and Benitez, 2008; Whittier, 1995). Younger activists' recognition of what older activists can contribute helps keep those connections in place.

The long-term view taken by *Lily* (Namibia) shows her perception of the need to connect the work of older and younger anti-VAWG activists. Like activists from examples in section 2 of this chapter, *Lily* perceives some older activists as being well-known for the stance on VAWG, signalling the achievements of older activists in relation to speaking out on policy and practice issues. In the same section, activists highlighted different age-related contributions, including singling out the social media organising capability of younger activists. Younger peoples' digital network capabilities can be positively utilised locally in feminist activism (Fotopoulou, 2016). Indeed, Bulbeck and Harris (2012) argue it is important to acknowledge the local application of younger people's social media organising, as some older activists mistakenly conflate younger peoples' online engagement with global issues as a lack of interest in local activism. Further, utilising younger activists' digital capabilities locally can enrich the activism experiences of older activists (Baumgardner and Richard, 2010). As such, whilst some activism skills pass down through successive generations, they also pass up, and new knowledges, skills and experiences are created (Bjursell, 2015). However, to acknowledge different capabilities *may* be helpful is not to suggest making assumptions about how activists will or should contribute according to their age. Similarly, appreciating cross-age interdependence need not mean age becomes the defining feature around which activists relate to each other, as this risks other aspects of identity, such as ethnicity and class, being lost.

Various older activists expressed enthusiasm about the ways younger women were engaging in feminist activism, which these two quotes exemplify:

I see, as a middle-aged woman, a lot of younger women becoming involved... We are stripping away the fences that have hidden these issues that impact on women, and we are not prepared to keep the fences up anymore. And young women especially are not afraid to say, "hold on here a wee minute!" (Dawn, NI)

And I would say we have a very bright vibrant youth input. It's a little bit scattered as well, like the older women are, but there is a lot of activism going on, and the way they seem to see it is that really, it's my role in society, I'm not doing anybody a favour by doing it. You know their passion for educating women on their rights and just doing the right thing, you know, working towards the common goal is just so amazing. (*Elsie*, Namibia)

In both Namibia and NI there was a sense that feminist activism is progressing. Further, some older activists expressed hopes that younger activists would make a political impact in respect of some of the legacies of conflict and colonialism. These quotes give a flavour of this perspective, which is covered in more detail in the next sub-section:

“I think the younger ones might be one of the keys that will turn this place.”
(*Angela, NI*).

There is opportunity.... The activists that we are should rise together so that we can form a strong voice. Maybe not in this time of ours, in the other generation. The ‘born frees’ can do that but using our examples. (A, Namibia)

Cross-age feminist activism that stretches over time is crucial. Just as the injustices feminists seek to eradicate endure, even though they may change over time, so too must feminist activism. It therefore follows that, within place-based feminist activism, there is an interdependency between the age ranges. By their responses, older and younger activists in this study showed their recognition of this interdependence. In the next section I focus on how cross-age feminism in each place responded to threats associated with their post-conflict and post-colonial contexts.

6.3.2 Making Sense of Long-Term Threats to Feminist Activism

The two long-term threats I have chosen to examine, the under-participation of Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist (PUL) women in activism, and the politicised repression of feminism in Namibia were discussed at length by research participants. I therefore view them as emblematic issues impacting on feminist activism in each place. I conceive of these as threats from the local political culture, or the way of doing politics in the field (Ray, 1999). These threats are distinct, and therefore not commensurate with each other. However, they reveal

post-conflict challenges facing feminism in each place, which explains why I am examining activists' perspectives. I introduced spillover in Chapter 2, as the relational process by which activism practices and values are shared across activism groups through interrelations between groups, and within coalitions of groups (Whittier, 2013). Whittier (2013) highlights that long-term spillover can occur through cross-age activism relations, which is the aspect I examine here, beginning with NI.

Convergent Views on the Under-Participation of PUL Women

As introduced in Chapter 3, the development of political culture in NI during the conflict resulted in feminism being ascribed to Catholic/Nationalist/Republican (CNR) more than Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities (Sales, 1997a). Indeed, I earlier illustrated this phenomenon in Dawn's struggle to identify with feminism because it was discouraged for being anti-state.¹³² Dawn's testimony about how Unionism traditionally held feminism in disdain was echoed by *Chloe* and *Kellie*. Both highlighted how women were discouraged from identifying with feminism by Unionist politicians.

I think feminism as a word even isn't very accessible because you have leading figures from the DUP saying that feminism is alien to Unionism, Ian Paisley Jr. said that. You have this idea of ordinary decent women, as Nelson McCausland said. I think there is, I think there has been the idea that feminism is for Nationalists and isn't for Unionists. Whereas Unionism has people who have feminist views, but they don't call them that, they might get called a different thing. (*Chloe*, NI)

Violence against women is a human rights issue: the difficulty with human rights here, which is the same as the difficulty of feminism here, is that it's greened¹³³... to the point that Protestant Unionist Loyalist leadership would be saying "you don't need to bother with any of that rights stuff - you don't need any of that feminism stuff because it's actually a Republican agenda". (*Kellie*, NI)

¹³² I included in Chapter 5 that Dawn worked through this issue with the support of older activists

¹³³ In this context greened means associated with Irish republicanism

Chloe and Kellie saw the situation improving in relation to young women. Kellie (NI) added the caveat, to her statement about feminism being greened, “maybe not so much with the younger generation, but definitely with the older generation. (Kellie, NI). *Chloe* saw that young Unionist women could now have a political home for their feminist beliefs:

There are young women in the PUP (Progressive Unionist Party) who are really feminist, vocally so... I hope it won't be a problem anymore, but it definitely has been. (*Chloe*, NI)

Some participants who shared not having direct experience of the issue, based their perspectives on what they had gained from those more directly involved. *Claire* (NI) traced her thoughts back to a specific encounter with an older, prominent, trade union/women's activist from a Loyalist community:

I remember one time meeting *name of activist*, who is just class. She told me how women slowly built up community development work in Protestant areas during the Troubles, all under the radar. She said the word feminism didn't much come into it but for different organisers it was definitely feminist work. So, when you think about it, if it was that much of a challenge to do bread and butter community work, you can see you would need to be careful in presenting feminism to women from Loyalist areas in a way that makes it feel accessible. Otherwise, you would just be on a road to nowhere. (*Claire*, NI)

Activists with extensive community activism experience in PUL communities, had first-hand knowledge of how PUL women had been discouraged from feminism and general rights-based community activism. G (NI) and *Erin* (NI) both recalled how addressing the issue in community work was a slow process:

In Protestant working class communities there wasn't a culture of doing it for themselves or community development. If you wanted anything done you went through the councillors, the politicians. (G, NI)

And I mean you wouldn't have said the word feminist or equality because it just wouldn't have got you anywhere. You had to try and approach it from that kind of angle – family, needs. You know women couldn't exist on their

own they always had to be a bolt on to something. So, you know it was women and this, or women and children, but, you know, women on their own, it just wasn't valid. (*Erin, NI*)

The need to frame activities that had benefit beyond women was not just something *Erin* remembered from her early days of activism but had also been experienced by G (NI). G (NI) reflected that, because women were not on the agenda in the community in which she worked, she used incremental methods to engage PUL women in community activism. Rather than starting off with a focus on women, she engaged women in issues that were central to their domain, such as housing and welfare advice services. G (NI) recalls that, over time, they developed a culture of self-help and activism:

Women were starting to do it for themselves rather than under the auspices of the councillors or the politicians. (G, NI).

Different activists offered complementary explanations for the historical causes of under-participation and recognition of the importance of making feminism accessible to PUL women. Kubal and Becerra (2014) argue the memory of activism groups and movements tends to be open to multiple interpretations as activists borrow from the past to make sense of the present. This argument makes their convergence on the issue noteworthy, particularly considering they came from various backgrounds and activism groups.

In NI various activism groups are integrated on multiple levels via coalitions, loose collectives, and more formal partnership structures, as I develop in the next chapter. Coalitions and collectives of activists of different ages play a crucial role in spillover (Whittier, 2013). The similarities in activists' perspectives and sense of commitment to be inclusive of PUL women, suggests their under-participation is an issue which has been framed as important within activism and has spilled over into those different groups and networks. Several activists reported a range of individual and group/organisational efforts to make feminism and activism more accessible to PUL women, such as targeted outreach work in working-class PUL communities. Committing to engaging PUL women in activism arguably became

part of those activists' ingrained values, or, to use the language of Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) became part of their activism habitus.

Divergent Awareness of State Repression of Feminist Activism

In Chapter 3 I analysed the division between government gender equality political actors and autonomous feminist activists in detail. These relational problems included Namibia Women's Voice being told by SWAPO leadership to dismantle during the independence struggle, post-independence splits, and homophobic oppression of feminist activists by government actors to quell feminist dissent (Akawa, 2014; Becker, 1995; Currier, 2010). Several participants in this research experienced the insidious homophobic mistreatment by government actors. The contrasting biographies of two activists prominent in anti-VAWG activism since the early post-independence period bears this deterrence out. Both D (Namibia) and Rosa (Namibia) are feminist though express their feminism in contrasting ways. D (Namibia) carries out gender focused and anti-VAWG awareness work throughout Namibia as part of an NGO working collaboratively with national and local government. She explained that, although she is a feminist, she maintains silence on the topic of feminism:

I believe in the doctrine of feminism I personally believe, but I have never engaged myself to that extent, to go into public debates on feminism. I have worked very closely with the feminists like *Name* and *Name*. ¹³⁴ They were part of my coaching and I have learnt a lot from them about feminism. But I never speak out. (D, Namibia)

As I highlighted in earlier chapters, levelling political homophobia against feminists can make the act of claiming a feminist identity difficult and deter activists from openly associating with groups and individuals labelled lesbian. D (Namibia) stated her belief in feminism which she said hugely influenced her work and acknowledged her feminism was closeted with striking clarity. She also said her association with well-known lesbian feminists was low-key and that she was

¹³⁴ These are the same feminists cited by other Namibian activists as being influential in teaching / mentoring them about feminism

careful not publicly align with them. In Chapter 2, I highlighted that Awinpoka Akurugu (2021) problematised Afrocentric conceptions of feminism such as Stiwanism in which the feminist element was obscured, highlighting this approach risks maintaining gender relations without achieving transformation. For D, maintaining a silence on feminism was connected to her need to safeguard her standing to do collaborative work with state actors.

Conversely, Rosa (Namibia) was explicit about being “totally feminist”, highlighting several examples of speaking out loudly as a feminist and being publicly derided for it. Rosa (Namibia) described ongoing conflict with women from Swapo from the early 90s. She elaborated on efforts she and other feminist activists made to work collaboratively with them, before later resigning herself to the division between them, particularly around the issue of political homophobia:

We were supposed to form the **name of national women’s structure** but that was the day that their actions said **group name** go back to your corner, **group name** go to your corner. Church women stay where you are, and the rest of the women linger around and let oppression continue. So later again, we said we need to look at how we can work together, so we say, “let us educate our women”. They reject it. Then funding. Of course, we have been funded from outside so what we are doing is not Namibian. Amongst us women are going away. “No, this is lesbian, it is about lesbians”. So, then I decided not this time, not this time again. After those years of experience with these Swapo women, they can go to hell. (Rosa, Namibia)

Currier (2012) states the campaign of homophobia began in 1995, although Rosa (Namibia) recalled low level homophobic slurs from Swapo women activists some years earlier. Political homophobia peaked in 2001 when President Nujoma called for the arrest, imprisonment, and deportation of gay people on the grounds that they threatened the integrity of Namibia’s national identity (Lorway, 2008). This was described by another activist, C (Namibia) as being “like a shock wave for lots of women involved in NGO and women’s organising work”. Rosa (Namibia) explained she responded by openly expressing support for LGBT rights:

So, I just said that people's human rights are people's human rights. It can't only be so when it's comfortable for members of Parliament. The rights can't just stop like that or else we must take it to the UN. Human rights is human rights. But when there is gay and lesbian people here and they want their rights but there is no human rights for them, then it is time for me to talk. And so, my colleagues they disagreed with me. Not all of them, but enough. (Rosa, Namibia)

Rosa (Namibia) added that some members of different activism groups in which she was involved left after she made her public statement. Several were critical of the position Rosa (Namibia) took while others said they agreed with her, but she should have discussed what she was going to say with them first. So, although being part of a cohort of feminist and LGBT groups and individuals in Namibia organising to "confront the ruling party's control over state operations and the national imaginary" (Currier, 2012, p.442), other relations in those groups were interrupted and even severed during this period. Although clear about initially trying to work collaboratively with those in power, once Rosa (Namibia) voiced her opposition publicly, she effectively became lodged in that oppositional space, not just by her own representations but also by the responses of others.

The communication of feminism from one generation can reflect the level and type of constraints placed on feminism from the political environment (Hoogland, de Vries and van Der Tuin, 2004). Comprehensively determining how cross-age feminist activists discussed recurring political oppression and homophobia, requires dedicated research. However, younger Namibian activists appeared not to know about it.¹³⁵ The significance of younger activists' lack of awareness is that several were perturbed at the relational problems they experienced with people from different government ministries, without seeming to understand the context. This excerpt highlights the frustration felt:

I cannot stress it more, the lack of support, on every level from government has always been our biggest, biggest problem. I don't know, the government thing is really upsetting. Because of some political issues and differences in the past. I don't even know what. It just gets to me - I can't deal with it. (B, Namibia)

¹³⁵ I make this comment in the context of knowing that the older activists affected by this repression, had collaborative activism relationships with young activists who appear not to know about it.

One exception applies among younger activists interviewed, *Samantha* (Namibia), who took up a leadership role in a campaign against blaming victims for sexual assault in 2013, as a first-time activist (see section 2.2 of this chapter). She shared knowing about the homophobia from government because she independently looked up background information on activism and came across details retrospectively:

Wow, man, I had no fucking clue about this homophobic abuse thrown at women by women for trying to stop male violence! But I have had an awakening. Not only am I a feminist activist fighting this violence against women craziness, but thanks to this ridiculous prejudice, I am now completely tuned into LGBTQI causes. Gay, trans and gender non-conforming people – please know I am your ally for life. (*Samantha, Namibia*)

Whilst Rowbotham (1996) identifies a weakness in activism groups as being the inability to hand down memory, Meyer and Whittier (1994) argue spillover in activism has successor effects (Meyer and Whittier, 1994). Therefore, where activism relations stretch out over time, there can be a form of contiguous memory. When *Samantha* learned about the history of political homophobia, it clearly strengthened her resolve to challenge it in activism. However, she did not learn about this repression from activist peers, but from independent research.

It is not possible to unequivocally explain the apparent lack of spillover on this issue here. However, I suggest it should be viewed in the context of how difficult it has been for feminist groups to sustain themselves in a hostile environment, as well as individual activists feeling the need to maintain secrecy about being feminist. Interruptions to feminist activism are themselves associated with the politicised repression of feminism by government. As mentioned in chapter 3, funding shortages caused some anti-VAWG groups and services, to pause at different periods. These pauses do not just result in a reduced response to those affected by VAWG, but they also interrupt the formation and continuity of interdependent cross-age relations in feminist activism. Political homophobia from Swapo leaders and women activists has recurred at different points across four

decades (Ellis, 2020).¹³⁶ Therefore, whether and how younger feminist activists get to become aware of this post-colonial struggle is pertinent to their ability to contextualise the conditions of their current activism. I acknowledge that feminism and activism may be becoming more accessible to younger PUL women for several reasons, such as the increased freedom of expression that comes with the cessation of conflict. However, the framing of under-participation as a concern and the steps taken by activists to address it, are feasibly among those reasons. As such, I argue both the convergence and divergence in activists' perspectives of both threats signal the importance of cross-age spillover. In short, younger activists need the opportunity to contextualise the post-conflict and post-colonial legacies of their current struggles.

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued for the importance of inter-age feminist relations in the here-and-now and cross-age relations that stretch over time in anti-VAWG activism. I have argued that forming inter-age relationships with feminist activists can be a pivotal aspect of building resolve to embark on feminist activism. Relations with more experienced, usually older activists, support early-stage activists with their questions and concerns about the backlash they may encounter. I illustrated from examples how relational agency can develop between feminist activists of different ages, where they are in solidarity with each other. Inter-age relational agency emerges in activism when activists' potential contributions and skills are developed and utilised across age ranges to enhance activism. I have taken a long-term view of the enduring yet ever-changing task of addressing VAWG, and, through my analysis have shown that younger and older activists recognise long-term and cross-age interdependence. I closely examined activists' awareness and perspectives of two long-term threats to feminist activism that are specific to each phase and implicated in the post-conflict context. Findings from both post-conflict and post-colonial contexts affirmed the importance of younger activists having the opportunity to contextualise, historicise and politicise their current struggles.

¹³⁶ Homophobia has returned to government level discourses including in relation to GBV (Alweendo, Andreas and Rafla-Yuan, 2018), which I include as a footnote because this was after my 2015 research visit.

Chapter 7: Solidarity across Ethnic and Ethnonational Differences

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I argue that solidarity across ethnic and ethnonational difference can form in anti-VAWG activism discussions and encourage relational agency development to address post-conflict issues that impact on VAWG. However, when solidarity is weak activists seek to mitigate the situation by avoiding known hazards associated with ethnic difference or focusing on high-level activism goals. In the first of three sections, I analyse participants' accounts of discussions that helped develop understanding of ethnic and ethnonational difference. Several discussions forged solidarity through increasing understandings of VAWG across ethnicised difference. In the second section, I analyse activism emerging from solidary encounters across ethnic, ethnonational, and other differences. The tangible links I show between solidarities across difference and relational agency development reveal how they are mutually reinforcing. In acknowledgement that not all activism occurs in solidarity, in the third section I analyse how activists persist in this context, usually with the motivation of ensuring the activism is not disrupted.

7.2 Facilitating Solidarity across Ethnicised Difference in Activism Discussions

In this section I analyse how solidarities across ethnic and ethnonational difference can form in activism group discussions and the connections that develop from those discussions. By activism discussions I mean discussions in a wide range of activism group sessions, whether between activists or facilitated by activists for the participation of women and girls. Several activists recalled discussions they variously facilitated or participated in that explored the different ways VAWG and associated issues were experienced within different ethnicities and ethnonationalities. My analysis of their accounts shows how the solidarities fostered encouraged unity in struggle, whilst acknowledging different ways women

and girls experience issues surrounding VAWG. Also, whilst these discussions can shed light on how others experience inequalities, importantly they can also help women reflect on the situation in their own groups. Further, I show how these inter-ethnic encounters can promote solidarity across differences without women and girls having to minimise their different identities.¹³⁷

7.2.1 Discussions in Groups of Activists

In Northern Ireland, D (NI) talked about being part of a small group of women activists that initiated occasional meet ups during the Troubles, beginning in the late 1980s. Although, it grew into a formal activism network,¹³⁸ the initial purpose was to discreetly come together for mutual support, for the challenges they faced in community level activism, in the context of ethnonational tension. In an account of more contemporary activism, *Agatha* talked about how she valued being part of several activist groups that enthusiastically encouraged activists to explore their own and each other's backgrounds:

Looking back on it now, you know the tensions were really, really running high and we just decided to meet from time to time. I suppose it was getting support you know and understanding about where you're coming from, and other women as well. Like me being a Catholic in *place name* and *person's name* being a Catholic in *place name*, and like *person name* in *place name*, you know she's a Protestant. D (NI)

It's absolutely brilliant, because if you talk to people about your upbringing everyone is like dying to know if you went to a Protestant school or a Catholic school and if you got sex and relationship education... You know everyone has their own baggage that they are trying to shift, and we all recognise that. *Agatha (NI)*

D's recollections show how she and other activists needed to find a way to talk through the challenges they faced in their activism. High among the challenges

¹³⁷ Please note, my analysis and argument apply across both sub-sections. I have organised the sub-sections according to group type for ease of layout. Further, some of the examples cross over with the previous chapter, but they are being considered with ethnicity or ethnonationality in mind, not age.

¹³⁸ I expand on this network in section 3 of this chapter

was negotiating their own identities in the interface communities where they were active, communities that were so directly affected and divided by the conflict taking place. The initiation of this group came from activists' need to develop supportive relations and carve out dedicated time and space to talk, listen, and reflect together in a safe environment. The quotes from both activists signal the benefits of being able to talk about one's own background and learn from others. Indeed, sharing one's situated knowledge of inequalities in activism groups confronting those inequalities can contribute to an overall sense of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011). *Agatha's* account suggests she entered activism spaces open to such discussions, rather than having to create such space, as D and her peers were required to do.

Agatha's summary of the issues she and other activists routinely discuss, suggest that activists appreciatively getting to know each other across difference can enhance their understanding of the different ways education, religion and politics converge to affect peoples' lives in the places they live. As discussed in Chapter 2, solidarity across difference, or external solidarity involves recognising and identifying with the struggle of people in groups external to oneself (Hunt and Benford, 2007). *Agatha* encountered activists from Protestant backgrounds with whom she developed solidarity, including peers from very religious families. She said in-depth discussions across those differences heightened her appreciation of the diversity of Protestantism and enabled her to reflect on the impact her Catholic upbringing had on her. In other words, by forming relations with people who are different, she was better able to understand her own life:

And you're going to Lourdes¹³⁹ when you're fourteen on a school trip and the only sex and relationship education that you got was the Silent Scream - an ultrasound of an abortion! I look back on that and I think that is madness! And realising just how cultural Catholicism is - it's not even about religion half of the time - it's totally cultural. And now it just helps to understand that those complexities existed on the other side as well as your own. *Agatha (NI)*

¹³⁹ Lourdes is a Catholic pilgrimage centre in Southwest France, devoted to the Virgin Mary, whose apparition was reported in 1858.

In addition to developing external solidarity, these discussions enabled *Agatha* (NI) to reflect on the inherent inequalities and oppressions of her own upbringing. Having found discussions so beneficial and valuable, *Agatha* (NI) told me she and some activist peers were looking into organising some facilitated discussion groups with women in communities. Some activists were already involved in facilitating discussion groups with women, as I now examine.

7.2.2 Discussions in Groups Facilitated by Activists

The facilitation of dialogic inter-ethnic encounter has been the focus of academic attention, often in relation to peacebuilding, trust-building and post-conflict reconciliation (see Galtung, 2001; Matejko and Williams, 1993; Lederach, 1997; Ross, 2016). The approaches activists discuss show that they facilitate inter-ethnic encounters in the context of anti-VAWG discussions, sexual and reproductive justice, and cross-community women's groups.¹⁴⁰ Whilst these groups may not have an explicit peacebuilding function, it is clear they facilitate solidarity across ethnicised difference, which is such a significant element of the post-conflict contexts of both places, as I now show.

In Namibia, *Deborah* talked about the kinds of discussions that took place with young women in groups she facilitated throughout the country, as part of a sexual and reproductive health programme. *Deborah* regularly incorporated the topic of VAWG into discussions about healthy, consensual relationships. She told me the group work discussions included discussions across and within ethnic differences. In these discussions young women were encouraged to explore the nuances surrounding VAWG in different cultural groups.¹⁴¹ *Deborah* similarly talked about the importance of enabling young women to discuss their cultural experiences, so they could see the influence the tradition of their ethnicity had in their lives:

¹⁴⁰ While in the context of NI means cross-ethnonationality

¹⁴¹ As I explained in Chapter 3, in this Namibian context, culture means culture group, which can either mean ethnicity or sub-groups within an ethnicity, also known as tribes.

Most of their experiences they could relate to their culture... So, we all share about our culture and then the others will say “oh really? For us it's not like that”. We could really see the complexity of it - how every culture approaches the issue of gender-based violence and how they follow it up is different. *Deborah (Namibia)*

Deborah described encouraging young women from different ethnicities and ethnic sub-groups to support each other through the challenges coming from the expectations placed on them in those ethnicities and ethnic sub-groups. The benefits of facilitating groups to discuss the experiences of women and girls, are that the discussions can help them learn about how gender norms influence VAWG in their community and think about how these norms might be changed (Abramsky *et al.*, 2012; Sarnquist *et al.*, 2014). The group *Deborah* facilitated included problem solving and practising ways young women could voice their issues and concerns within their families and local communities. Providing an example, *Deborah* explained that, when some young women shared how they were expected to be submissive within their families, they role-played scenarios in which young women could practice how to voice their wishes to people close to them “without being aggressive”. In other words, *Deborah* deliberately incorporated discussions about difference as a way of helping young women aspire towards changes in their own lives in ways meaningful to them.

In NI, Dawn described an interface project between two groups of women, facilitated by a women's organisation. As I explained in earlier chapters, interface communities, some with walls separating ethnonational groups people, are emblematic of the depth of ongoing divisions in NI (Hargie, O'Donnell and McMullan, 2011). In the project each women's group met for several weekly sessions in their own community to discuss the struggles they faced, before being brought together on an inter-ethnonational basis. Bringing previously separated ethnic groups into a single group requires skilled facilitation, as group facilitators act as intermediaries across cultures (Gilchrist, 2004). Dawn explained that, when brought together, the women were surprised to learn about commonalities in their concerns and experiences. She said these concerns were due to the domination of mostly male paramilitary groups in both communities:

A woman from one group said, “we can't do anything without them breathing down our necks”. Then the woman from the other group explained that you can't even talk to the Housing Executive because they (the paramilitaries) are the ones who are supposed to do that... I said, “we call them gatekeepers - they're standing at the gate and they're not letting you through”... But they didn't call them gatekeepers - they called them paramilitaries. Dawn (NI)

Despite living in different communities with opposing ethnonational identities, women in both groups learned about the similarities in the processes and effects of paramilitary control they endured from within their own communities. Her account of this interface women's project suggests the women were focused on the wider environment of masculine paramilitary domination and control that can restrict their agency in certain contexts. As such, they exchanged accounts of their specific experiences of what Edwards-Jauch (2016) terms the structural dimensions of gendered, post-conflict violence. Dawn said she was encouraged by the “green shoots of feminist activism” emerging from this project, in that both groups planned to carry on being active in their own communities whilst keeping in contact with each other. The lesson Dawn said she took from this project was that the emphasis should not just be on facilitating inter-ethnonational encounters, but also giving women space to discuss issues in their own community:

When women can recognise the roles and injustices within their own community – that provides opportunities, to nourish and maintain and grow that activism. Dawn (NI)

The project described encourages women to relate to the shared nature of their struggles in different ethnonationalities, without having to dilute their own ethnonational identity. This resembles the approach Kellie (NI) discussed in relation to work she was doing immediately before we met:

At that workshop I was delivering today I was just thinking I love this. I'm back in the community. I'm working with Republican women and Loyalist women and we're talking about abortion, you know, this cross-community thing, this issue that is so important to all of us. And I hate that whole 'let's look at our similarities and forget about our differences'. Our differences

are fine. If you want to be Irish, be Irish. If you want to be British, be British. Just don't fucking murder anybody over it, ok?

The various approaches activists discussed here show it is possible to facilitate the development of solidarity across difference in anti-VAWG activism without seeking to minimise or eradicate difference. Their approaches resemble the practice of rooting and shifting in transversal dialogue, introduced in Chapter 3. In transversal dialogue, rooting denotes reflecting on one's own positioning whilst shifting relates to understanding the positions of others, and Yuval-Davis (2015) credits this process for having the potential to create shared knowledges that can form a basis for solidarity. Post-conflict transversal dialogue enables exploration of what matters to those who have been marginalised by conflict and oppression (Unterhalter, 2009). In the next section I show how solidarity across difference can encourage and shape the process of relational agency, as the insight gained from discussions and relations across difference inspires new priorities, activities, and forms of activism.

7.3 Solidarities and Relational Agency Development across Difference

In this section, I argue solidarities across difference can shape relational agency development that helps activists work through ethnicised divisions associated with post conflict contexts. I trace tangible links between solidarities across difference and relational agency development. In addition to ethnic/ethnonational difference, of particular relevance to this research, there are various differences across which participants seek to build solidarities in their activism. I begin by looking at activists' solidary motivations to be intersectional, as part of analysing of how solidarities form across difference. Then I focus on two relational elements research participants shared about activism across ethnic difference. These are exchanging knowledges about difference to improve activism interventions and engaging in activism in a sense of togetherness. Whilst these elements were present in previous activism examples discussed, here I focus on them in terms of how they became part of how activists deal with post-conflict differences. As I show, these relational elements were pivotal to the agentic practices that followed.

7.3.1 The Motivation to be Intersectional

Encounters in which solidary relations develop in activism can take place by happenstance or because activists seek out people from different groups experiencing oppressions, to build solidarity with them. Whilst several activists' described reaching out in this way, one activist named her approach to forming links with others as being intersectional. In Northern Ireland, *Chloe* (NI) explained how intersectionality informs what solidarity means to her and how this translates into action:

I try to be an intersectional feminist. Intersectionality is really important to me because I think we do need to understand how it isn't just my experience, it is everybody's different experiences. There are going to be discriminations that I don't experience... But that doesn't stop me showing solidarity with people from other backgrounds and I think that listening to lived experience is really important. I mean actually listening and taking it on board and doing something about it. *Chloe* (NI)

In Chapter 2, I explained solidarity based on the intersectionality paradigm is attuned to addressing layers of oppressions, and as such, is deeply political (Hancock, 2011). *Chloe* was clear her political values guide her decision to show solidarity with people experiencing discrimination. Critical of increased trans-exclusionary and sex-worker exclusionary feminist activism in England, she explained how various NI activism groups she is in ensure places on the platform at anti-VAWG gatherings for people from these marginalised groups. *Chloe's* perspective on activism appeared to be guided by the intersectional approach of affirmative advocacy (Strolovitch, 2007), which I explained in Chapter 2 involves designing societal change around the most disadvantaged people:

That is something that we try to do, we try to be inclusive. It's sort of that idea that you need to think of the position of the most vulnerable. And if you can sort out the position of the most vulnerable, everyone will benefit, rather than starting at the top. *Chloe* (NI)

The link between solidarities across difference and relational agency development comes into focus when looking at how the connections *Chloe* formed shaped her activism practice. *Chloe*'s connections with sex work campaigners and transgender people seemed to particularly impact on her activism. She explained how getting to know about peoples' lives and struggles transformed her understanding of how VAWG and hate crime need to be addressed. She added that understanding peoples' struggles made her want to be better at challenging marginalisation by ensuring marginalised people are centred in campaigns for change. For example, *Chloe* talked about how her group, which organises public demonstrations on VAWG, had recently started to provide sex workers with masks so they could participate in rallies without being outed as sex workers. Further, the anti-VAWG group took a position on decriminalising sex work, based on discussion with sex workers about what the problems are with NI legislation. These practical actions show how solidarity across difference and relational agency can be mutually reinforcing as they develop.

Similarly, in Namibia, the interpersonal connections *Deborah* (Namibia) formed with sex workers, increased her understanding of their struggles, particularly when it comes to them being taken seriously as women who experience violence:

Most of the time they did not go for medical help when they got beaten up ...they just stayed quiet... they feel that the police will discriminate against you, because you are a sex worker, they will not treat you with respect. Or, they find a police officer who is very kind who can help you, but mostly the police will also take advantage of them because of their work. *Deborah* (Namibia)

Deborah explained she engaged with sex workers to be conversant about their rights, although she understood how difficult it was for them to realise their rights, whilst experiencing institutional abuse from the police. She talked at length about encouraging women to speak out to local police leaders about being violated. Her goal was to elevate the issue of police mistreatment so senior police leaders would address it as a form of VAWG. However, *Deborah* said she understood the women's hesitance to represent themselves directly and instead secured their consent to share details of the incidences of police mistreatment. Whilst not

achieving the desired outcome, she did help sex workers come closer to having their concerns heard at institutional level, and in ways that respected their wishes.

7.3.2 Togetherness in Activism Across Ethnic and Ethnonational Difference

Several activists working in groups that were deliberative about bringing women from different ethnicities and ethnonationalities together, spoke about the importance of this togetherness. Indeed, solidarity in activism matters because it encourages people to work together to tackle injustice (Gould, 2018; Jasper, 2009). For H (Namibia) the sense of togetherness was pivotal to her participation in activism. She shared that she had experienced institutional violence as she was coerced into being sterilised by hospital staff. H went on to spend several years in a combined self-help and campaign group with other HIV positive women who had been sterilised in coerced or enforced circumstances. In her interview, H explained the women were from different ethnicities, using the word tribe, and they had to find a way to communicate across several languages, which did not come quickly for them. She told me about the stigma some women experienced in the context of how being sterilised was viewed by the people around them, which they then discussed with each other and how close they became. She added she now knows and trusts the women in the group like her own sisters:

For some of the women their relationships ended because of being sterilised, because of that taboo in their tribe... We have cried together, and we have laughed together. We have done many things together. We are Ubuntu. (H, Namibia)

Whilst I asked H about what it means to be Ubuntu she told me “it means we are together - not one alone - together” (H, Namibia). In Chapter 2, I discussed how in the philosophy of Ubuntu, relations provide both the means and reason for agency, which H’s reply emulates. In a landmark human rights case, several organisations worked together to legally challenge these violations of HIV positive women by health services in Namibia (Roseman, Ahmed and Gatsi-Mallet, 2013) which Sifris (2015) argues was a form of intersectional discrimination. H described

some of the contributions she made to this successful litigation process, which again had a focus on togetherness:

In this campaign different people from different tribes and different communities all worked together. We came together to tell the government that this is not right, and we don't want to see this happen. I see that what we did was uniting people from all walks of life... I organised women and made sure we brought in women from all different communities. We wrote together - we sat and wrote the messages in different languages so that all people can understand and be part of all what is going on in the planning of the activities that led to the court. (H, Namibia)

Togetherness was reiterated throughout H's account of her activism, not just in relation to the high-profile case but also in every-day activism, for example accompanying women to medical appointments to make sure they are not mistreated. Her account of her activism centred on women being together and, as with examples provided by other activists, the relational aspects of challenging violence were central to H's experience.

The impact of relationships and togetherness in shaping activism in practice was emphasised by *Angela* (NI) about a collective in which she is heavily involved:

People will step up and do things and they will offer before they are asked, because they feel appreciated, and they feel that they are part of the bigger picture. They feel ownership and they feel plugged into it. And once people feel all of that sure the job is half done. I love it, I absolutely love it but it's so fragile, that's the thing, it's so fragile. Not fragile as in you know it's ready to fall apart. It works because of the goodwill. It works because of the experiences that we've had together because we respect each other, and as different as we are, we have learned a lot from each other. It works because of that, and that is what is fragile about it.

In this excerpt, *Angela* (NI) highlighted how pivotal a sense of togetherness is to the workings of the collective, given it is already formed. She speaks of fragility, in recognition that activism is bound up in the relationships and interactions that create it. As such, she highlighted the importance of sustaining relations between

actors for activism to work, given the members have taken time to learn from each other's differences. Similarly, the importance of togetherness in solidarity campaigning for women's groups in Northern Ireland was discussed in depth by D (NI). In Section 2, I explained that D was part of a small number of activists in NI that decided to meet occasionally for mutual support, in the context of ethnonational tensions in interface areas. She explained this occasional discussion group developed into a formal network of and for activism:

So, we actually formally formed the network because things were happening like *women's group* had got their funding taken off them by *Name of* Council. And *women's group* had lost their funding. We came out and supported them and then we lost our funding. And it just didn't matter if you were Catholic or Protestant – as women's groups we wanted to stand up for ourselves and for each other. D (NI)

The connection between solidarities across difference and relational agency development is tangible in how the group evolved. The group started out as an informal safe space to talk about women's activism experiences, in the context of division in conflict. However, D's account shows how members from different groups stepped in to help each other in times of acute difficulty, namely the loss of funding. Solidarity campaigning was carried out across the ethnonational divide, even with a sense of risk of losing one's own funding. D explained how the group progressed into a network for women's activism in NI:

We decided we'd apply to what was then the *name of funding source* and we got the biggest ever grant there. And *name* carried out this research and it was about how many women's centres and groups there are and what work they do and what funding they get. It was kind of like the first mapping exercise that was done of the women's sector. And it was great. And what we found out was, it didn't matter if you were in Dungannon or Derry, if you were in a women's group, you were providing these services. And women's groups were doing it because the services weren't available anywhere else. Up until then the groups were just doing it on their own, but this was our chance to bring groups together and we made the most of it. D (NI)

As discussed in Chapter 2, agency is based on agents' relationships and social embeddedness (Jha, 2019). D's account provides some insight into the extent of effort involved to ensure the network became embedded across places where women's groups operated. I argue the network's willingness to do so shows how solidarities across difference encouraged relational agency development. From the initial informal discussion group made up of activists creating space for them to discuss their situations, they collectively acknowledged and developed their commitment to support women's groups. In other words, they helped each other form the intention to support women's groups, and as Bandura (2007) argues, intentionality is a pre-requisite to agency. Having formed this intention, they were obliged to seek out women's groups in communities, whether operating as single ethnonational entities or across ethnonational difference, in the context of a long conflict. As the scale of the network grew, it needed to secure resources to generate knowledge about who and what comprised the women's sector. As such, taking the chance to "bring groups together" meant embarking on a whole new programme of work together. The next relational element considers how activists in solidarity with each other purposefully utilised knowledge about their differences.

7.3.3 Exchanging Knowledge on Ethnicised Differences

Solidarities across difference can shape relational agency development in the ways activists make use of each other's insights to interpret the best course of action. I have already highlighted how many residential communities in NI and Namibia are ethnicised, due to the legacies of conflict, colonialism, and apartheid. Several activists discussed a practice in which individual activists share their own ethnicised, community level knowledge to help inform how to address sensitive VAWG and women's rights topics. In three examples below, *Agatha* (NI) firstly, told me how the knowledge activists had about different communities and ethnonationalities was important in her pro-choice activism group. Secondly, *Sarry* (Namibia) explained how it works with people from different ethnicities who are willing to provide community level knowledge, before working in different communities. Thirdly, *Olivia* (NI) explained how activists from both ethnonational groups in communities with a strong paramilitary presence, improved the quality of

the submission to the domestic violence legislation consultation (mentioned in the previous chapter) with their knowledge:

Difference becomes a point of discussion rather than avoidance when you're trying to come together to change something. You would want to know how it would go down if you wanted to hook a certain community or a certain politician. You'd want to know how is this going to go down? Do people like this politician? What is the story on the ground? *Agatha* (Northern Ireland)

We are diverse and our cultural groups are part of that diversity. For example, I am Damara Nama and I come from a cultural group of Central and Southern Namibia that does not do polygamy, yet in the North there is polygamy. Some people want harmonisation of cultural groups but Namibia too diverse for that. For me to discuss issues of gender-based-violence, or division of labour, or inheritance or polygamy in the North, first I need to discuss all what I propose to do with somebody in the North. This is what I have done, and this is how I show respect to people who are different to me. (Sarry, Namibia)

Most recently there was a proposal around changing the law on domestic violence and myself and *name of activist* did the bulk of the written work in response to that consultation. We worked with *names of groups* on that and when we wrote our response, we circulated it to other women's groups and then we had a meeting together where we talked about it. It was really useful as we were able to include that on-the-ground knowledge of what they were telling us ... It was really eye opening about the specific difficulty we have here about domestic abuse. There is obviously always a fear about reporting anywhere, but there is an additional fear here because men who are out of prison on licence from paramilitary backgrounds, would get recalled for domestic abuse, if it was reported. And it seems that extra layer of difficulty about reporting their criminal activity perpetuates the normalisation of violence and we really emphasised that point. That local knowledge is just one of the reasons why the women's groups in the communities affected are really excellent. *Olivia* (Northern Ireland)

I argue solidarity between activists from different backgrounds enable these strategic exchanges of community knowledge thereby shaping relational agency development in ways the activists interact to devise future activism. This argument is in line with how Edwards and Mackenzie (2005) conceptualise relational agency in terms of how people help others to interpret situations and respond to them. Giving examples, *Agatha* (NI) explained how the sensitivities of pro-abortion choice campaigning work, discussed in her quote above, meant the

group relied on activists sharing knowledge of different urban rural places from their own backgrounds. Having this knowledge enabled the group to think about how to be nuanced in the tone and content of campaigning, not just for community level awareness raising activities but also for political lobbying. Similarly, to broach topics respectfully, Sarry in Namibia was aware of the need to work alongside individuals from different ethnicities before engaging groups. *Olivia's* example shows by approaching agency through relations with others, different people can bring their skills together. Explaining she and a peer had writing skills and the interest to work on the submission, she knew they needed community level knowledge to inform it. Because of solidary networks already being in place, collaborative relations were already formed across ethnonational division, enabling different activists to contribute to the submission according to their strengths. This required them to discuss difficult issues happening in different communities to make the most informed case possible for political and legislative change. In both examples, the exchanges enabled activists to place their localised gendered, ethnonational knowledges and experiences into a wider interactive effort towards societal change.

In shaping relational agency development in activism, solidarities across difference can strengthen activism responses. Whether explicitly guided by activists' intersectional values or not, the presence of solidarity across difference relies on activists' commitment to include different people in activism and utilise their expert insights to inform the solutions activists seek. Whilst I have shown connections between solidarities across difference and relational agency development, I am aware not all activism occurs in the context of strong solidary relations. In the next section I analyse ways activists seek to work around these situations, whilst still contributing to activism.

7.4 Safeguarding Activism when Solidarities are Weak

The earlier sections of this chapter show how solidarities can shape interpersonal relations in activism and how a sense of togetherness can be pivotal to activists' efforts to effect change. However, it needs to be acknowledged that some

relations between activists lack the cohesion that comes from mutual dependence, which was how Durkheim (1984) viewed solidarity and have not, in the language of Featherstone (2012) forged relations through struggle. Therefore, activists may be part of various situations where solidarities have either not yet formed or are under strain, and where a sense of togetherness cannot be assumed.

Participants' testimonies show how the post-conflict context and sensitivities around ethnic/ethnonational difference can be bound up in these strained relations. I identify three main methods some activists apply to prevent activism being disrupted or damaged in these situations – avoidance of contentious topics, avoidance of potentially problematic encounters and focusing on the high level or superordinate goals of activism. I analyse these methods to understand how the post-conflict context of ethnic/ethnonational division continues to restrict some engagement in activism, even though activists show various levels of commitment to safeguarding activism from harm due to these divisions.

7.4.1 Avoiding Contentious Topics

Several activists talked about avoiding contentious topics with activist peers, either out of concern for maintaining good relations, or to ensure activism didn't get side-tracked by such issues. For E (Namibia), the avoidance of a potentially divisive political topic was motivated by a wish to prevent misunderstandings that might damage relations. E explained that, after media coverage of Olufuko, which is a female initiation ceremony marking the transition from girlhood to womanhood in some sub-groups of the majority Ovambo ethnicity in North Namibia, she was interested in finding out more about it.¹⁴² She considered asking an activist she knows in an anti-VAWG coalition, who comes from the Ovambo ethnicity, but held back because she could not find the words to broach the topic:

People forget we all speak different languages. I can speak some Afrikaans but only if I feel comfortable in a group, and my next colleague will speak another language again... So, there is women initiation ceremonies and things like that. I will like to talk about Olufuko with the one

¹⁴² When Olufuko was launched as a large scale event in 2012 and officially opened by former President Nujoma, it drew national level media and political attention, including expressed concerns this ritual was abusive and a violation of the rights of Ovambo girls/young women (Kautondokwa, 2014).

of us who knows more but I don't want to ask in a wrong way that she will feel bad, so I keep quiet. E (Namibia)

Similarly, in NI, *Claire*, explained the reason she avoids raising some topics in activism, relates back to a moment when she was on a training course for activists from different groups:

I've obviously got a Protestant sounding name and this woman in the session has a Catholic sounding name, and I'm only saying that because of how she reacted to something I said. Anyway, we were just talking about how our parents reacted to our activism and I happened to mention when I was in university, my dad had unrealistic ideas about what I might do and I just said, "And he would always say to me, you should just marry a farmer or join the police" and her eyes just widened like this [*demonstrating*]. There was just this horror in her eyes! Maybe she has come from a part of Northern Ireland, where people don't have lots of contact with people from Protestant backgrounds or she has had issues with the police, but I never forgot her reaction, and I would never casually mention the police or anything that is a dead giveaway, like the police, anymore. It's a little insight into how divided this place is. *Claire* (NI)

For E, the feeling she could not mention Olufuko due to concern for her relationship with her peer, was compounded by communication challenges in a multi-lingual country. This avoidance meant she was unable to discuss an issue pertinent to VAWG or ask questions, as she would have liked. In NI, *Claire's* hesitation was based on an experience that stood out in her memory, when the cultural cues in an everyday conversation with her father provoked a strong, yet unspoken, reaction from another activist.

Whilst some activists hesitate to raise contentious topics others safeguard against being drawn into them. Section 3 above discussed how ethnonational differences in NI could be constructively discussed and utilised in strategic activism campaigns. However, some activists in NI shared that they tended to avoid discussing contentious topics about conflict and division in NI with peers they don't know well, unless it has a bearing on activism they are involved in together. Two activists from Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist backgrounds said they had been in situations when other activists tried to draw them into discussions on the Israeli

occupation of Palestine.¹⁴³ *Chloe* (NI) who is active in several coalitions, told me that, despite not having expressed political support for Israel's treatment of Palestinian people, she felt she had been "checked out" about it during a social gathering after a coalition event, due to her Protestant background. Interestingly, another activist, *Erin* (NI) identified social gatherings after activism events as situations when such "traps" may be set, a term suggesting she finds these discussions are relationally tense. *Chloe* (NI) said she finds taking part in these political discussions futile:

I just won't get involved in talks about Israel and Palestine - it's not about anything practical. And so, it's the same about Northern Ireland stuff. I think people generally don't talk about that because they know it's going to be divisive. The problem is I don't know how stable that is. Like we can't not talk about Northern Ireland. *Chloe* (NI)

For *Chloe*, topic avoidance comes from a determination not to be side-tracked from practical activism by hazards familiar to her, such as discussions on Israel – Palestine. Parades and flags were also mentioned in several interviews as contentious topics to be avoided, reflecting what Bryan (2004) refers to the lingering contested use of public space to express ethnonational identity in NI. However, *Chloe* acknowledged there are times when topics associated with the political, conflictual aspects of NI are relevant to activism. As such, she appeared to have carried out a cost/benefit analysis to discuss contentious NI issues when pertinent to activism and to otherwise leave them alone.

As discussed in Chapter 5, issues activists address may include those with the potential to be divisive, such as conflict-related VAWG. Morey, Eveland and Hutchens (2012) argue strong relationships can withstand political disagreement, however, activists' accounts show that there is a spectrum in the depth and strength of relationships between activists as according to context. Strong relationships indicate people spend time together, learning about each other and

¹⁴³ This situation in Palestine has been incorporated into the division in NI. Catholic/Nationalist/Republican communities are seen to be traditionally aligned with Palestinians and some such areas have flown the Palestinian flag (Hamber, 2006). Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist are seen to be aligned with Israel, with a smaller number of areas having flown the Israeli flag, in response to the show of solidarity with Palestine (Hill and White, 2008).

building trust. Some activism relationships are looser, less intimate, and potentially short term, particularly in relation to events in which networks of groups or even networks of coalitions come together. As discussed in Chapter 2, it is possible solidarity may form in these loose connections.¹⁴⁴ However, as the examples above make clear, some activists - aware solidarity can be limited or strained by actual, or assumed, political differences associated with ethnic identity - choose to be selective about when to discuss these issues. This selectivity suggests that the transformative potential of solidary relations argued by Featherstone (2012) can sometimes feel secondary to working through the motions of activism without tension. Further, developing relations with transformative potential takes time and trust.

7.4.2 Avoiding Potentially Problematic Encounters

Activists' examples of avoiding encounters were primarily designed to prevent activism from being marred by ethnicised disharmony. Some activists explained there are some contexts in which they don't put themselves forward in activism. I provide one example from Namibia and NI where activists opted not to engage in support or outreach work in ethnicised residential areas. In each case, the activist sought to avoid a negative reception from people in those communities because of her obvious ethnic or ethnonational difference. In both situations, activists sought other people to provide the support, thereby seeking to make sure the activism task went ahead. However, the examples show how some activism is carried out by activists who operate within ethnic or ethnonational lines, which can lead to the exclusion of people outside of those lines.

In the north of Namibia, G carries out a range of activism tasks in various capacities; as an individual, as a local politician, and as a member of a local network of groups and individuals. When domestic homicide or other VAWG related death occurs, she is sometimes invited by the bereaved family to address the mourners. As part of supporting families, she often addresses mourners alongside other community and traditional (or ethnic sub-group) leaders, so they can collectively denounce the violence that has taken place. She explained she

¹⁴⁴ Which McDonald (2002) termed fluidarity (fluid solidarity)

had been in a situation where she felt unable to fulfil a request from a family, when their daughter had been killed, allegedly by her husband. The deceased, originally from G's ethnicity and region, moved to the neighbouring region in Namibia when she married a man from the majority ethnicity there:¹⁴⁵

I was not comfortable to go because of the things that can happen, you know? They might tell you "it is our culture so why should you be involved in our culture? You're not from our culture so how can you come and say those things?" G (Namibia)

G (Namibia) expressed feeling it would be unwise for her to intervene in the mourning rituals in a neighbouring region with people of a different ethnicity, in case doing so would be unwelcome. Although a predominantly Christian country, some rituals surrounding family events, such as weddings and funerals, may vary between ethnicities in Namibia (Yamakawa, 2009). She explained she felt bad about it and contacted some political activists in the neighbouring region to go to mourn. G added, even though she did not go the area where the death took place, as the family had requested, she did spend time with the bereaved relatives when they returned to their home region. G showed a willingness to safeguard activism from ethnic conflict or disharmony, by withholding some requested support, because she assessed doing so meant crossing ethnic lines in a way that risked conflict. However, beyond this incident, G expressed a belief that anti-VAWG activism is best carried out within one's own ethnicity/ethnic sub-group (also known as tribe) due to the different ways VAWG may be experienced and responded to in different ethnicities and regions in Namibia:

I think that that is the only the way we can do it according to how a person is taking it and doing it in their own region and in their own culture. G (Namibia)

G's hesitance in relation to the bereaved family should therefore be seen as part of her wider view of the importance of addressing VAWG within defined cultural, ethnicised, and geographical parameters.

¹⁴⁵ In Chapter 3, I explained how, in Namibia, certain ethnicities are associated with geographical regions, due to historic factors, including apartheid.

Similarly, in NI, H who is part of a coalition group that carries out outreach awareness sessions on various forms VAWG, told me she was reluctant to do this activity in some communities. She explained this is based on prior experience of not being received well by some Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist women when trying to discuss issues surrounding VAWG. She attributes this negative experience to their reaction to her distinct accent, which marks her out as ethnonationally different:

People who identify as PUL, as opposed to people who happened to be from that sort of background, are immediately not open to discussing anything like that with myself as soon as they hear my accent. That is honestly true. H (NI)

H said she avoids putting herself forward for activities where she senses a risk of not being positively received by community members. She expressed being unhappy about having to do so, saying she would rather be able to discuss these issues with all identities. However, H added there is an understanding in her coalition group about this, not just in relation to her, but generally about the need to match activists to situations that minimise identity being a barrier in discussions about VAWG. This matching process shows how activism coalition works around what Deiana (2013) describes as the ongoing hegemony surrounding the ethnonational binary in NI. Whilst it can safeguard the work activists are trying to do, planning around the binary limits the type of activities some activists get to carry out. This limiting of engagement shows that the work carried out in activism groups and coalitions can both traverse difference and limit itself within similarity, showing there can be a multiplicity of approaches to forming interpersonal connections within the same groups and networks. Indeed, all activists included in this section are part of coalitions to varying extents and many examples provided relate to their work in coalitions and even in networks of coalitions. In the next section I analyse another key method activists use to safeguard relations in situations when solidarities are under strain, focusing on high-level goals. Whilst not limited to coalitions, this safeguarding practice is relevant to the coalition context, as I now examine.

7.4.3 Focusing on Superordinate Goals

Some activists talked about how they diffused tense potentially conflict situations in activism, by focusing peoples' attention on the high-level goals of the group. In doing this, they elevated the long-term superordinate¹⁴⁶ goals of their activism to deal with momentary relational problems. Whilst this method was discussed by NI activists in various collectives, the examples they provided relate to one collective. I highlight this not to suggest this approach only applies to NI, to this collective, but it is emblematic of how strongly activists in this collective associated with the agreed goals. The ease with which activists cited these goals was a striking feature of the collective. G quotes the goals here while C gives some background to how they were developed:

We bring together women's groups and organisations, trade unionists, individual feminists and activists and we basically have six themes, aims, you know, in terms of a life free from poverty, discrimination, domestic and sexual abuse, affordable accessible childcare, a health system that meets our needs, and representation. G (NI)

I suppose it's seeing the big picture and making the small moves towards the big picture. The aspirations are there and if we can make movement towards them, well I think that we do make movement.... It took us a long time to get to where we are and through that process, we did some strategic planning. And we were like, what is our vision? What are our goals? And that document is available to everybody, and everybody contributed to it. So, that is ownership. Nobody owns it and everybody owns it we are all happy to work at it. And that's why stuff gets done. C (NI)

Several activists said they valued being in the collective for giving them space to take political positions on issues that are too difficult to address under the banner of a single group or organisation. As such, the shared ownership of the collective, which activists more usually portrayed as 'nobody owning it', was a vehicle to take sensitive issues forward. This benefit of coalitions is recognised by van Dyke and

¹⁴⁶ I discussed superordinate goals in Chapter 2 as being high-level goals

Amos (2017) who argue coalitions can generate new forms of political analysis. However, participants also felt the open nature of the collective made them vulnerable to conflict and external interference, as the quotes below show. Several activists discussed strained situations and conflicts, including some so specific they cannot be quoted due to the risk of identifying third parties. In these situations, activists were required to refer to the inclusively agreed ideals as a way through the conflict:

Here you've always got to be careful of people hijacking the agenda. People just steal it for themselves. And you have to watch out for people who try present you as something that you are not. And the very best way to stop that from happening is to be very clear about what exactly you stand for as a collective. And then you've got to be careful of people just trying to swan in and making it all about them. Some people are naturally like that you know. I remember when *Name of well-known activist / political figure* came and goes, why don't you do this? why don't you do that? why don't you do the other? And I'm like, "do you know what it is? Why don't you develop those ideas a wee bit in terms of how they fit our key aims and bring it back to the next meeting. That would be really helpful". And surprise, surprise, she walked out and never come back. So, you've got to always be keeping it grounded, and keep it collective, and keep it focused on the big picture. F (NI)

There has been a few massive attempts at coup d'état with "how dare you do this" and "how dare you do that?" and I'm fucking like, "go and take your how dare you. This is a collective, democratic, decision-making group. It doesn't belong to any one group here. It belongs to all of us. We decide things together and if we have agreed on something because it fits our aims, then there is no need to how dare anybody." A (NI)

The open nature of some multi-group coalitions/collectives may attract people that engage loosely, without necessarily knowing the position that has been agreed on different issues. This fluid engagement arguably underscores the importance of explicit goals. However, the above testimonies suggest there is potential in thinking about superordinate goals beyond their objective benefit, that is, the high-level aspirations contained in each goal. The additional benefits activists identified were in how goals could be used to address relational problems and tensions as they arise. Activists' accounts suggest clear, inclusively negotiated superordinate

goals can help activists resolve situations where solidarities are weak and intragroup relations are strained. Based on the work of Sherif (1958), the importance of superordinate goals is well established within peace studies to help resolve inter-group conflict. Determining that goals may be similarly valuable in intragroup relations where perspectives can clash poses questions about the implications of doing so. I have already discussed the importance of having difficult conversations about differences as part of forging relations for feminist and political transformation (see Emejulu, 2018; Featherstone, 2012; Lorde, 1983; Weldon, 2006). The ways in which superordinate goals are invoked during tense discussions in which there is dissent and a clash of perspectives are therefore relevant to that bigger challenge. Indeed, the same dilemma applies to the earlier topic and encounter avoidance methods. What are the long-term impacts of these short-term pragmatic approaches that help ensure the activism gets done in the here and now? How do these practices help address bigger relational inequalities, problems and differences that provide the need for long-term activism?

7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed how anti-VAWG activism groups can foster solidarity across ethnic and ethnonational difference. I highlighted examples of discussions in activism groups that improved participants' understandings of the issues surrounding VAWG, such as socialisation and social control, as they manifest in different ethnicities/ethnonationalities. Utilising examples where solidary discussions in activism developed into new forms of collaborative work, I traced the links and mutually reinforcing dynamics between solidarities across difference and relational agency. Further, I brought into focus two relational components in the agency arising out of solidarities across difference, activists' exchange of knowledges on difference to improve activism effectiveness and, activism occurring in a feeling of togetherness. My analysis of three methods activists use to safeguard activism in contexts where solidarities across differences are weak or underdeveloped showed some similarities and clear distinctions between the the methods. Whilst all methods activists employed sought to safeguard activism interventions, there was a variation in the extent to which safeguarding relations motivated participants' use of topic avoidance and

encounter avoidance. Examples of activists focusing on superordinate goals applied to one collective, yet these examples have raised my interest in the potential value of superordinate goals extending beyond their substantive content into wider relational benefits. In the next chapter I propose a synthesis of how this thesis contributes to the ways we can conceptualise relational agency and aspects of activism in the context of post-conflict factors and bring the research to a conclusion.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter I bring this research to a conclusion. I begin by drawing out and building on key contributions from earlier chapters centred around relational agency in activism in post-conflict settings. In the subsequent section I revisit the three research questions and summarise my responses to the questions, including how I answered them. In the penultimate section I review the particularity of this research. In the first sub-section I consider three limitations of the study. In the second sub-section I identify where findings from this study point to the benefits of future research and scholarly attention. In the third sub-section I set out key findings in terms I propose to present to activist networks in Namibia and NI. The final comments of this thesis are a quick review of the entirety of the research, as well as closing words from participants that illustrate how relations are intrinsic to activists' agency.

8.2 A Conceptualisation of Relational Agency in Post-Conflict, Anti-VAWG Activism

My synthesis of five contributions from earlier chapters of this thesis forms my conceptualisation of relational agency in post-conflict activism. I incorporate one contribution on the relational aspects of activists' hesitation and inaction into this synthesis as part of revealing how relations are the crux of activists' agency. This understanding of relational agency developed through analysing life history narratives which were focused on understanding women's activism histories in the context of their post-conflict settings. These interviews revealed a range of situations and activists' responses to them which allowed me to understand how agency emerges relationally. Whilst I frame relational agency and relational inaction around the specific challenges for activists in post-conflict contexts, elements of these contributions may be applicable more widely, according to context.

- The elements that make up agency develop in the interactions and relations between activists.

My analyses of agency from literature included examining its various elements, including intentionality, forethought, motivation and subsequent actions. My subsequent analysis of activists' life history narratives exemplified how, in activism, each of these elements formed in the interactions they had with others. Rather than listening to testimonies about individuals making choices and implementing those choices as individual actions, in interviews I heard activists discuss how they came together with peers to analyse the macro problems facing them and working out what they could do in response. Therefore, to frame activism in terms of individual choice and action would not only be incomplete, but it would also be misleading. Several examples in the thesis demonstrate how the elements of agency develop in interactions and relationships and here I focus on the interactions between *Samantha* and Rosa, in Namibia. The first thing *Samantha* did when she heard about the victim blaming statements from a senior official was to first tell her friends she was angry and wanted to do something and based on their suggestion, make a general call out to others who wanted to do something to join with her. At this point she did not know what to do. In other words, she had a generalised *intent* but had not crystallised that *intent* or reached the point of *forethought*. When *Samantha* and Rosa met, their interactions enabled them to develop both *intent* and then *forethought*, which as Bandura (2007) highlights are two pre-requisites of action. Bringing *Samantha's* and Rosa's networks together as a loose network galvanised their motivation to act out their interactively formed ideas. Their subsequent action protested negative state representations of sexual violence, thereby interplaying with macro-level issues, actors and injustices from the outset. This protest began a surge of feminist activism in the coalition they formed with more activists that joined them. Based on this example and others, it is fair to assess that what we might traditionally name as action is more accurately interaction. Moreover, conceptualising agency in terms of deliberative action can instead give way to a conceptualisation of deliberative interaction. Empirically, activists' testimonies show relationships are the space in which the work of activism is done. As O'Shaughnessy and Kennedy

(2010) argue, just as the purpose of activism is to achieve changes, relationships are where those changes occur.

- Solidarities across difference can shape relational agency development in activism in ways that can resist post-conflict division

Division based on identity differences is a legacy of conflict and colonialism. In the process of challenging VAWG and associated issues in those divided contexts, activists engage with the macro dimensions of division. Solidarities across difference are particularly valuable in the context of division because the extent and nature of oppressions cannot be understood from peoples' partial view of them within division. By facilitating and participating in varied forms of discussions in a range of contexts, activists can foster solidarities across ethnonational and ethnic differences. I illustrate this in relation to the interface women's group in NI Dawn described. Activists' facilitation enabled women to explore and express their concerns about domination and control in their own ethnonational community and learn about the different ethnonational community with which they interfaced. From Dawn's account it is apparent women undertook an in-depth analysis of the dynamics of masculine paramilitary domination in their collective lives, determining what was distinct and shared about their perspectives and experiences. The solidarities across ethnonational difference engendered in these discussions created potential for relational agency development. Holding with Featherstone's (2012) conceptualisation of solidarities as relations forged through struggle that seek to challenge oppressions, I also add to it. I add to it by showing how, in the context of activism, relational agency is the subsequent interactive practices shaped by solidary relations between people seeking to challenge oppressions.¹⁴⁷ When women and girls interact across difference about their experiences of oppressions and coalesce around common anti-VAWG and gender justice concerns, their interactions can challenge wider societal divisions.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ I expand on these practices in the next point.

¹⁴⁸ Other examples activists described included similar activities with girls.

- In activism, relational agency comprises interactive practices by those working to challenge forms of oppression, part of which involves being able to seek and use help to interpret and respond to situations.

Here I concur with Edwards and Mackenzie (2005) that relational agency is about people's ability to seek out and use help which expands their interpretations and supports their responsive actions.¹⁴⁹ However, I argue for acknowledging relational agency as being more. Relational agency in activism is not only seeking and using help from others to be responsive, as Edwards and Mackenzie (2005) highlighted. Relational agency also includes providing help, which can entail focusing on relationships as much as on agency. I draw on the testimony from H in Namibia to illustrate this point. Everything H discussed as her contribution to the litigation process following institutional abuse was focused on relationships and togetherness, togetherness she articulated as Ubuntu. H's time and effort were used towards ensuring all those subject to this institutional abuse would be able to understand and stay involved in the lengthy legal process. As such, the relational aspect of the activism was so central to H's experience, it became her main purpose. Beyond giving or receiving help, relational agency can comprise any of a range of agentic practices, including but not limited to those analysed in this thesis. The practices I identified, including mentoring, and taking on new responsibilities with the support of mentors, illustrate the ways in which "capacity for deliberative action", which is how Edwards and Mackenzie (2005, p. 301) define agency, develops in interactions between activists. By identifying various activism practices as relational agency I expand existing conceptions of relational agency.

- The benefits associated with the practices of relational agency have the potential mobility to spill over to individual activists, activism groups and networks, as well as span activism across time.

The benefits of relationally agentic practices I identified in this thesis include building confidence and improving activists' interactive assessments of what

¹⁴⁹ I repeat their definition of relational agency here for ease of the reader's access: "People's ability to seek and use help which expands their interpretations and supports their responsive actions, where agency is a capacity to undertake deliberative action" (Edwards and Mackenzie, 2005 p.301).

needs to be done against oppressions. Activists' extensive accounts of experiencing these benefits in the context of their work in coalitions, collectives and networks reveals the depth of the intersection of different activism groups and the integration of VAWG with other activism issues. This interconnectedness ensures the benefits associated with the practices of relational agency can traverse widely. In other words, in line with activism and social movement spillover theory, these positive effects can spill over. The mobility of this spillover travels outwards in a moment in time and it is also possible for it to span across time through long-term connections between activists across age-ranges. The former is important to activists' contemporary activism. The latter is important to activism's enduring ability to identify and respond to the changing and lingering challenges from their post-conflict contexts.

- Hesitation and inaction in activism have relational components, so to understand relational agency one must recognise what can jeopardise it.

As relations and interactions are at the core of activists' agency, it follows that concerns about relationships can be at the centre of activists' hesitations and inactions. The reasons I identified for activists' hesitations and inactions around publicly challenging intra-group VAWG by conflict actors, were based on their concerns about relationships with others. These reasons reaffirmed how relations are not only vital to activists' (inter)actions but can also be at the root of their hesitation and unwillingness to act. Recognising activists' hesitance about the reluctance of their peers to address a difficult issue, particularly when it involves challenging powerful people, is part of understanding what risks jeopardising relational agency. However, due to the fluid and contextualised nature of relational agency and relational inaction it is important not to assume activists' positions on issues are fixed. This fluidity is shown in the discreet steps being taken by NI activists to raise conflict-related VAWG in their activism and, in the reduced levels of activism carried out by A in Namibia. Further, whilst activists may hesitate to act in one aspect of the issue, they may well be agentic in others, such as supporting those affected by this VAWG, without speaking out about it.

The sum of the above points is a recognition of the paramount role of interactions and relations in activism. I find that relational agency in activism emerges through the interactions between people collaborating to tackle the activism cause, in this case the oppression of VAWG. Some forms of relational agency in activism emerge in the interplay between those activists and macro level sources of oppression. This distinction acknowledges the dual aspect of activism, which in the case of anti-VAWG activism is the combination of care and campaign work, both of which are closely related. Finally, my conceptualisation of relational agency acknowledges that activism is created through interactions and relations that could not be similarly created outside of those interactions and relations. As such, this synthesis of contributions about relational agency aligns to scholarship that places relationality at the centre of human endeavour.¹⁵⁰

8.3 Re-visiting My Research Questions and Responses

In this thesis I have analysed aspects of anti-VAWG activism in post-conflict Namibia, and Northern Ireland. To do this I firstly reflected on my experiences in Namibia and NI as well as my concern that VAWG is downplayed when other forms of political violence and issues dominate. A major part of scoping out the study was my detailed analysis of literature that enabled me to look comprehensively at the things that surround post-conflict anti-VAWG activism in Namibia and NI. These included geopolitical trajectories of feminism and activism in the regions where both countries are located, looking relationally at women and VAWG during and after conflict, and unpacking aspects of activism and agency relationally. My focus on places and spaces in this study was both conceptual and applied to Namibia and NI. By this I mean I analysed theoretical ideas about places and spaces, and I analysed the relations of the conflicted histories of both countries, and the nature of the subsequent ethnic/ethnonational divisions. As

¹⁵⁰ This scholarship includes relational sociology (Burkitt, 2018, Emirbayer, 1997: Powell and Depélteau, 2013) and indigenous philosophy, including feminist interpretation of indigenous concepts, such as Ubuntu (see Ogude, 2018, Tamale, 2020). Relational sociology prioritises interaction over action (Burkitt, 2018), and indigenous scholarship sees the entirety of humaneness as emergent from relations (Ogude, 2019).

well as helping me identify the research questions, this analysis gave me a range of concepts I could use to help answer them. As such, I built a composite of these concepts including agency, solidarities and field theory and within that, political culture. I used several of these concepts in my analysis of life history interviews I conducted with twenty activists. The overarching argument or story of this thesis is that forms and practices of relational agency, shaped by solidarities across age and ethnic difference, can help anti-VAWG activists challenge oppressive political cultures. However, concerns about damaging relations can feature in activists' hesitance to address some contentious forms of conflict related VAWG. I developed this argument over the course of Chapters 5, 6, and 7. In Chapter 8 above I synthesised key contributions from earlier chapters to put forward my conceptualisation of relational agency. Rather than repeat my analysis of each chapter and my overarching argument, here I provide a summary response to each research question.

8.3.1 What are anti-VAWG activists' perspectives of the impact of conflict and the post-conflict context on their lives, and places of activism?

One of the strengths of the life history method chosen for this research was the depth and richness of accounts activists provided in relation to the impacts of conflict on the lives of anti-VAWG activists and their places of activism. Their varied perspectives were based on testimonies of displacement, bereavement and other losses, as well as participation in/resistance against various dynamics of conflict. In Chapter 5 I focused on VAWG perpetrated by conflict actors in their own community. The extent to which activists were impacted by this issue was unexpected. However, focusing on their perspectives of this issue in both NI and Namibia provided alternatives to the dominant representations of both conflicts. Activists' reflections of how conflict impacted on their activism highlighted how it stifled the possibilities for anti-VAWG developments. Some activists were required to be surreptitious about their women's rights activism, focusing on housing and family support. Discussions on the post-conflict context were couched in terms of gender justice developments still being held back, which I integrated into Chapters 6 and 7. In NI, activists' dissatisfaction about the lack of progressive developments on VAWG, abortion and LGBT+ rights, sat alongside concern that historical developments made feminism less accessible to women from one

ethnonational group. In Namibia, activists spoke of the challenges of showing feminist dissent, whether in relation to gendered cultural expectations within one's ethnicity, or against postcolonial government actors, willing to quell such dissent. Having identified these two issues as emblematic post-conflict and post-colonial challenges, field theory helped me conceptualise them as threats to feminist activism from the political culture.¹⁵¹

8.3.2 How do women activists come together in anti-VAWG activism across ethnic/ ethnonational and other differences?

Anti-VAWG activists in both countries come together in a diverse range of planned and spontaneous campaigns, coalitions, and collectives to unify their responses to VAWG. In Chapter 6 and 7, I illustrated how solidary relations between activists of different ages and different ethnic/ethnonational identities form in activism discussions and shape the practices of activism, which I specified. Activists provided examples of how they used their situated knowledges across difference in their exchanges with other activists and supported women and girls in communities to do likewise. Therefore, activists have shown their willingness to utilise difference as a point of entry to encouraging solidary encounters and relations. The ways anti-VAWG activists come together across age, ethnicity and other differences contribute to both post-conflict development and peacebuilding in tangible ways. Cognisant that anti-VAWG activists are development actors in the global South and North, and that relations are the crux of their agency, I support calls for an increased focus on relations in measuring agency in development.¹⁵² Finally, some of ways anti-VAWG activists respond to situations where they are concerned about conflict and tension, often due to ethnicised differences – that is by avoiding conflict so the activism can proceed – shows their short term pragmatism sometimes takes priority over long term transformation.

8.3.3 How do post-conflict factors shape anti-VAWG activism relations?

¹⁵¹ The (in)accessibility of feminism for pro-British women in NI and oppressive anti-feminist discourses from the state in Namibia

¹⁵² For example, Ballet, Dubois, and Mahieu, 2007; Griewald and Rauschmayer, 2014; Ibrahim, 2006; Pelenc *et al.* (2013) who argue the capability approach in development would benefit from a relational, collective approach.

Post-conflict factors and legacies of conflict impact anti-VAWG activism relations in multifaceted ways that are both known and unknown by affected activists. Several relational problems that started during conflict still feature in anti-VAWG activism relations, which I have analysed in depth in this thesis. In Chapter 6 I analysed the split between government gender equality actors and autonomous feminist activists in Namibia and subsequent repression of feminism. That this issue still impacts on younger feminist activists' relationships with state actors, in ways they don't understand, shows the depth of the conscious and unconscious ways post-conflict relations are touched by the legacies of conflict and colonialism. I focused at length on the issue of how intra-community VAWG by conflict actors impacts anti-VAWG relations, in the dynamics of how it is both addressed and avoided by activists. In Chapter 2 I argued for reflection on what the end goal of activism in response to conflict-related VAWG, which is a pertinent question for both NI and Namibia, as I showed in Chapter 5. I also analysed the reasons activists hesitate to address this issue publicly and reflected on the temporalities of this issue in activism.

I add here that in addition to thinking temporally, it is important to consider legacies of conflict from a place-based perspective. Massey (1994) highlighted that there are inevitably more relational connections occurring in place than we can identify at any one time. If we apply that thinking to places in conflict, where so many events occur in secret, it becomes clear that the key points we know about a particular armed conflict are only some of what has taken place. To understand post-conflict activism on conflict-related VAWG or other post-conflict factors, it is vital to contextualise the relational complexities of the legacies of any given conflict beyond those headlines. A depth of understanding requires guarding against making assumptions about those experiences and analysing the ways women and girls are both included and excluded from post-conflict processes. It also requires understanding the positions of women and girls relative to those of conflict actors who have perpetrated intragroup VAWG. Only then can the nature of feminist and women activists' responses to addressing the harms of conflict be contextualised.

8.4 The Particularity of this Research

I begin my analysis of the particularity of this research by acknowledging its limitations, in terms of scale and methodology. Secondly, the opportunities for future research I identify are mainly based on the findings of this research, although some arise from the limitations of this study. Conceptualising activism through activists' perspectives presents future academic opportunities to expand and deepen how we understand relational agency, which I specify below. Finally, I distil findings from this research with a view to accessibly sharing key points with activists.

8.4.1 The Limitations of this Study

It is beneficial to be honest about the limitations of any study, not least because it can inform and inspire future research endeavour (Singh, 2015) and here I highlight three limitations. Firstly, a larger study across an increased number of field sites at different stages in the post-conflict process could inform more detailed findings about how post-conflict factors feature in anti-VAWG activism. This observation is not to diminish the findings from this study, but rather to acknowledge that places in different points along the post-conflict continuum may pose distinct relational opportunities and restrictions for activism (Bell and Forster, 2019). The concept behind the study grew out of my experience in the countries where data collection took place. However, there is potential in carrying out research to answer similar questions in places affected by different types of conflict, as well as at different points along the post-conflict continuum.

The second limitation relates to the chosen method of data collection. As I explained in Chapter 4.2, I chose the life history approach as the most suitable method for this study, as it enabled me to analyse activists' experiences over time and across a variety of activism groups. However, had I been able to apply a mixed methods approach and combine life histories with participant observation, I potentially would have been able to observe relational agency practices in action. The accounts of various practices, such as mentoring and exchanging community

level knowledges, come from participants' recollections of them. Had I been able to observe activism, I would potentially have a richer empirical understanding of the practices involved and what they mean to the different people in the relationships. Staying with research methods for the third limitation, in Chapter 4 I explained I should have liked to have practiced process consent, but I didn't. Process consent is an arrangement in which research participants continually give their consent around the use of their data at various stages of the writing process and beyond (Ellis, 2007). I learned about this approach after data collection in Namibia, by which it was too late to retrospectively introduce process consent for all participants. So, although I see it's absence as a limitation, I feel it is an appropriate absence, as I was unwilling to facilitate a disparity in the extent to which participants would have an ongoing say over the use of their data.

8.4.2 Implications for Future Research

There are conceptual, empirical, and methodological implications for future research arising from this study. Firstly, the concept of relational agency is underdeveloped in scholarship on activism and warrants more attention. The contribution of this research, conceptualising forms of interactive activism practice in activism as relational agency, provides a basis on which future scholarship can build. Research utilising participant observation of relational agency practices in activism would be useful, whether in settings at different stages of post conflict process or in various environments. Such research has the potential to deepen our understanding of how interactions shape activism practices, the essence of relational agency in activism. Further, the connections between forms of relational agency and solidarities warrant further exploration. Research on solidarities based on the intersectionality paradigm and encouraging connections across difference are of relevance to anti-VAWG activism in the context of division (Collins, 2017; Hancock, 2011; Porter, 2016) and research how these solidarities shape agency can build on this study. However, all solidarities that may enhance activists' analysis of local and global factors that influence the structural and symbolic violence impacting on lives of women and girls are relevant for further research (Ackerly and True, 2010).

Secondly, the position I developed on the importance of relationships and interactions as well as the sites where relational agency is produced, echoes the indigenous philosophy of Ubuntu and the paramount importance it places on relational interaction (Ogude, 2018). Therefore, it would be useful to conduct research on the conceptual complementarity between relational agency and Ubuntu. My reflections about the potential connections between both phenomena began at the data analysis stage of this project. However, an empirical study with its own data is needed to be able to conceptualise relational agency and Ubuntu in relation to each other. Such a study could help address a challenge identified by Gouws and van Zyl, (2015) that relational ontologies from the global South are dominated and overshadowed by more individualised, rights-based ontologies from the global North. Exploring relational ontologies from both the South and North, and tracing their place-based influences and implications, could yield beneficial results in developing a more holistic understanding of the power of relationships in human action and, within that, feminist activism. Further, given the calls from Cornell and van Marle (2015), Gouws and van Zyl (2015) and Tamale (2020) to re-interpret decolonial, feminist activism for justice in Africa using Ubuntu principals, essentially to develop an Ubuntu feminism, such research would be timely.

Thirdly, my reflection about the *potential* relational benefits of superordinate goals in activism warrants empirical research to further develop. Building on from the work of Sherif (1958), scholars of peace studies and social psychology recognise superordinate or high-level goals as an important tool to aid inter-group conflict resolution (Miller, 2017). My suggestion for future research is to further explore the phenomenon of activists, refocusing attention on superordinate goals in activism in response to intragroup conflict. Based on the examples I provided where activists utilised previously agreed goals to manage dissent and tense conversations I argue the dynamics of and implications of this process warrant further attention. More broadly, research into the relational impacts of going through the process of discussing, setting, and refocusing on high level goals in activism, is pertinent.

Fourthly, looking at conflict and post-conflict issues from the perspective of anti-VAWG activists throws up several issues that are suitable for further enquiry. Not

least of these is the enduring impact of conflict-related VAWG as a difficult activism issue. This difficulty featured in both places, despite VAWG by conflict actors not being an emblematic feature of either conflict. Relationships between feminist activists and the state in post-conflict societies is another relevant research topic, particularly given state repression of feminist activism in Namibia. Researching this place-based activism issue from the experience and perspectives of activists, I suggest that using archival methods has the potential to improve our understanding of how changing relations over time manifests in current activism relations. This improved understanding has the potential to benefit younger and future anti-VAWG activists to contextualise the legacy of various public and private conflicts they inherit.

8.4.3 Sharing Research Themes with Activists

I earlier expressed my intent to share research findings with anti-VAWG activists, particularly those in activist networks in Namibia and NI. I appreciate research findings are made available through sharing the thesis itself, which I will do with all the participants I can reach. Subsequent academic publishing of findings is also important in this regard. However, beyond these methods, I am interested in accessibly distilling key themes I think are likely to be of interest to activists. I am interested in presenting a precis of the below points to activists for discussion.¹⁵³

Relations Between Feminist Activists of Different Ages

Feminist activists placed value on the relationships they were part of with other activists older and younger than themselves. Their positivity challenges narratives of division between feminists of different age ranges. Mutual appreciation was apparent in younger activists' gratitude about being able to learn from older, more experienced activists and older activists' admiration of the skills and knowledge of younger peers. Older and younger activists were certain about the long-term need for feminist activism. Some older activists placed high expectations on younger peers to overcome anti-feminist and homophobic oppression and generally regressive politics. However, the expectation placed on younger activists can be a

¹⁵³ I clarify here these are not different findings, but rather a restating of key findings with activists in mind.

source of pressure. Coalitions, collectives, or networks of activists of different ages can play a crucial role in carrying important details about localised feminist histories. These details include the way feminist activism has responded to and resisted political threats. However, for younger feminist activists to be able to access knowledge about the oppressions that have come from and can still come from local politics, those networks need to be in place and those conversations need to happen in those networks.

Relational Agency and Solidarities

A key argument of the research, based on activists' life histories, is that relations are the crux of their agency. The research offers new ideas about relational agency, especially that activists' interactions are pivotal to what they decide to do and what they go on to do together. In other words, activism is created through activists' interactions and the relationships they have with each other. Therefore, the same activism could not be created outside those interactions and relations. Activists discussed different practices and methods of interaction that this research sees as being part of relational agency, although further research and observation of activism could determine more.

Relational agency is shaped by the solidarities that develop between activists. Many of the challenges faced by post-conflict activists are related to the ways society has been divided by conflict and the legacy of this division. Therefore, solidarities across difference are particularly helpful to activists to come together to challenge division. When activists develop solidary relationships across difference, their understanding then of the kind of activism they need to develop to reach different people has the potential to improve. Anti-VAWG activists have also been part of facilitating the development of solidarities across ethnic differences among the women and girls they support. Solidarities across age and ethnic/ethnonational differences are highlighted in this thesis, although the formation of various solidarities across difference matter. Activists' commitment to intersectional solidarities has resulted in them forming connections with people that experience marginalisation. Activists have learned from marginalised people with whom they have connected and this has shaped their activism practice.

These experiences demonstrate that activists can decide to make their activism solidary and committed to challenging marginalisation.

On the specific post-conflict challenge of ethnic and ethnonational difference and division, there are different methods activists use when they are concerned about relations with other activists and people they support in activism. These methods are avoiding difficult topics and encounters and focusing on the big picture goals of activism.

Intragroup VAWG by Conflict Actors as a Difficult Activism Issue

It feels important to make clear how some are concerned about and have been impacted by VAWG perpetrated by conflict actors in their own groups and communities. It also feels challenging to reflect this point for two reasons. Firstly, I approached activists about my interest in activism, rather than analysing VAWG or singling out forms of violence. Secondly, as several activists have discussed, this is a potentially divisive issue. Part of taking up the issue requires reflecting on activists' hesitations about whether and how to raise their concerns because they don't wish to damage relations with their peers. Despite these hesitations, several activists stated how this issue needs to be highlighted.

8.4 Final Comments

This research has conceptualised anti-VAWG activism in two contrasting post-conflict contexts, Namibia and Northern Ireland, through emphasising the relational components of how activism is practiced. As a peaceful independent republic, Namibia bears the legacy of colonialism and a most egregious system of racial and ethnic segregation to which it was subjected, apartheid. Although part of colonised Ireland before becoming a country, since being partitioned from it, NI remains in its coloniser's jurisdiction. Despite a protracted peace process NI skirts on the edges of being a post-conflict country, though remains a contested society by two ethnonationalities pulling towards Irishness and Britishness. Even in these contrasting aspects of their contexts, there are shared features in how anti-VAWG

activism and the wider dynamics within each country interrelate. Life histories of activists operating in different groups and collectives have shown how agency emerges in the interactions among activists and between activists and the people they support. Relational agency development is shaped by various solidarities, although this thesis has homed in on solidarities across different ages, ethnic identities, and intersectional solidarities. This research has analysed relational agency practices taken from activists' testimonies, practices which have helped them form intent and follow through in challenging oppressions in their places of activism. Activists' hesitations and inactions when it comes to addressing some difficult issues relating to conflict, even though they are core to anti-VAWG activism, are based on concern about damaging relations. In other words, this inaction is relational. In sum, findings from this thesis underscore how pivotal relationships are in the realisation of activists' agency. Whether one needs to go as far as Emirbayer (1997) by saying relations should be the primary unit of social analysis, the relational dimensions of agency in activism warrant academic and activist attention. I close this research using words of participants that illustrate the importance of relations in activism:

I feel that being an activist in my community brings change to my community. Because sometimes you see there is this woman who is having serious problems, but after you spend some time talking to her you see a smile come to her face. And that makes me feel, "look I have helped". And I too, have been helped by others. And that's what makes me strong and want to continue to help other women. *Nangula* (Namibia)

You meet all these wonderful inspiring people, not just wonderful inspiring feminists, it could be people you met on a trade union demonstration because somebody's getting fucked over in Subway. You meet people with whom you share a belief that you can make this society a better place and together you do all this work. You can call it anti-violence work, anti-sexism, anti-sectarianism, anti-racism, human rights and equality work, identity work, good relations work, community development work, whatever. All I know is, when people inspire me, I want to be better. I want to do better. Kellie (NI)

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Prompts

Childhood: Time and Place

- Where and when were you born?
- What was it like growing up in that time and place?
- Can you tell me about a childhood memory that stands out?
- How has the place changed over the years?
- Where have you lived since?
- Tell me about your life since?

Wider Societal Issues

- Can you tell me how the historical events or the political situation have affected your life? And your community?
- How did the wider conflict / political situation impact on you and family? How have things changed for you and your family over the years? Can you give examples?

- Has the political situation impacted on the way you encounter or communicate with people from different communities, cultures or ethnicities? Can you give some examples or tell me more about that from your own experience?

Activism: Individual

1. Can you tell me about how you came to be an activist?
2. What kind of activities you have been involved in since you started? How have these activities changed over time?
3. Do you see your activism as feminist? Please explain.

Activism: Collective

- I am interested to ask about how you come together with other women activists to challenge VAWG. Can you tell me about that?
 - How has coming together helped to make a difference?
 - What challenges have you experienced?
- Can you tell me about working with activists from different backgrounds, communities, or ethnicities? How does activism happen in those different contexts? Please tell me what comes to mind about your experiences.

- How have women's activism and collaboration helped activists from different backgrounds come together and learn from each other about this issue?
- How has the political situation impacted on your activism? What have you had to do differently, not do, or especially do because of it?

Wrap Up

- Thank you so much for sharing your experience of life and activism with me. I really appreciate it.
- Before we close, is there anything else you would like to tell me or ask me?

Appendix B: First Social Media Recruitment Post

Dear friends and family in Namibia - I will be coming from England in July to do research with women who have taken a stand on the issue of violence against women and girls. Please may you share this post to help me reach activists? Whether you are an activist who feels you have done a little or a lot, it would be good to be in touch with you so we can decide whether to meet. Please send me a private message, if interested, or email me at Kate.Mukungu@northumbria.ac.uk. Thank you

Appendix C- Participants' Information Sheet; Namibia and Northern Ireland



Centre for International
Development
Northumbria University
Newcastle upon Tyne
England
NE1 8ST

Participants' Information on PhD Research on Women's Activism, Namibia

Thank you for considering being part of this research I am undertaking at Northumbria University in England. Before you agree to be interviewed, it is important that you know what this will involve. Please read the following information, or, as it is in English, please ask to have it read / translated for you. If there is any further information or clarification that you need, please feel very welcome to discuss this further with me.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of the research is to explore women's **activism on violence against women and girls** in societies, such as Namibia, that have experienced deep division and major changes following conflict. The method used in the interview will be a life history interview. This means we will talk about your life story, although we will pay particular attention on your activities / activism on the issue of violence against women. Whether you are part of a formal group or organisation, or if you carry out your activism more informally as a community member, I will particularly want to ask you about how you come together with other women as an activist.

What will happen if I decide to take part?

Arranging to Meet

If you agree to participate in this research, we will arrange a convenient date and time to meet when I am in Namibia (July 2015). The interview can take place at your preferred location, for example within a quiet room at your project or place of work, or at a suitable quiet space, such as a discussion room in the National Library of Namibia. I estimate that the interview would last approximately 1 and a half or 2 hours (although it would take longer if you do not consent to my recording the interview, as I would need extra time to take detailed notes).

Consent

At the beginning of the interview you will be asked to confirm your informed consent, and will be provided with a copy of the consent form to keep. Even after you have given consent please remember that you can end or postpone the interview at any time. You can also withdraw from this study, should you decide, up to twelve months after the interview by informing me by email. Interviews are normally voice recorded but if you do not consent to this then I, as the researcher, would be required take detailed notes during the interview instead.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

What you say during the interview will be typed up by me afterwards. In accordance with English law (the Data Protection Act 1998) both the voice recording and notes from your interview will be stored securely; the voice recording will be locked away in a cabinet and the documents will be saved electronically in a password protected folder. Only I, as the researcher, will have access to this material. This means your participation will remain **confidential**.

Please be assured that your name and the names of people, places and groups / organisations you discuss will be altered after the interview so your identity or their identity will not be divulged. You are not expected to identify yourself to others as a participant in this research. This means that your participation is **anonymous**.

Contact Information

If you have further enquiries regarding your participation in this research, please contact me directly: **Kate Mukungu**, PhD Researcher, Email: kate.mukungu@northumbria.ac.uk or I can be reached by cell phone on the following number _____.

If you require my research supervisor to provide verification about this research or wish to raise a concern with him, please contact: **Prof Matt Baillie Smith**, Professor of International Development Email: matt.baillie-smith@northumbria.ac.uk

Your Sincerely

Kate Mukungu

Doctoral Researcher



Centre for International
Development
Northumbria University
Newcastle upon Tyne
England
NE1 8ST

Participants' Information Sheet PhD Research on Women's Activism, Northern Ireland

Thank you for considering being part of this research I am undertaking at Northumbria University in England. Before you agree to be interviewed, it is important that you know what this will involve. Please read the following information and feel very welcome to discuss this further with me, should you require further clarification.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of the research is to explore women's **activism on violence against women and girls** in societies, such as Northern Ireland, that have experienced deep division. The method used in the interview will be a life history interview. This means we will talk about your life story, although we will pay particular attention on your activities / activism on the issue of violence against women. Whether you are part of a formal group or organisation, or if you carry out your activism more informally as a community member, I will particularly want to ask you about how you, as an activist, come together with other women.

What will happen if I decide to take part?

Arranging to Meet

If you agree to participate in this research we will arrange a convenient date and time to meet when I am in the area (March, April, or June 2016). The interview can take place at your preferred location, for example within a quiet room at your project or place of work, or at a suitably quiet café. I estimate that the interview would last approximately 1 and a half or 2 hours (although it would take longer if you do not consent to my recording the interview, as I would need extra time to take detailed notes).

Consent

At the beginning of the interview you will be asked to confirm your informed consent, and will be provided with a copy of the consent form to keep. Even after you have given consent please remember that you can end or postpone the interview at any time. You can also withdraw from this study, should you decide, up to twelve months after the interview by informing me by email. Interviews are normally voice recorded but if you do not consent to this then I, as the researcher, would be required take detailed notes during the interview instead.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

What you say during the interview will be typed up by me afterwards. In accordance with English law (the Data Protection Act 1998) both the voice recording and notes from your interview will be stored securely; the voice recording will be locked away in a cabinet and the documents will be saved electronically in a password protected folder. Only I, as the researcher, will have access to this material. This means your participation will remain **confidential**.

Please be assured that your name and the names of people, places, and groups / organisations you discuss will be altered after the interview so your identity or their identity will not be divulged. You are not expected to identify yourself to others as a participant in this research. This means that your participation is **anonymous**. The only exception to this would be if you refused complete anonymity, which would result in your actual first name being used, although identifiable details of all other people, groups and organisations would still be altered to protect their anonymity.

Contact Information

If you have further enquiries regarding your participation in this research, please contact me directly by email kate.mukungu@northumbria.ac.uk or telephone _____.

If you require my research supervisor to provide verification about this research or wish to raise a concern with her please contact: **Dr Katy Jenkins** by email katy.jenkins@northumbria.ac.uk

Your Sincerely

Kate Mukungu

Doctoral Researcher

Appendix D - Verbal Informed Consent Form



Centre for International Development
Northumbria University
Newcastle upon Tyne
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NE1 8ST

To be completed by the researcher in consultation with the participant at the start of the interview in either Namibia or Northern Ireland. This form records that verbal informed consent has been obtained from the research participant

Name of project: Women's activism on violence against women in post-conflict societies

Researcher's name: Kate Mukungu

Participant's first name as chosen by her:

Date of interview:

No.	Informed Consent Indicator	Please tick
1.	I have explained the nature of the research to the participant, including what the interview will involve and for what purpose the research will be used.	
2.	I have given the participant the chance to ask questions about the study and her participation in it	
3.	I have explained that participation in the research is entirely voluntary and the participant is free to withdraw from the research at any stage during the interview or up to twelve months after the interview, without the need to give a reason.	
4a.	I have explained that all data will be anonymised and that only the researcher and project team will	

	know which individuals have participated in the research.	
4.b	I have explained that all data, with the exception of the participant's first name, will be anonymised.	
5.	I have explained that the participants name and details, and the details of other individuals she discusses, will be securely and confidentially stored and will not appear in any printed documents	
6.	I have supplied the participant with a copy of the research participant information sheet	
7a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I confirm that the participant has agreed to the interview being recorded OR 	
7b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I confirm that the participant did not give consent for the interview to be recorded but did give consent for detailed notes to be taken 	
8	<p>I confirm that the participant has agreed with the following statement of confirmation</p> <p>"I agree to the University of Northumbria at Newcastle recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) set out in the information sheet supplied to me, and my consent is conditional upon the university complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act (England) 1998."</p>	
9	I confirm that the participant has verbally given their informed consent to take part in the research.	

Researcher's signature:

Date:

APPENDIX E: Categories from Open Coding Spreadsheet			
Namibia Data		Northern Ireland Data	
Row	Broad Category	Row	Broad Category
1.	Early childhood / community (place)	1.	Early childhood / community (religion)
2.	Effects of apartheid / colonisation on activists – including memories of fear	2.	Effects of the troubles on their life– everyday life and major events
3.	Family dynamics and issues	3.	Family problems
4.	Language and communication across cultural groups	4.	Escapism – music, drugs / drink, books, travel
5.	Living in poverty	5.	Personal experiences of VAWG
6.	Safety and danger in childhood	6.	Sibling relationships
7.	Liberation struggle activism - school boycotts and adult activism	7.	VAWG activism testimonies – detailed - older and younger women
8.	Accessing education and work	8.	Observations of politics, religion and class in community / country (field?)
9.	Pregnancy and abortion issues	9.	Dealing with the “other”
10.	The split between the exiled and those active in the struggle in Namibia.	10	Political perspectives - peace and reconciliation perspective, left wing analysis – importance of education
11.	Personal experiences of VAWG	11	The Troubles and VAWG activism
12.	Everyday ethnic division – “tribalism”	12	Segregation of housing & education
13.	VAWG activism testimonies - older and younger women - coming together.	13	Gender / feminism and ethno-nationalism - pulling against each other,
14.	Feminism and LGBT alliances protesting political homophobia which recurs over time	14	Abortion rights / repro justice / right to choose
15.	VAWG awareness through media	15	Activism that changes society
16.	Collaborating with male activists – challenging public misogyny by men	16	Sectarianism – various perspectives and experiences

17.	Ghosts of intragroup violence - disappeared, dungeons, VAWG, trauma, lack of reconciliation	17	Feminism – what it means, support of feminists and how that shapes activism. Intersectionality.
18.	Activism across colour / race	18	Building the collective. Contributions from younger and older activists. Mutual admiration and close relationships.
19.	Splits in women’s activism / past efforts at coalitions – NGO feminism versus (pro-Gov) gender equality	19	Harm caused by conflict actors to women / children in own communities
20.	Female solidarity across cultures in VAWG activism (contested - tribalism)	20	Societal / NI challenges to the collective – need to protect it
21.	Reticence about being associated with LGBT+ activists (while quietly supporting them). Oppressive homophobic environment.	21	Network of collectives with crossover of key actors and causes. Pooled effort and impact.
22.	Building the current VAWG coalition –mix of hope and deflation it is not achieving potential	22	The importance of protest events and the politics around them
23.	Relations in activism between older and younger women. Expectations and the issue of respect for elders.	23	Getting “stick” – too big for boots. The importance of support from more experienced activists, to withstand this. Older and younger activists, relying on each other.
24.	Anecdotes about how cultures view VAWG and gender equality	24	Effects of prisoner releases on community sector (women)
25.	Shortcomings of activism	25	Competition for funding - stifling
	Addressing VAWG in one’s own cultural group (sometime ethnic division – sometimes access)	26	State overlooking past (and ongoing) VAWG by combatants – activists’ dilemma about old wounds
27.	Assessments of VAWG in Namibia – apartheid trauma, culture, gender	27	Human rights as a green / Catholic issue. PUL women discouraged from feminism and activism.
28.	Role of the born frees / the future generation - change over time	28	Importance of online activism
29.	Miscellaneous codes	29	Activism across ethnonationalism. Some avoidance of contentious issues. Fall back on goals.
30.		30	Miscellaneous codes

APPENDIX F: Northern Ireland Headline Data on Effects of the Troubles

Row 2: Effects of the troubles on their life– everyday life and major events

Columns: Participants A - J

- 2A** Loss of family murdered members came in waves throughout childhood. It was like living with their ghosts. You learned to be cautious – don't answer the door unless you know who is on the other side.
- 2B** Realised the impact as an adult. Restrictions to everyday living and clashes with the policy / army.
- 2C** Totally impacted as a Republican. Family members in prison and injured. Ex-partner causing hurt to her and others. His abuse was not challenged because he was Republican paramilitary / prisoner. Harassment from police and army.
- 2D** As a child 2 best friends lost mothers – death and prison. Beaten up as a teenager. Had to cross interface areas - dangerous.
- 2E** Eviction of best childhood friend. Acts of bigotry from family members during funeral.
- 2F** Part of the backdrop of life rather than the centre of it. Regular incidents but did not live in fear.
- 2G** Houses burnt all at once and forced relocations. Ongoing day to day restrictions had her trying to break out.
- 2H** Bomb incident as a child – too young to understand and it felt like a novelty. Encountering discrimination
- 2I** More security aware in interface areas.
- 2J** Innocent father interned. Health effects and effects in community. Constantly targeted and bullied – feeling trapped. Getting beaten up with little interest from police.

APPENDIX G: Research Notes 29/07/2015

Listening to interviews content about and the informal coalition. It's sad **activist's name** sees it as some sort of failure - it really isn't. Looking from the outside in they have managed to create more of a sustained presence than anyone since the old days of the Multimedia Campaign. With all the different hopes members have for it, I think it feels difficult when some realise it can't be everything they want all at once. This was clear from **activist's name** who seemed to put a lot of pressure on herself for it to have impact. The relationship issues with the Ministry are clearly taking their toll and tempers seem frayed. But this could be channelled with some facilitated work on the basics – What is our name? What are the changes we want to see? How is our coalition going to help those along? What do we give ourselves permission not to do?! What barriers do we face and how are we going to handle them? I'm not sure what a change in structure would achieve – the issues are about mission, goals and managing peoples' expectations, especially when it comes to relationships with gov.