

AN ATTEMPT TO SEIZE THE POLITICAL OCCASION.

A Study Dealing with Time in the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition.

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ABSTRACT

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The study deals with a party called the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (henceforth: the NIWC), established in 1996. The party participated in the multi-party negotiations for the Belfast Agreement (Good Friday Agreement), signed by a range of parties and both British and Irish governments in May 1998. With the agreement the rules and practices of the local parliament (Stormont) were reshaped and devolved powers for the new assembly defined.

The study operates on two levels. On the one hand the focus is on the external events shaping the formation of the party, as well as the period following its emergence. On the other hand the study deals with the way "realised chances" are incorporated into the argumentation of the party, i.e. how the party legitimises its existence and actions by using the novelty of the political situation as their point of reference. The party political field and its discourses are considered a temporal constellation of politicisations, which are potentially reshaped by introducing new politicisations. The negotiations for the Belfast Agreement and its signing mark a distinctive period in the parliamentary life of the region, as the power-sharing mechanisms were established and the legislative power of Stormont strengthened by devolution. Within this framework the argumentation of the party is considered both outside and inside the parliament.

The course of the study starts with the introduction to the development of the Northern Ireland peace process in the 1990s. The adopted temporal approach is outlined, after which the arguments of the party are considered both inside and outside the parliament. In the end a short assessment on the reasons the party failed to secure its vote is presented. The central reasons for this failure coil up to the way the party was unable to respond to the changing political situation by keeping the Belfast Agreement as its main point of reference in argumentation. Thus, while the early success of the NIWC was an outcome of realising a political opportunity, its incapability to move away from its point of departure proved fatal.

Keywords: Political times, politicisation, the Belfast Agreement, Northern Ireland, women's party, parliamentarism

TIIVISTELMÄ

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Tutkielma käsittelee Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (tästä eteenpäin NIWC) –nimistä pohjoisirlantilaista puoluetta, joka perustettiin Belfastissa 1996. Puolue osallistui neuvotteluihin, jotka päättyivät rauhansopimuksen allekirjoittamiseen toukokuussa 1998. Belfastin sopimuksen allekirjoittivat Ison-Britannian ja Irlannin tasavallan hallitukset sekä suurin osa Pohjois-Irlannin valtapuolueista. Sopimuksessa määriteltiin uudelleen hallinnollisten instituutioiden muoto sekä vallansiirrossa Pohjois-Irlannille määräytyvät oikeudet.

Tutkielma kohdistuu kahteen tasoon. Yhtäältä se käsittelee tapahtumia, jotka vaikuttivat puolueen perustamiseen ja sen jälkeiseen aikaan. Toisaalta tutkielma käsittelee sitä, miten nämä tapahtumat ja niistä johtuneet ja toteutuneet mahdollisuudet ovat läsnä puolueen argumentaatioissa, eli miten puolue legitimoii olemassaolonsa käyttäen uutta poliittista tilannetta hyväkseen. Puoluepoliittinen kenttä ja sen diskurssit käsitetään tässä ajallisiksi konstellatioiksi, jotka koostuvat politisoineista ja joita on mahdollista uusien politisointien kautta muokata. Rauhanneuvottelut ja sopimus ovat merkityksellisiä parlamentarismien kehitykselle alueella, koska uusi sopimus introdusoi uudenlaisia toimintatapoja parlamenttiin sekä vallanjaon että – siirron muodossa. Tässä viitekehyksessä puolueen argumentaatiota tarkastellaan sekä parlamentin ulkopuolella että sen sisällä.

Tutkielma etenee kontekstin ja lyhyen rauhanprosessin historiikin esittelystä tässä omaksutun ajallisen näkökulman esittelyyn. Tämän jälkeen NIWC:n argumentointia tarkastellaan parlamentissa sekä sen ulkopuolella. Lopussa listataan muutamia syitä puolueen epäonnistuneeseen yritykseen turvata asemansa. Keskeinen syy löytyy tavasta, jolla puolue oli sitonut argumentaationsa rauhansopimuksen paradigmaan, eikä onnistunut hyödyntämään laajempaa retorista skaalaa. Näin NIWC siis aluksi onnistuneesti hyödynsi poliittisen tilaisuuden, muttei sen jälkeen onnistunut laajentamaan liikkumavaraansa.

Avainsanat: Poliittinen aika, politisointi, Belfastin sopimus, Pohjois-Irlanti, naispuolue, parlamentarismi

Contents

Abbreviations.....	2
1. Introduction	3
2. Situating the Coalition	9
2.1. The peace process: A brief review	9
2.2. The Belfast Agreement.....	13
2.3. Governing after the partition: Stormont	17
2.4. The formation of the political centre	22
2.5. Women’s movements and political participation	25
2.6. The emergence of the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition	27
3. A temporal approach	33
3.1. On political times	34
3.2. Polity-politicisation	37
3.3. Time: Space and motion.....	42
3.3.1. <i>Motion</i>	45
3.3.2. <i>Space</i>	50
4. “Humanizing the dialogue”	55
4.1. Politicising women	56
4.2. Female experience	59
5. On the scene of the crime: The novices of a commencing Assembly	65
5.1. On representation.....	66
5.2. The New Assembly	75
5.3. Mediating the “will of the people”	82
5.4. Leading the country	85
6. Discussion	88
References:	94

Abbreviations

APNI	Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
MP	Member of Parliament
NICRA	Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association
NIWC	Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (also: the Coalition)
IRA	Irish Republican Army
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
IICD	International Independent Commission on Decommissioning
PR (STV)	Proportional Representation (Single Transferable Vote)
PUP	Progressive Unionist Party
UDA	Ulster Defence Association
UKUP	United Kingdom Unionist Party
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force

1. Introduction

The conflict in Northern Ireland can be a very tiring context for a study. About it books and texts are written that would constitute a pile of speculating literature, miles high, with parts of the “truth” about the conflict hidden in each one of them. It seems everything worth saying about it has already been said. I feel like agreeing.

The question about a divided society is never as black and white as it is presented to be in its most simplistic form. The shades of gray found in it can also be argued to be of no significance to anyone, except for those interested in that specific case. At this point, at the time of writing the final lines for my thesis, I am willing to put the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition into the category of “interesting, with some significance”. The reasons for this are as follows:

The reason, which makes the Coalition interesting, is its fierce start. Indeed, it is of no little achievement to rise from non-existence into the local parliament within only two years – considering the special circumstances of a conflict society and its strong, traditional parties with established status. Furthermore, it was by no means the only party realising the exceptionality of the political situation in the mid-1990s: the Green Party was there alongside with the Conservative Party, as well as other groupings. Somehow, then, the Coalition had been able to argue for its case in a more convincing way than the other participants. This means the party has also had some significance in the course of the peace process; after all, it managed to convince the electorate about its competence and turn its participation in the negotiating forum into a success in its first Assembly elections.

Another reason the Coalition is interesting is the way it managed to bring in the category of women and use it in arguing for its cross-communal point of departure. In a way this move is ingenious: “women” forms a large group of citizens with no party to carry out its name, and, arguably, the number of women elected to the parliament is one of the lowest in Europe. Following the lines of the discussion about equality, the case of gender equality was logical to gain visibility too.

The final reason why the Coalition is of interest is also the most significant one. From the point of view of political theory, the Coalition provided an example of the party as born out of and in a special period of time. The timing and the acuteness of the party mark its whole existence as it was so willing to stress its contemporary nature. It presented its roots to be firmly grounded in the solid base of the Northern Irish conflict, but at the same time it was able to rise above the division with its novelties brought about in the form of the special qualities of women. While a period can be a significant one for number of reasons, the situation at the time of the formation of the party was arguably an exceptional time of deconstruction and political activism, out of which the development of a less violent society was to be accelerated. A party emerging from such a background may provide interesting insights into the contemporary polity.

Because of the background mentioned above, the point of view, from which to approach the Coalition, the aspects of political theory concerning time are of interest. In adopting the temporal approach different theories about time are being utilised. The idea of *kairos* and *chronos* (Lindroos 1998) illustrate one point of view, while further formulations of Palonen are also used in widening the point. The classifications of Evans are used as one way of looking at the temporal figures in relation to the story about the emergence of the Coalition. All of these types of conceptualising time are thus used variably in the course of the study, as tools for conceptualising the role time has in relation to the party.

The questions asked during the course of the study are prompted by the exceptional situation of the 1990s in the politics of Northern Ireland, but also by my interest in the party political field of the region at the time of my exchange period in 2003. At the time the Assembly had just been suspended the previous autumn, and the election for it was around the corner. Prime Minister Blair, however, postponed the election (perhaps in hoping this would win time for the moderate parties to reassure their electorates for the excellence of the politics of compromise), after which the more radical parties outnumbered their moderate counterparts, with the centrist Alliance experiencing a decline in its vote and the Coalition losing its two Assembly seats. I began to wonder how the Coalition was able to win any seats in the first place.

My thesis was, and is, that the 1990s was a crucial time in regard to the peace process. What was it that made it special, i.e. how did the situation turn out the way it did? What

were the features making that made the time seem exceptional? These questions became a part of the process of reading about the context, about the political developments of the 1990s. This is also the (self-evident) reason, why it is necessary to include the conflict into this study, to serve as a point of reference. Obviously, keeping the conflict out of the central role of the study proved to be a bit more complicated than I had initially thought. Despite of this I have tried to concentrate on the events and developments important to the formation and argumentation of the Coalition, and leave the conflict –in terms of trying to explain or resolve it- into the background.

Once I had agreed with the idea that the period in question was one of revolutionary in nature I began to focus on the question of how the Coalition is embedded in these developments. Since it was formed out of the realisation of the exceptional time, it would have traces of this time written into the backbone of its argumentation. How was the exceptionality of this time legitimised? How was it used to legitimise the existence of the party and to support its arguments? And how was the party seeing the experiential difference and the relationship between the present and the past? What kind of figures were there to express time?

The history of governing Northern Ireland has left its marks on the party political culture of the region. Because of this a short assessment on this history is provided in the chapter concerning the context. The Coalition stated its willingness to participate into the politics on the formal sphere, to be a political party among the established ones. Managing to get two representatives elected firstly into the negotiating forum and then into the parliament meant that this wish would be realised, at least until the next election or prorogation of the Assembly. The reason for considering the arguments of the Coalition on the parliamentary level, although somewhat briefly, lies in the way I consider the negotiation of the Belfast Agreement and the establishment of the power-sharing institutions an act of democratisation: the need for wider representation, the need to “hear different voices” the Coalition is arguing for is potentially a way of developing a functional form of representative democracy, in which the idea of representation and a debating Assembly would improve the quality of life in the region.

The reason the Agreement is considered here as important is the way the Coalition uses it as a point of reference, as legitimating the existence of the Assembly and its participation

in it. In a way the Agreement is used as a tool for an attempted shift in the discourse: The established polity and discourse are coiled up around the constitutional issue, with its origins in the partition of the island in 1921. The Agreement provided the Coalition with an opportunity to use another point of reference, namely the contemporary constitution. Rhetorically this would mean a constitutional paradigm updated to suit the contemporary vocabulary using concepts like human rights, equality, reconciliation and power-sharing.

Some notes about the usage of Evans should be stated here. First of all, it may seem strange to adopt such a theory as providing a viewpoint for a study, which has no relation to a study from a field of cognitive linguistic approach. However, the classification Evans makes has served here as a source of inspiration by introducing a wide selection of possible temporal figures to detect in a text. Being a cognitive linguist, Evans concentrates on several points of no interest from my personal point of view. It would be wrong, however, to leave his theory without any recognition, since it has had an impact on the way I read some parts of the material. Thus his classification was adopted to mark one possible approach into the problem of expressing time.

The conceptual choices I have made may need clarification. The abovementioned Belfast Agreement is referred to as a constitution, although it is merely titled “agreement”. This is because of the institutional introductions made in it, as well as the issues of security and the defining of the powers to be devolved from Westminster. To put it shortly, the Agreement reforms the way the region is governed and defines ideals for it in a way that it can be considered a constitutional change. The concepts of “assembly” and “parliament” are used interchangeably in terms of Northern Ireland because of the way it has been considered a distinctive part of the United Kingdom with relatively independent Assembly (when operative). The term “unionist” is used when referring to a non-violent matter of the predominantly Protestant community, whereas “loyalist” refers to the paramilitary – oriented fraction. On the predominantly Catholic side the corresponding terms used are “nationalist” and “republican”. I have chosen to write all of these with small initials, even though they can also be written with capitals in part of the literature. These terms are also referring to the population in the North, although the same categorisations apply to the South of Ireland as well. The IRA refers to the Provisional Irish Republican Army without further discussion about the different branches broken out from it. The violent period of

history from 1969 onwards is at times referred to as “the Troubles”, a local term used in Northern Ireland and also the speeches analysed here.

The speeches quoted are a selection of ones among the group of those sent to me by an NIWC member in 2004. The material concerning the argumentation outside the parliament consists of speeches, which are given in different kinds of conferences –one of those being an annual NIWC –conference. Thus the speeches are addressed to an audience attending a meeting or a conference, where the role of the addressee might seem like less a politician, more an academic (as in the case of Professor McWilliams). However, the speeches concern the role of Northern Ireland women’s coalition, its emergence and participation – whether this is done by introducing its ideology by widely presenting ideas of Italian feminists or concentrating more specifically on the contemporary political situation. In these speeches the optimism concerning the future of Northern Ireland is strongly present, and highlighting the potential key role the women might be able to realise within this process is further stressed by underlining the competence achieved through “female experience”, an essence possessed by the women all around the region and thus capable of participating.

The material of the parliamentary speeches varies from the speeches given in different conferences in that the role of a politician becomes more obvious and the role of an unparliamentary party, a social movement, becomes less so. The audience consists of those participating in the constitutional politics alongside with the members of the Coalition and is not present at the Assembly to learn about the core principles of the party, but to hear the arguments made from the position the Coalition is representing. The power-sharing principle, so explicitly stated in the new constitution, provides the Assembly with a situation unfamiliar to any of the established parties: while with the restoration of the Proportional Representation the smaller parties have been present in the parliament, after the Agreement the model of a power-sharing executive and the principle of consent is rooted in the very nature of governing the region. With the newly shaped Police and the process of decommissioning, the province is about to experience changes in the nature of security in the civil society as well, and this sense of new security the authorities are trying to promote in order to start the confidence-building between the communities should be reflected in the governing Assembly. The optimism of the Coalition expressed outside the

parliament is turned there into a repeated reassurance of the other parties about the capability and the potentiality of the new system.

Further material, although not explicitly quoted, consists of the rest of the speeches sent to me from Belfast. This is a set of texts, some of which have their initial purpose of use documented at the top of the text, some of which have remained undocumented. I consider these a significant part of the material, even though they have left without recognition elsewhere in the text; it is by using these I have chosen the themes to serve the purpose of the study and decided on the focus of this study. In short, it is naturally this whole range of speeches that has influenced my apprehension about the Coalition.

The period of time the speeches both inside and outside the parliament is chosen to concentrate on the years around the Agreement. One of the non-parliamentary speeches is from 1997, a year before the signing, and is one given at Trinity University. The others are dated between 1999 and 2002, with quotations taken mainly from those of 1999. The parliamentary debates concentrate on the early days of the Assembly, newly established and without fully devolved powers. The quotations are from years 1998 to 2000, a period during which the Assembly took its first steps in the implementation of the party. The reason the material is chosen from these periods is that the approach adopted here concentrates on the emergence of the Coalition, the way a political occasion, or a chance, was realised and how there was an attempt to establish this realisation into a political party with a secured vote.

The study begins with an assessment on the political situation the Coalition was born out of. The past events, which have had their impact on the course of the peace process, are outlined. The question of parliamentarism and representation form a distinctive level of the study, and begins with a brief history of governing the region. The third chapter is dedicated to the temporal approach and some aspects of the argumentation of the Coalition. Chapter four illustrates the Coalition's ways of legitimising its existence among the parties, and chapter five concentrates on the party members turned into Members of Parliament. In the final chapter I have made some conclusive remarks and outlined some of the reasons for the failure of the Women's Coalition to renew its electoral success in 2003 and turn into an established parliamentary party.

2. Situating the Coalition

In this chapter the political situation at the time of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition's (henceforth: the NIWC/the Coalition) formation will be discussed shortly. The peace process set the framework for the political climate of the 1990s, and the party political landscape fluctuated according to the developments in the negotiations, cease-fires and the signing and implementation of the agreement. The Agreement –context and the conceptual framework of the negotiations have had an impact on the issues and concepts used in the rhetoric of the parties, not least in the case of the Coalition, since its formation prompted out of the idea of getting women elected into the negotiating forum. The forum was the one to decide the next course Stormont would take in the history of governing Northern Ireland. This history is been discussed in this chapter in order to cast light on to the development in the role of the parliament during the existence of the Northern Ireland province. From the point of view of the rhetorical choices of the Coalition an important point is the situation on the party political field contemporary to the party's establishment, i.e. the existence of the Alliance Party as the fifth choice of parties. Thus the formation of the “political centre” will be briefly outlined, as will be the history of women's movements in the region. It is against this background that the emergence of the Women's Coalition can finally be considered.

2.1. The peace process: A brief review¹

The Belfast Agreement (the Good Friday Agreement²) was preceded by other agreements and declarations, which had an impact on the issues and forms of the one signed in 1998. One often mentioned is the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973, an agreement negotiated by both Irish and British governments alongside with three Northern parties, i.e. the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (henceforth: the APNI/the Alliance), the Social Democratic and Labour Party (henceforth: the SDLP) and the Ulster Unionist Party (henceforth: the UUP). The agreement, which eventually fell in the face of the unionist opposition, was the first to introduce the idea of power-sharing executive for Northern Ireland. In it the Irish

¹ Section 2.1 is based on following publications: Coogan 2004; Cox et al. 2006; McKittrick & McVea 2001 and Neumann 2003

² The Belfast Agreement will also be referred in the text as “the Agreement”

government also recognises the boundaries of Northern Ireland saying that the constitutional status of the region would only be altered should the people so wish. The Irish dimension was also introduced by presenting the idea of the Council of Ireland, completing the list of issues that ended up in the Belfast Agreement, also called “Sunningdale for slow learners”. The Anglo-Irish Agreement signed in 1985 gave the Irish government a consultative role on the affairs of the North of Ireland as well as confirmed that the status of Northern Ireland as a part of the union can only be altered with the consent of the majority of the people. The unionists again protested, but the document was eventually signed by Margaret Thatcher, the contemporary prime minister of the United Kingdom. It is argued, that one of the aims of the prime minister was to strengthen the SDLP and detract Sinn Féin, who seemed to be gaining support.

Despite the on going violence the republicans with the party leader Gerry Adams were exploring the options for another approach to the Irish Question. The signing of the Anglo – Irish Agreement had made it difficult for the Irish Republican Army (henceforth: the IRA) to argue that their campaign was against a colonial, occupational force because of the outlined principle of consent. The new nationalist theory formulated and advocated by the SDLP leader John Hume as well as the Irish Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald ceased to point the British as the source of the problem arguing instead, that the Protestant community was to blame for the permanency of the border, since it only still existed because of their demands, not the interests of the British. At the turn of the decade the result was a series of talks between different parties, most of them kept private. In a few years’ time it became clear that the republicans, with whom no one agreed to negotiate in public, had been in contact with such actors as John Hume, some representatives of the Catholic Church as well as representatives from both Irish and British governments.

The Downing Street Declaration (the Joint Declaration) reached finally in December 1993 after dramatic talks and negotiations between both governments, Sinn Féin and the SDLP restated the issues of consent and self-determination. However, the key issues the republicans had been claiming for (such as a timetable for a British withdrawal and an acknowledgement of the value of a united Ireland) had not made it to the final version. The republicans asked for a clarification about the content of the declaration, and as the British refused, a stalemate developed. A further crack in the relationship between Sinn Féin and the British government, led by the Prime Minister John Major occurred when the President

of United States Bill Clinton invited Gerry Adams to visit the United States, despite the wishes of Prime Minister Major to keep the republicans excluded. Later on in May 1994 the British changed their minds and did amplify the declaration, but without a response, i.e. a cease-fire, from the republicans.

The early 1990's was marked by the continuous campaigns of violence by the paramilitaries on both sides. The possibility of an IRA cease-fire as a precondition to any further talks between the British government and the republicans was repeatedly disavowed by Gerry Adams. Nevertheless, the first republican cease-fire was declared in August 1994, and the loyalist paramilitaries followed later in the autumn. A formerly absent political element emerged from the loyalist side and such groups as the Ulster Volunteer Force (henceforth: the UVF) and the Ulster Defence Association (henceforth: the UDA) produced parties to function as their political wing. The IRA announcement was received with a cautiously welcoming but suspicious tone by the British as well as the unionists, and in spite of the Irish government's attempt to push for early talks, it seemed the cease-fires did not mean immediate progress for the process. In addition, the IRA remained active in internal "disciplinary" operations, which further fed doubts about the consistence of the cease-fire. In 1995 the two governments published a declaration called the Framework Document, which later became the basis for the negotiations for peace, although in the time of its publishing the unionists refused to accept it in any form. It stressed the unionist consent by stating that Northern Ireland was to remain as a part of the United Kingdom. The distinctive Irish nationalist identity was to become formally expressed via new cross-border institutions and a stronger input from the Irish government's side.

The problem of getting into negotiations became apparent for Sinn Féin when the issue of decommissioning entered the scene. Decommissioning of weapons meant disarming the paramilitaries –both republican and loyalist, but the main problem was the question about the willingness of the IRA to announce that the war truly was over, and to put their weapons out of use. The act was to serve as evidence of the permanence of the cease-fire and the commitment of the republicans into the democratic process. The republicans refused to accept disarming of the IRA as a precondition to the talks, while the unionists and the British refused to make a move before the decommissioning had started. Finally a commission, consisted of a former United States Senator George Mitchell, a Canadian

general John de Chastelain and a former prime minister of Finland, Harri Holkeri, was established to assess the problem. The result of their analysis put out in January 1996 was that the demand for decommissioning as a precondition was an unrealistic one, and that disarming should take place parallel to the talks. Major rejected the suggestion and there seemed no prospects about the beginning of the inter-party talks the republicans had called for.

The IRA cease-fire came to an end in February, only about a month after the publication of the Mitchell report. In a couple of month's time, however, the idea of the multi-party talks took a step forward, as the elections for the debating forum for the talks were held. It turned out that Sinn Féin was the main beneficiary with its vote going up, and the SDLP vote slightly declining. The talks started and went on in spite of some activity from the paramilitaries on both sides. The Protestant vote for the forum had been divided into nearly a half, between David Trimble, the party leader of the UUP and his supporters agreeing to enter into the talks with Sinn Féin and Ian Paisley, the leader of the Democratic Unionist Party (henceforth: the DUP) with those against the republican participation. After the IRA performed an attack to British army's Northern Ireland headquarters, the republicans' assurances about their commitment to peace were treated with disbelief. The British-republican – relationship was restored only after Labour won the election for Westminster in 1997 and Tony Blair became prime minister.

Even though the IRA was still operative, Prime Minister Blair and his government alongside with their colleagues in Dublin declared that Sinn Féin would be allowed to enter the talks without decommissioning as a precondition. They announced that the negotiations would start in the autumn and Sinn Féin would be welcome six weeks after another cease-fire. The IRA responded in July with a complete cessation, and David Trimble kept his party, the UUP, in the talks despite the entrance of Sinn Féin while Ian Paisley led his party, the DUP, out. The result was the Belfast Agreement of April 1998. The referenda in the North and the South showed a vast endorsement for the Agreement with 71.1% in the former and 94.4% in the latter. The unionist vote was divided, with 55% voting yes in comparison to the nationalists' endorsement of 96%. The following years brought about violence on both sides, including the Omagh bombing with a death rate of 29, but the implementation of the Agreement still, although somewhat slowly, got started. The first post-Agreement Assembly took its seats in Stormont in July 1998.

Since the first elections for the newly elected Assembly in 1998 its work has not gone on without interruptions. The full powers were devolved in December 1999, and the first suspension took place 11th of February 2000 and lasted until the end of May of the same year. In 2001 the Assembly was suspended for twenty-four hours on two occasions, and the current prorogation was called in October 2002. The next elections for the Assembly, postponed from May to November, were held in 2003, and it was in these elections that the DUP and Sinn Féin were given the status of the largest party in their communities. The greatest object of dispute was for a long time the issue of decommissioning, as the IRA did not give in its weapons as quickly as the unionists demanded. Furthermore, the act, when finally completed, was not considered to be transparent enough, and suspicions about the totality of the disarming were expressed by the unionists. By February 2006 in a report given by the International Independent Commission on Decommissioning (IICD), established for supervising the process in 1997, a closure on the IRA disarming was announced. The process is still unfinished with some of the loyalist organisations. Now the main problem is the relations of the DUP and Sinn Féin, and their incapability to govern together. The legislation is currently run by the Northern Ireland Office, led by the Northern Ireland Secretary of State, the representative of Westminster in Northern Ireland. The office was established in 1972, due to the suspension of a short-lived first version of the Assembly in the beginning of the Troubles.

2.2. The Belfast Agreement

As mentioned above, the endorsement of the Belfast Agreement varied between and inside the communities, with the unionist vote divided into half as opposed to the strong yes – vote of the nationalist side. This has been reflected in the development of the party political landscape since the signing of the Agreement. The more moderate parties on both sides, i.e. the UUP and the SDLP, were the central parties in delivering the agreement. John Hume's SDLP saw the final version of it as a culmination of its thinking, whereas the UUP, and especially David Trimble, were the major unionist voice in the negotiations. In spite of this, since the Agreement has become a reality and the problems in its implementation have occurred, these parties have lost parts of their votes for the more radical counterparts; Sinn Féin and the DUP were the numerical winners in the Assembly

elections of 2003. (Tonge 2006) The DUP has traditionally had a strong appeal in working class and fundamentally Protestant areas, but has now been able to gain more support in the upper middle class, traditionally UUP- voting areas. Sinn Féin has managed to do the same. The voters, who previously opposed the party for its linkages with the IRA, can now regard it as a parliamentary party, or at least a party heading for that direction. In addition, the party managed to mobilise the constituency and attract new voters from the group of those who had not voted before. The mode of election, Proportional Representation (Single Transferable Vote) (henceforth: PR (STV)), has had its role in shaping the landscape, in that the communal voting is still the dominant form: it is more likely that the lower-preference vote goes to the party within the community, regardless of its standings on the Agreement.³ (Ibid.)

The ability of the more radical parties to gain support on their areas has had its effect on the small political centre of Northern Ireland. The APNI and the NIWC experienced a collapse in their vote, with the APNI getting only half of its 1998 support in 2003. The traditional SDLP – voters have previously tended to give their lower-preference vote for the centrist parties, in reluctance for supporting a party considered to be the political wing of the IRA. The assurance Sinn Féin has given about its willingness to engage into the peace process has made it more acceptable in the eyes of the middle-class, traditionally SDLP – supporting constituency, who now are able to give their lower-preference votes for the other representative of the community. (Ibid.)

The Agreement consists of three main strands, which define the new democratic institutions established for securing the power-sharing. In addition there is a “micro-agenda”, which deals with the questions about decommissioning, the release of prisoners, policing and security. Commissions for human rights and equity were founded. Moreover, in the beginning the changes required for both the British and the Irish constitution are addressed. These changes are needed to formulate the new constitutional status of Northern Ireland, and means that the Republic of Ireland needs to drop the claim for the North from its constitution, and the British will reformulate their legislation in a way that, should the

³ The PR (STV) was the original franchise system introduced set in Northern Ireland in 1920. However, the unionist government, with its majority, legislated for a change into the first-past – the post –system in order to secure their domination. The original system was re-instituted in 1973 after the Alliance Party had successfully claimed for it. (Mitchell 2000, 19)

people of Northern Ireland so wish, Ulster would cease to be a part of the union. In the last section the conditions for implementation, validation and further reviewing of the Agreement are declared.⁴

The first strand provides Northern Ireland with a new, devolved Assembly, structured so that the principle of power-sharing and consent would be secured as effectively as possible. To ensure this there are safeguards to guarantee that the decision making is based on cross-community by either parallel consent or weighed majority. As mentioned above, the principle of power-sharing has its problems in a society like Northern Ireland, as the representatives of the two communities may not find a way to govern together. The decision –making based on the principle of cross-community also has its problems for those who do not wish to identify as either unionist or nationalist. The APNI has criticised this after, during a voting, two of their members were forced to identify themselves as unionist in order to ensure the confirmation for the legislation. They claimed that the required cross-communality only consolidated the existence of the two communities instead of transcending them and moving the parliamentary system into a direction, where the political actor would be more of an individual citizen rather than a member of either community. (Tonge 2006.)

Devolution as such has had its opponents and advocates in the unionist camp since the introduction of the power-sharing idea in the 1970s. The DUP has always been a devolutionist party, but power-sharing has not been appealing to them. The UUP has had its integrationist fraction, whose claim was that Northern Ireland should be governed more like Britain, but Westminster has indicated no support for this claim. The other half of the UUP was in favour of devolution, with ones advocating for a majority -, and others a power-sharing basis. The APNI, although a non-sectarian party often considered unionist, has always been in favour of a power-sharing, devolved Assembly. (Mitchell 2000.) The nationalist side has naturally had no objections for devolution or power-sharing, although sharing power with the DUP in current situation has proved impossible. The principle of consent, however, has been welcomed in part on both sides: for the UUP it works as an

⁴ <http://www.nio.gov.uk/agreement.pdf>

assurance about the consideration of their view and concerns, and for nationalist it provides a rhetorical tool for arguing for a possibility of a united Ireland. (Tonge 2006)

The structure of the institutions set in the Agreement is designed in a way that it creates a network of institutions not only inside the borders of Northern Ireland, but also across the borders. Furthermore, the attempt is to provide institutions in two directions. The second strand, then, formulates the functions and structures of the North/South Ministerial Council, which creates a link between Dublin and Belfast. The Republic of Ireland has a consultative role on the issues concerning matters within the island. The “Irish dimension” was not treated with pleasure by the unionists despite its consultative nature, but Reynolds (1999) argues, that when voting for the Agreement, the majority of unionist accepted the power-sharing, presence of the Republic and the possibility of a change in the constitutional status of the region. The third strand introduces two new institutions, the first of which is the British- Irish Council, members including the devolved institutions of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales as well as the British and Irish Governments and representatives of the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. The other is the British –Irish Intergovernmental Conference, a body formed by the two governments.

The “micro-agenda” of the Agreement has been an important part for the republicans and nationalists. (Tonge 2006.) The reason for this lies in the delicacy of the question about decommissioning, but also the history of policing in Northern Ireland has been problematical. The tradition is that the IRA was originally established for protection of the Catholic side, since the police force was 90% Protestant. The Good Friday Agreement sets a new institution for security and policing in Northern Ireland, with founding principles being cross-communality and human rights. The issue of prisoner release is important to both republican and loyalist side. The DUP has developed an especially strong moral opposition against the issues on policing and decommissioning, but also the early release of prisoners has been objected. (Tonge 2006.)

One insight on the Agreement is, that

“...this document went further, and was full of ingenious formulations which together provided a closely interlocking system designed to take account of all the political relationships within Northern Ireland, between north and south and between Britain and Ireland” (McKittrick et al. 2001, 220)

Another point of view is provided by Reynolds, who argues (1999), that the potential of the Good Friday Agreement lays in the way it leans on consociationalism. Following Lijphart, he states that the four basic elements of consociationalism (i.e. grand coalition, segmental autonomy, proportionality and mutual veto) can be found as such in the agreement, although some conditions, such as the existence of a majority rule, are not as such favourable to a consociational solution. A counterpart for successful constitutional solutions based on consociationalism can be found in the South African peace process, where the agreement was finally reached through an adequate amount of institutionalised power-sharing. However, Reynolds stresses the transitional nature of the consociational solutions and institutions and argues, that the power-sharing mechanisms of the Good Friday Agreement are, as they proved to be in South Africa and Zimbabwe, only functioning as stepping stones towards either a majority rule or a plural democracy with PR. In the case of Northern Ireland, the potentially transitional nature of the agreement has become an object of the unionist opposition, in the fear of the weakening of the union and steering the region into the direction of a united Ireland.

The comparisons to the peace process in South Africa do not limit only to the question about the direction the Agreement is taking the region. Using another conflict and its resolution as a point of reference can be helpful for the politicians in arguing their case as the other –preferably successful- conflict can provide for useful concepts, examples of legitimising new institutions and in some cases reassurance about the outcome (Guelke 2006). The conflict and peace process in Northern Ireland has been compared to the one in Israel and Palestine, Zimbabwe and South Africa (Mitchell 2000 & 2002; Gidron et al. 2002; Knox & Quirk 2000). Some adaptations to the vocabulary of the peace process have also been made, for instance the idea of reconciliation. The Coalition uses the South African case as a point of reference in their speeches.

2.3. Governing after the partition: Stormont

The peace process and the arguments for allowing Sinn Féin in it made the negotiations more inclusive and meant that a larger share of people had their representatives involved in shaping the democratic institutions for the province. Developing new institutions and authoring the power-sharing mechanisms as well as the safeguards for both sides was

crucial for the creation of an atmosphere for “a fresh start”; the institutions would signify a new, more democratic way of governing in Northern Ireland, without the threat of either side being excluded from the decision making. Furthermore, these institutions would be designed to function as the form of governing Northern Ireland in particular, in which case they were also developed to serve its complex conditions. The newly established and reformulated parliament would be the forum for legislation and political dialogue. However, a parliament functions on a debating basis, in which case a culture for such a debate and language would be required, and Northern Ireland has had a long history of majority rule and non-alteration of parliament.

The Government of Ireland Act of 1920 granted Stormont a range of legislative powers, so called “transferred matters” (among which were the issues of security and electoral arrangements), a parliament and an executive (Neumann 2003, 14-15). The situation is described by Neumann the following way:

“Although the supreme authority of the British parliament was reaffirmed in section 75 of the 1920 Act, Westminster refrained from legislating in matters that were considered to be the responsibility of Stormont. As a result, the Northern Ireland government was what I Budge and C. O’Leary describe as a ‘self-governing province with some trappings of sovereignty’.” (2003, 15)

The Government of Ireland Act was replaced by the Northern Ireland Act of 1998⁵, in which the procedures for implementing the Good Friday Agreement and the proceeding of devolution with devolved powers were articulated. The important point in the latter act is precisely the explicit replacement of the act of 1920 because of its fierce opposition among the nationalist community; the new act could be interpreted to be an insurance of a new beginning and a change in the culture of governing. The legislative powers granted belong to the greater realm of the devolution in the United Kingdom, with which the regional legislative powers of Scotland and Wales (but not England, which does not as such have a local parliament of its own) are strengthened.

As mentioned before, during the division of the island the mode of election for the North was PR. The first election in May 1921 brought about a vast majority for unionists, a majority which then was left to govern on its own since those twelve nationalists who

⁵ For a .pdf –version of the Act see <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/law/hamlyn/ni98.pdf>

managed to win seats refused to take them (Buckland 2001, 211).⁶ This set the foundation for the practically unionist state of the forthcoming decades. Googan (2004, 298) argues, that the breadth of discrimination against the Catholic/nationalist part of the population resembled a Northern Irish version of the South African apartheid. On a more moderate note Buckland (2001, 211) takes the view that, even though the accusations against the unionist regime of that time have been “grossly exaggerated”, the pursuit of policies of the unionist regime did concentrate on the interests of the majority while failing to address the concerns of the minority. With the ongoing absence of the nationalist representatives and the domination of the unionists in the parliament the majority was able to execute the aforementioned act of abolishing the PR in 1929.⁷ The advantage of the first-past-the post –system was completed by modifying the boundaries of the constituencies in a way that secured a win for the unionists in otherwise Catholic dominated area (Cronin 2001, 209). The British government took no action to change the course of the matters, since its attitude towards “the Irish Question” was to leave Ulster to manage its own internal affairs; with the partition settlement the province was considered out of the British agenda and not welcomed back (Neumann 2003, 15). Furthermore, because of the independence of the Irish Free State the number of its seats in Westminster were reduced, which meant that the Irish vote would no longer have a substantial role in London (Ibid.).

The interwar years of the parliament were dominated by the UUP, with its leader, James Graig, maintaining the post of the prime minister until his death in 1940 (Cronin 2001, 209). The unionist dominance was to last until the fall of Stormont in 1972. English (1998, 98-99) argues that the exclusion of an effective voice of the Catholic constituency on both local and parliamentary level prevented Northern Ireland from developing a proper culture for political debate, and strengthened the Catholics’ feeling about the illegitimacy of the institutions of the province. English writes about the problems of terminology concerning the form of governing in Northern Ireland, i.e. whether one should refer to the institutions of 1921-72 as a state, a statelet or perhaps a sub-state (1998, 96). This raises another point

⁶ The term “Ulster”, which is often used when referring to Northern Ireland is an inaccurate one. The original Ulster includes nine counties, but at the time of the division the border was drawn in a way that secured the Protestants a majority in the region. This meant that three counties with Catholic majorities were left for the Irish Free State.

⁷ This shift from PR to first-past-the post –system had already taken place on the level of local elections in 1922. (Cronin 2001, 209)

concerning the development of the parliamentary culture in Northern Ireland, namely the supremacy of the British government, an alternative direction of governing possibly relied on, should the local parliament fail:

In 1973 and 1982 there were attempts to restore the legislative status of the parliament without success. The latest suspension was conducted in 2002 and the parliament still remains inactive in 2006. The intervention of the British is a reminder of the status of Northern Ireland: although granted with more legislative powers than the parliaments of Wales and Scotland, it still remains a part of the United Kingdom, and this means it has an “alternative” government for it should the Assembly fail. Furthermore, the prorogation of the legislative and debating body leaves behind it a political vacuum, since the decisions concerning the people of the region are made in Westminster instead closer to the voters (Sales 1997, 170). Sharing power and the safeguards mean that the solutions and compromises in a situation of dispute must have the consent of both sides, and this cannot be reached without a proper debate and the willingness to find a common basis. English (1998, 99), who discusses the meaning of the state in Northern Ireland, notes that the problem in defining the “common interest” in the province reflects the problem created by the status-based division of Northern Ireland. So far the interests of the British, the island of Ireland, those, who possess a British or Northern Irish identity, or those with an Irish republican identity and who see the region as an artificial and illegitimate construction, have been so fiercely divided and protected that a compromise has not been the most favoured option.

Buckland (2001, 218) argues, that a “fundamental” error made by the British government was to hand the power over the province to the unionists, who neither were a united alliance nor have an ideology for governing a region with such a remarkable minority to deal with.⁸ The one theme uniting the unionist front in the 1920s was the opposition of the Home Rule, and among that front were people who did not even want to govern the province but to have a direct rule of Westminster. On the religious side the term “Protestant” referred to three differing churches (Presbyterian, Church of Ireland and

⁸ On the British policy towards Northern Ireland McCall also notes, that “..., British subvention allowed the Northern Ireland government to implement their legislative powers effectively, often extravagantly and with little interference from Westminster” (1999, 36).

Methodist), which further indicated the heterogeneous nature of those identified as unionist. These internal tensions created another sphere of mistrust: Alongside with the existing suspicion of the unionist side against the nationalist and vice versa, one of a unionist against another unionist emerged. (Ibid.) Another interesting point Buckland raises is the locality of the politics in Northern Ireland. As a small region and with a highly localised political culture the actions of the governing officials were well known to their constituencies. The politicians were close to their churches and remained strongly connected to the people who had voted for them. This gave the politician little room of manoeuvre in terms of decision making, and as the Catholic religion and its representatives were considered a threat to the Protestant community, made it difficult to legislate anything that could be seen as a concession to the minority. (2001, 219.) As mentioned earlier in the text, a lot of votes are still mainly contested inside one community rather than between the two main communities of the province, which means that the challenge for the political centre to increase its support is a substantial one. It also creates difficulties for the politicians within either of the communities, as any compromise may carry with it the label of a “sell out” and allow another party within the community to profit from it. The impact of David Trimble and the moderate wing of the UUP to the peace process and the decline of votes they have experienced since provide an example.

The early policy of the British government to leave Northern Ireland and its unionists on their own and making them feel abandoned, the suspicion of the minority against the ruling institutions, the potential violence on both sides and the quarrel within unionism are all contributors to the great atmosphere of prejudice that has evolved in Northern Ireland over the years. In his memoirs of the peace process of Northern Ireland Senator Mitchell (1999, 37) notes, that at the “heart of the problem” is precisely the deep mistrust among the parties and the difficulties it poses on the communication between them. The vocabulary is loaded with terms of heavy meanings and exclusion, which makes a situation of a healthy debate hard to reach. Moreover, the decision to make the negotiations for the Agreement as inclusive as possible meant, that the representatives of the radical ends of the province were also present, bringing in the more radical substance and rhetoric from both sides.

2.4. The formation of the political centre

The one theme shaping the party political field in Northern Ireland is the constitutional question. With the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 the island was divided into the regions of North and South, leaving the British with a share of six counties on the island of Ireland. Since then the characteristic of the Northern Irish constituency has been the division into those in favour of maintaining the union and those for a united Ireland, namely the mainly protestant unionists and the primarily Catholic nationalists.⁹ Because of this, the votes tend to be contested only within the community, not between the communities. Thus, the party political field at the time of the Agreement, and in relation to the constitutional positions, can roughly be divided into three (Siaroff 2000, 473-475.): Firstly, the unionist/loyalist, predominantly Protestant parties, with the two major ones and three lesser ones, the former including the more moderate UUP with Mr Trimble, later taken over by the more radical DUP and Reverend Ian Paisley. The anti-agreement DUP got support from the smaller United Kingdom Unionist Party (henceforth: the UKUP), whereas the loyalist paramilitaries –linked UDP and the Progressive Unionist Party (henceforth: the PUP), though highly critical of what they saw as too many concessions for the nationalists, did sign the Agreement. The nationalist/republican, predominantly Catholic group really consists of only two parties, namely the Social Democratic and Labour Party, the slightly leftist nationalist party established in 1970, and the republican Sinn Féin, with connections to the Provisional IRA.

As mentioned above, the more moderate parties have had more support on the middle-class areas than their more radical counterparts, but this has now slightly changed along the lines of the problems in implementing the Agreement. The third group is the political centre of Northern Ireland, and is constituted by the parties without a constitutional agenda. It is into this group the Coalition counts itself. Thomas Mitchell, in his assessments on settler conflicts¹⁰ (2000; 2002), argues that the liberal, i.e. the non-sectarian, parties have had

⁹ The terms loyalist and republican refer to the more radical wings of these communities. For example, when referring to the militant activity in Northern Ireland one speaks of loyalist/republican paramilitaries.

¹⁰ A settler conflict is a conflict between the settlers and the natives. In an independent settler conflict the local settlers rule according to their interests, whereas in a depended settler conflict the colonial metropole or its representatives rule the region in their interest. Northern Ireland has the characteristics from both of these

more important roles in conflict resolution than usually acknowledged. In the case of Northern Ireland the liberal centre Mitchell notes means the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (APNI), established in 1970. The party has been in practice the sole successful representative of the non-sectarian, liberal centre, until the appearance of the Women's Coalition and its seemingly robust start in 1996. Some attempts for a centre party had occurred before the Alliance came into existence. The Ulster Liberal Party in the sixties was occupying the university seat (the constituency consisted of the students and faculty in Queen's University, Belfast) at Stormont in 1961-69 and had some ties with the British Liberal Party. The party collapsed soon after four of its members had resigned and formed another party, the New Ulster Movement, and later, the APNI. Another non-sectarian party was the Northern Ireland Labour Party, which had its stronger periods in the forties and the mid-sixties. Its decline started when the re-emergence of the Troubles spread the working – class votes along the sectarian lines. The labour party replacing it was the (more Marxist than social democratic) Workers' Party. (Mitchell 2002, 10-11)

The emergence of the APNI was at the time of the civil rights movement and the increasing demands for equality from the Catholic part of the province. The end of the unionist hegemony had its origins in the political ambitions of the unionist Prime Minister Terence O'Neill, who was appointed for the post in 1963 (McCall 1999, 40). The economic climate had started to change in the 1960s. The Republic of Ireland, under the leadership of Taoiseach Sean Lemass, was giving up its protectionist policy and the two leaders were trying to establish links between the regions. O'Neill took the view that, in order to attract business in the form of multinational companies, the social infrastructure was to change, and this in turn would require a better accommodation of the minority and the process of reconciliation. The raised hopes of the Catholics became unrealised in the face of the Protestant opposition embedded in fear of losing its hegemony to the minority rebellion. In the end O'Neill failed to overcome the unionist opposition led by Reverend Ian Paisley and the intended reforms failed to materialise. (Ibid.)

The Catholics had, however, raised their expectations for a more equal status in the society, and these expectations survived the failure of the reform. What was created was an

types: the former from 1920 to 1972, when the return of the Westminster direct rule occurred, and the latter from thereafter until the restoration of Stormont in 1998. (Mitchell 2000, 3)

atmosphere of political activism, or, to be more precise, civil rights activism. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) addressed the Labour Party in Westminster directly and contextualised its campaign in terms of equal citizenship and representation within the United Kingdom. (McCall 1999, 40-41.) The attention of the British Government was turned to the region as the demands for the more equal rights increased and became evident effectively visible in the media as well (ibid.). Even though some points had been made about the possibility of the prorogation, the contemporary response of the British Government was to maintain the rule of Stormont, but to put it “on probation” in terms of a more accommodating policy towards the minority in order to ensure “British standards of citizenship” (Neumann 2003, 45). The idea of accommodation instead of exclusion and the discussion about the Irish dimension got the SDLP more involved in the mainstream politics and to act and represent the Catholic community in the constitutional process (ibid, 45). The Irish dimension provided the parties involved an extended conceptual framework for discussing the grievances and the future of the nationalist community within the British state, not only in terms of a united nation-state on the island of Ireland. From the point of view of the newly established APNI this would have been a resource for the centrist party to argue their case of a consociational solution.

The Alliance Party did manage to secure its position during what is considered the first high period of its existence, from 1970 to 1973, and thus created a third voting sector for Northern Ireland. (Mitchell 2002, 36) Its main attraction was in the middle-class unionist areas as the party was considered, though non-sectarian, a mainly unionist liberal party (ibid. 17, 36), although, as noted before, since the re-introduction of the PR (STV) some supporters of the SDLP have given their lower-preference votes for the APNI. The founding principles of the party laid out by its former leader John Cushnahan in 1979 were

(1) the primary objective to heal the bitter divisions by ensuring equality of citizenship and full partnership between Catholic and Protestant; (2) to support Northern Ireland as an integral part of the United Kingdom; 3) a pragmatic non-doctrinaire approach to social and economic problems; and (4) support for the firm and impartial enforcement of the rule of law. (Quoted in Mitchell 2000, 94-95).

Thus by the mid 1990s there already existed a narrow political space for the centrist parties. The APNI vote at the time was around 7%, the peak of 1977 being 13.3%

(Mitchell 2000, 94). Like the APNI, the Women's Coalition did take non-sectarianism as their point of departure, but without any reference to either the securing the union or attempting to weaken it. The core ideas of the party were articulated with the three principals of equity, inclusion and human rights, the aim being to distance itself rhetorically from the political parties that had played an active role during the Troubles and represented the historical sectarian division. It is said that the party was concerned "with the *interests*, not the *positions* of others, and how those interests might be accommodated within the NIWC's ethical framework (Fearon & Rebouche 2006, 281)". The novelty in the Coalition's point of departure in relation to the traditional parties was the explicitly stated feminist agenda, as no party as such had previously adapted the question of gender as one of its priorities. By introducing the feminist agenda the NIWC was able to further differentiate itself from the leading centrist party, the APNI.

2.5. Women's movements and political participation

Women in Northern Ireland are largely absent from the macro-level of politics, as the number of women elected for the Assembly or Westminster has been low in European standards. For example, only 14 of the 108 possible seats in the Assembly were occupied by women after the election of 1998 (Miller et. al. 1999). Women's movements have their origins in the informal sphere of politics, namely at the community level and the NGOs rather than in the framework of the formal party political level (McWilliams 1995; Miller et. al. 1999; Porter 1998; Sales 1997). The nationalist women started to organise at the time of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, where the claims for equality in housing and job allocations for the Catholics escalated. Following the classification of the NIWC party leader Monica McWilliams (1995), Porter (1998, 48) notes the five stages of women's activism, of which the first is the above mentioned "civil rights activism". This was originally prompted by Catholic working -class women. This is where the history of feminist activism in Northern Ireland differs from the rest of the Europe, where feminism has had its origins in the academic middle class (Sales (1997). The second form or stage by Porter and McWilliams is that of "accidental activism". This refers to women, who got involved with political activism by their families as the mothers or wives of either prisoners or victims. The third group, "conflictual activists", is a group formed among nationalist women to gain resources needed for the community, but dissipated as soon as

this is achieved because of the differing nationalist identities within the group. The fourth stage was the “peace activists”, a briefly existed group formed by mothers whose sons had been affected by the Troubles. The fifth stage is the “feminist activism as agents of change”, women in trade unions and community developments.

Occupying the communal level of politics has meant that women also form strongly local identities inside their own communities (Porter 1998). Although the working –class, everyday approach to politics has invoked discussion about the practical issues of child care, housing and poverty as being common for women from both traditions, it has also had a depoliticising effect on these issues, since the closure on what is defined as political has narrowed its definition down to the constitutional issues (Little 2002). The “politics of avoidance” (Sales 1997, 169) means that women working on the communal level, when associating with other women on the issues concerning e.g. child care, are reluctant to talk about “politics”, i.e. the centre issue of the conflict. The impact on the development of feminism and the role of the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition in it will be discussed below. First, however, some consideration should be addressed to the differing experiences of female activism between the two traditions. Sales (1997, 186) quotes a Protestant activist, who notes that the Catholics were aware about the notion of oppression because of their minority role in the society. The Protestant community lacked this experience. The association of the Civil Rights Movement with nationalism and republicanism created a supposed linkage between republicanism and feminism, leaving the latter feeling alien to the Protestants. Moreover, even though women with a Catholic background have had “women’s issues” being treated as secondary to the nationalist mission, feminism still has had its stronger roots in this community. The debate over the role of women in the mainstream unionist politics did not begin until in the 1990s. The issues of equality and justice the feminists have been argued for has been associated with socialism and thus republicanism. (Porter 1998).

The low level of female participation on the more public level of politics has in the 1990s prompted surveys on the subject. In their study on the modes of political participation Miller et al. (1999) argue, that, when dealing with politics, both men and women see themselves as apathetic and passive, when political participation is understood as a form of behaviour affecting and pervading the both public and private levels of life. The study indicated that the difference is most apparent in the spaces considered to be reserved for

political discussion, as men preferred talking about politics with their friends and workmates, whereas for women the arena formed around family relationships. Nevertheless, as the political is understood as concerning the constitutional issues and happening on the public sphere, both men and women felt they were inactive. When it comes to women, then, it seems that the politics of avoidance is in place while acting outside the domestic sphere. Referring to the development of women's organisations over the years McWilliams (1995) argues, that women have managed to create

“safe, yet subversive, spaces where they can organize together around issues of concern which cross the sectarian divide all the while “agreeing to disagree” on the more divisive ones.” (1995, 32).

This “agreeing to disagree” – position is what Little (2002) has criticised as being one of the drags for the development of feminism in Northern Ireland. Little argues, that the form of feminism advocated by the NIWC, whose leader and founder Professor McWilliams is, homogenises the experience of “women” as overlapping the experiences of the individuals. He indicates this being a form of feminist essentialism and as such more related to the first wave of feminism in liberal democracies. The essentialist approach fails to recognise the politics of difference within the female collective and cannot be expected to succeed in implementing an alternative political discourse. Moreover, and perhaps self –evidently, female representation does not correlate as such with feminist representation. (2002, 166-171) Little calls the approach of the NIWC “strategic essentialism”, in which the feminist claim for difference can only be understood within the paradigm of the two communities and thus fails to create a more inclusive and dynamic understanding the political in Northern Ireland. (Ibid.)

2.6. The emergence of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition

The All Party Talks for negotiating an agreement had reached its realisation in 1996. There was to be an elected Forum for Political Dialogue, from which its participants were to appoint a delegate for the talks. The British government stated that ten parties with the largest shares of votes in the election were to be allowed into the forum. (Darby & MacGinty 2000, 72.) Originally this was done to ensure the inclusion of the small unionist parties with loyalist connections in the talks (Mitchell 1999, 43), but it also provided for a window of opportunity for others outside the five main parties (the SDLP,

Sinn Féin, the DUP, the UUP and the Alliance), such as the Women's Coalition. The NIWC was founded for the election of 1996 and did manage to be the 9th party on the list. The opportune moment for the women had arrived in the form of the negotiations, in which a new constitution for the region would be made. It would be a chance to write women into the foundations of the region and its new future, if only the party could stand in the elections; the list introduced by the British government concerning the parties allowed to participate in the elections included merely the traditional, already established parties. The disappointment due to this is expressed in a speech from 1999, delivered by Monica McWilliams:

“Those who had debated the possibility of encouraging women in Northern Ireland to engage in any new mainstream political fora were left in a quandary. It also outraged many other women who wanted to move away from the sectional interest of the past and create something new. Avila Kilmurray, Bronagh Hinds and myself successfully lobbied Whitehall to have the election system changed and were then faced having to do something having made such a breakthrough with the British establishment” (1999b).

The success of the lobbying meant, that the political centre was represented in the forum by the Alliance, Labour (with no links to the British Labour) and the NIWC. The Women's Coalition was the youngest of these, having been established in 1996 for the main purpose of getting women elected for the forum. The situation was a new one for the politics of Northern Ireland: the cease-fires, although being treated with caution, were still a novelty, and the commitment of the both governments and the largest parties of Northern Ireland into the process made progress seem like a possibility. The Coalition welcomed this situation by campaigning with their “Say good-bye to dinosaurs” – slogan which, according to their newsletter *A Common cause: the story of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition*, “summed up the years of frustration”.

One of the founding members of the party and one of the two delegates in the talks is Professor Monica McWilliams, a Catholic university lecturer from Belfast. She has been a civil rights activist in the 1960s and has written about the role of women in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. In her article *Struggling for peace and justice: Reflections on women's activism in Northern Ireland* (1995) some ideas similar to the forthcoming campaign of the Women's Coalition can be found. The first of these is the realisation of the activity of women on the local, communal level of politics (1995, 13, 16) - a theme,

which is repeatedly raised in the texts concerning the party as well. This notion is linked with the idea of women as pragmatists, who have had experience in working across the community lines, if needed, to gain their goals. For the political aims of the party this is used to argue for the capability for dialogue that women possess.

In a speech delivered for Trinity University in Dublin (1997), McWilliams describes the absence of women from the formal sphere of politics as a situation where women have “never been on the scene of the crime”. By stressing the low rate of female representatives on the parliamentary level and the female input on the communal level she is able to associate women with issue –centred politics and disassociate them with the principle –centred politics leading to the depths of a zero-sum game. Another theme in the article used later for the purposes of the party is the articulation of women as “agents of change” (1995, 29). McWilliams argues that by lobbying for the need to address inequalities not concerning the traditional communal divide has made women representatives of the matters that have been suppressed by the questions regarding the conflict and paramilitary violence. According to her the informal sphere of politics and its activism, again, has provided for a more dynamic ground for women to work for the issues they feel important and have been choosing this way of acting politically because it has not represented the “stagnation” of the formal sphere (1995, 30). The “agents of change” –concept has later been used in the speeches given by Professor McWilliams (e.g. 1997) The multiple levels of oppression experienced by women is also introduced in the article (1995, 31) as well as in the speeches, where women on the formal sphere of politics is noted to have the role of the “double other” (e.g. 1997 & 1999a). She also presents her assessment on women’s activism quoted above in her speech and thus links the Coalition as a successor of this activism, as its vehicle to mainstream politics (1999b).

Of the traditional parties Sinn Féin has had the longest history in having a women’s organisation. The close community tie it has with the constituencies has played a role in having active women joining the party. Compared to the mainstream parties (which Sinn Féin has not been until its commitment to the peace process) the party has had a more radical agenda on the social issues, alongside which the women’s issues have followed. Sinn Féin also adopted the issue of gender equality on its agenda as early as the 1970s and even voted “yes” for a policy on women’s right to choose in the 1980s and thus accepted abortion for a while. The party later abandoned the policy, as the strongly Catholic values

are still a cornerstone in the identity building of the party. (Sales 1997, 174-175). All the major parties have lifted the question of gender equality on their agendas in the latter part of the 1990s. The most inactive women's organisations have been those on the unionist side, where the organisations have either been serving the unionist cause rather than build their own agendas, or had little influence on the party politics and the role of the women's issues. (Ibid. 172-173). The female candidates had thus been a rarity in the parliamentary affairs and in the role of representing their party. Under these circumstances the appearance of the delegates of the Women's Coalition with the rhetoric of active participation in the politics of Northern Ireland and the feminist profile they adopted has been an obscure phenomenon in the party political field of the province. Senator Mitchell illustrates the atmosphere in the forum the following way:

"The women overcame a great deal of adversity. Early in the process they were not taken seriously in our talks and they were insulted in the Forum. I would not permit such conduct in the negotiations, but it took many months for their courage and commitment to earn the attention and respect of the other parties. In the final stages of the negotiations they were serious, important participants, and were treated as such." (1999, p.44)

In the party conference speech from 1997, written at the time of the talks and the forum, McWilliams refers to the experienced lack of respect of the early days:

"The list of insults that have been hurled across the floor of the elected chamber at the Women's Coalition elected representatives includes the more base level comments of whinging, whining, feckless women to rather higher level of accusation that 'our chant' sounds like that of a Greek chorus of women. The more traditional roles ascribed to women are called upon by Ian Paisley and William McCrea from the DUP in their admonishment to the Women's Coalition members that they should 'stand behind the loyal men of Ulster' and 'that women must start breeding for Ulster,....,despite reminding those present that our breeding days were over,..."

The accepted core principles of the party were the three concepts of *inclusion, equality* and *human rights*. The party was the first political party in Northern Ireland to argue specifically for the increase in women's numerical representation and make the point of cross-communality by appealing instead for the universality of female experience. In the abovementioned newsletter, dating back to 1998, the emergence of the party is said to be based on the willingness to participate in the writing of the future for Northern Ireland:

“Not having women at the negotiating table would mean a settlement, and society, which women had no meaningful part in shaping. Something had to be done. And it was.”

Telling the story about the party’s formation and participation in the talks in the newsletter is labelled by a notion of impulsiveness and the act of “taking matters into their own hands”. A central argument made in favour of getting more (cross-communal) women elected is the idea of women as reasonable peacemakers, skilled in negotiating. A NIWC member from Portrush is cited in the newsletter:

“Why should women stand on the side lines? Negotiation is second nature to women.”

* * *

The emergence of the Women’s Coalition was an attempt to shake the boundaries as well as the inner dynamics of the party political field in Northern Ireland. What they were embedded to in relation to the other parties and the political atmosphere of the region was the idea of a political centre, already existing and represented by the Alliance. The time of the negotiations was enriched by discussion about the course that the peace process was to take, and for the first time the list of participants included parties not previously engaged in the political process and had now become the representatives of the paramilitary matter of the society, even though this may have not been said in so many words.

The Coalition’s point of departure was to adopt the cross-community approach but in a way that would distinguish it from the established field: To raise women’s issues as a central theme was an attempt to stretch the centrist discourse into a wider one including the idea of equality and human rights to be realised as reaching beyond the equal citizenship of the two communities. Even though the question of getting women’s issues on the agenda is stressed in the campaigns of the Coalition, the cross-community approach is also presented as being part of the very heart and soul of the party, written in its foundations: the representatives of the party in the talks were Pearl Sagar, a Protestant community worker, and Professor McWilliams, a Catholic university lecturer. This heterogeneity is used in underlining the “cross-community and cross-class” –nature of the party and is mentioned repeatedly in describing the “early days” of the Coalition.

The fact that the form of governing and the constitution had become under debate meant that the established structures were already challenged and more open for reformulation. This provided the Coalition with a chance to make an entrance. Noting the history of governing Northern Ireland is here considered important because of the implications it has had for the situation prevailed at the time of the negotiations: the importance of the Agreement is increased by the implications it has for the parliamentary institutions, i.e. the changes the established power-sharing and the safeguards for the principle of consent have on the ethos of the parliament. It also has had its implications to the parliamentary procedures, since the representatives are asked to identify themselves with one of the categories of “unionist”, “nationalist” or “other”. This does establish the division into the institutional structures of governing, as some of the members of the Alliance have argued, but this can also be seen as a necessary step to be taken for the moment: The Agreement is ambiguous and states the guidelines for governing. Institutionalising the division may seem like establishing the problem on a fundamental level, but taking account of the minorities’ experiences about representation on the institutional level, some assurances about the equality of the system seem like a logical thing to add. Moreover, sharing power is inherently problematical for both sides, and the safeguards are there to reassure the unionist community as well. The negotiations and the Agreement have thus shaped the discourse used on the party political field, and marked an important point within the Northern Ireland peace process.

3. A temporal approach

The point of view adopted here for the emergence of the Coalition is that of time. The question about timing, about a rupture in the seemingly linear course of events and the realisation of these is what makes the tiny Women's Coalition interesting among the more dominant parties of Northern Ireland. This is due to the way the Coalition was established at the time that a small party might have a chance of gaining visibility, a time when the "old regime" is already been challenged and the international dimension opens the framework up for a potentially wider discourse. The peace process and the events of the 1990s mark a distinctive time in the history of Northern Ireland, and the negotiations resulting in the Belfast Agreement are a turning point in the politics of the region. The Coalition is born out of these developments, and in its argumentation the exceptional time is used to legitimise the emergence of the party. It has to link itself with the violent history of the region and similarly maintain its distinctiveness and refrain from being associated too closely with either of the two traditions. It has to legitimise its political significance in terms of the dominating discourse, and at the same time try to bend its limits in a way that would make the political space for it wide enough to gain visibility and possibly to secure its vote.

The idea of *kairos* illustrates the revolutionary time of the negotiations and the Agreement, while the act of politicisation in relation to the existing polity is used to point out the temporality of the framework of action. The conceptions of time as presented by Evans are used as tools for analysing the different temporal figures of the argumentation, as one insight to the possible layers of temporal expressions. The usage of the classification is twofold: on the one hand it is used to illustrate forms of expressing temporality in the speeches, on the other hand it is utilised in describing the exceptional time the Coalition was operating out of. Language and linguistic action is embedded in the temporal approach adopted here: the emergence of the Coalition is analysed from the point of view of argumentation, and the temporalities of these arguments are considered using a theory concentrating on the relationship between the linguistic level of expressing time and the cognitive level of experiencing it. The events and the revolutionary period of history is reflected in the temporalities of the party emerged out of and at the time of these developments. Thus in this chapter three aspects in regard to the creation of the party are

distinguished: What is considered first is the exceptionality of the period of time the Coalition was emerged in, this being the “outer” time of its formation. After this the second consideration involves the temporal aspect to the actions of the party and the framework within which it functions, i.e. the times of politicisation and polity. The last part concentrates on the different ways of expressing time (in relation to experiencing it) and considers the temporal layers specified using this categorisation in the argumentation of the Coalition.

3.1. On political times

The attempts to build a peace process that would result in an agreement with a constitutional sketch for Northern Ireland did not take place until after almost 30 years after the first prorogation of the parliament. The acceleration of the process in the 1990s was an outcome of personal commitment from the part of some individuals, such as John Hume, David Trimble, Gerry Adams and both John Major and Tony Blair with Senator Mitchell and his companions, to name a few examples. But also the inconclusiveness of the IRA’s Armed Struggle, the international dimension with the peace process in South Africa and the interest expressed by the USA added new elements to the process. Despite its impermanence, the first cease-fire of the Provisional IRA was an event that marked a period of a potential change in the politics of Northern Ireland. The appearance of a political element among the loyalist paramilitaries in the form of political parties also linked the violent matter of the unionist side into the political process. Defining the new devolved powers and the power-sharing mechanisms changed the nature of governing and parliamentarism as well as, at least in theory, strengthened the turn towards a culture for political dialogue.

The period of the 1990s and the peace process mark a time of *kairos* (Lindroos 1998) in the politics of Northern Ireland. Kairos is defined in relation to *chronos*, which represents the linear time of history and politics, its quantitative aspect. Against the linearity, kairos is the time of rupture, opportunity and action, a turn into the present time instead of the historical time overcoming the individual existence, but without an attempt to replace it. The chronology of the historical past is challenged by the cairology of the present, which stresses singularities instead of totalities and the subjective, individual experience as

opposed to the collective, categorised narrative. The different temporalities can be detected through qualitative differences, which appear “through experience, action, and a subjective acknowledgement of temporally changing situations”. (Ibid, 11-13). In terms of Northern Ireland, the individual acts and commitment as well as the outcomes of the ongoing dialogue in the form of declarations and cease-fires mark a potential shift of focus from paramilitary culture into negotiation. The events are a sign of development, of a rupture in the political stalemate. The 1990s has its precedents in the previous agreements, declaration and negotiations, but the combination of actors and parties of the decade in question managed to overcome the moments of potential collapse of the process. Far from being the “ultimate solution” for the problems of the region, the Belfast Agreement is an important achievement in the course of the events, not least because of its wide endorsement and inclusiveness.

The institutional tools and the amount of independence Northern Ireland was given in its establishment have created a distinctive situation for the region in terms of “democratisation” (Palonen 2005). The three political changes included in this term and considered from a temporal point of view are individualisation and equalisation of suffrage, the rhythm of alternation in government, and the adoption of parliamentarism, and serve as potential ground for conceptual change. (Ibid, 54-56.) The first on the list refers to the increase in the number of people able to act politically by voting. The concepts that have become accepted in terms of the election may serve as examples of conceptual change and can be considered in this context. The second provides the region with recurrence and regularity based on elections and changes in majorities. The temporal implication of the use of concepts is that the change in the government and parliament indicates also a conceptual alternative in relation to other (previous) governments. The adoption of the parliamentary style of politics means the adoption of a rhetorical regime based on deliberation. The temporality of the regime lies in the act of turning the political questions into the items on the agenda, the adaptation of concepts into the temporality of procedures. (Ibid.)

Northern Ireland inherited its parliamentary culture from the British as the institutions for a democratic governing of the region were established in the partition.¹¹ The temporality implied by the alternation of government, however, failed to become truly realised after the PR had been abolished and the unionist regime secured. The unionist government had their representatives in Westminster, which in turn left the region in the hands of its legislators. The universal suffrage failed to become realised for a while as the unionist regime held on to the restriction of franchise to ratepayers and their spouses despite the fact that the British had given up the same restriction in 1948, a practice that benefited the unionist part of the population because of their proportionally better income (McCall 1999, 39). The Northern Ireland parliament, even though institutionally in place, was a one-sided forum for substantial parts of its existence from the 1920s to the prorogation, at first because of the boycotts of the nationalist community and a little later the electoral system. One of the reasons the Agreement of 1998 is an important document is that it introduces a set of mechanisms to ensure the representation of the minority and thus provides the nationalist community with a parliament that lacks much of the traces of the unionist regime it has been hostile towards. Democratisation in Northern Ireland is a peculiar combination of democratic institutions and less democratic practices. The region has been a UK province with either a substantial amount of freedom in terms of legislation, or a prorogued parliament and direct rule from the centre. This has had its implications on the course of governing and the role of the parliament: it has been, although perhaps considered a legitimate institution of democracy, a totem of the majority rule in a region considered illegitimate *per se* by the minority.

The negotiations and the inclusive approach of the parties into it made an agreement, or at least some progress in terms of the peace process seem more of a possibility than before. The kairos nature of this time meant, that a realisable rupture in the course of the violent conflict was to take place enabling other issues and suppressed conflicts to rise from the background. The emergence of the Women's Coalition at the time of the negotiations serves as an example of the utilisation of this kairos. The firstly declared list of the parties that would be allowed to participate in the election for the forum raised opposition, which in turn got its realisation in a form of a new party. It seemed that to include only the

¹¹ Similarly, the Irish Free State also adopted parliamentary democracy for its mode of governing and had established democratic institutions effectively despite of the civil war.

already established parties on the list would stabilise the historical divisions without sufficient innovations. The point of departure was, according to an NIWC newsletter, the feared absence of the issues of gender equality from the agenda of the negotiations, which were to formulate a new constitution for the region. With the Assembly suspended, the forum was a way of entering the formal sphere of politics through the more informal way of getting elected to a negotiating body instead of a more “official” and established institution, such as the Assembly itself, but into a more visible one than a local council.

3.2. Polity-politicisation

Kairos enables the reinterpretation of the past in relation to the knowledge and experience of the present. It challenges the past and chronos by introducing a new temporal dimension, where the present seems to cast new light to the past while carrying the traces of it within. The present moment also includes the seeds of the future in it, the resources for political action and the potential courses of events. Acting politically is inherently rhetorical and linguistic in nature. The realisation of the linguistic turn –“that our language does not mirror an independently existing world but is instead partly constitutive of it” (Ball 1988, 5) - makes the point of political language obvious. On this political (and moral) language Ball further notes that

“A language of this sort includes those ‘shared conceptions of the world, shared manners and values, shared resources and expectations and procedures for speech and thought’ through which ‘communities are in fact defined and constituted’.” (A quotation from White, in Ball 1988, 11)

The sub-languages and idioms within the community language is what Ball calls discourses. What differentiates a political discourse from the others is, firstly, its way of using the sub-languages and the concepts of other disciplines in a way that shapes the discourse. Secondly, the meanings of the concepts of political discourse are often objects of dispute, since a comprehensive definition of the meaning is impossible. However, Ball wishes to clarify between the notion of something being “essentially contested” and “contingently contested” in nature: Being essentially contested means, that there is “no single definition or criterion of application upon which all competent speakers can agree (1988, 13-14)”. In his view it is impossible to have all concepts contested at the same time, which leads to the point that, while the language of political discourse itself is essentially

contested, contesting a concept only appears intermittently. While the idea of a situation where “all competent speakers” do find a single definition for all other concepts than those under a dispute can be doubted, the point Ball makes about the choice of concepts for contestation is a relevant one: the choice is more often driven by political rather than philosophical motives.

It is the dominant discourse of the constitutional issue that the Coalition was trying to challenge by introducing its agenda based on the principles of human rights, equality and inclusion. To simplify the point, politics on the formal sphere had become about essentially about who should be guarding the interests of the people in terms of question about the union, and other issues would be considered against this background. However, a linkage between the contemporary debate and the novelties introduced by the party would be required in order to make the point more comprehensible, in which case avoiding the constitutional question might prove problematical. The time of the negotiations provided a suitable point of departure for a party wishing to enter the party political scene in that it introduced an alternative constitutional discourse, i.e. the discourse including the ethos of power-sharing, human rights and the outlined principle of consent. The time proved mature for this kind of development as opposed to the somewhat similar attempts of the past, the Sunningdale Agreement and its successor, the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Especially the institutionalised power-sharing and devolved Assembly indicated the changing climate for democratic governing. The alternations of discourse at the time of the negotiations and the Agreement also provided the two traditions with an opportunity to redefine them, even forced them to do that because of the pressure put on them by the actors of the international dimension and the British and Irish governments. Particularly in terms of the republican tradition the strategies of Sinn Féin and the Provisional IRA had obviously failed so far, as the argued goal of a united Ireland seized to become a feature of political reality.

The linguistic point of political action and the utilisation of kairos refer to the “speech acts” performed to legitimise the position of the actor in relation to other actors. Kairos provides the opportunity to challenge the discourse, which may seem as incompatible with the ideas rising on the agenda in the present, through the breakage in the course of chronos. Actions taken in the course of this rupture are a realisation of an occasion, through which it may be possible for the actor to gain in terms of political influence and space. The

differentiation of the four aspects in the polit-vocabulary (Palonen 2003) illustrates this point. The two pairs, namely policy-politicking and polity-politicisation (ibid, 171) serve as conceptual and analytical tools in the thematisation of the approach to the political situation and development of Northern Ireland in the 1990s. The former conceptual pair marks the aspect of politics-as-sphere, whereas the latter is occupied with figures used in relation to the concept of politics-as-activity (ibid.). The main focus is on the times of polity and politicisation, and, even though the four concepts are inter-linked, the review of the first two is being bypassed here.

From the point of view of politics-as-activity concept polity is a political sphere, i.e. a temporalised space resulting from the politicisations of the past and with an established status that complicates the introduction of new politicisations (Palonen 2003, 179). Thus a contemporary polity is temporal and historical in nature, a representative constellation of the varying power shares of its actors.¹² Polity provides the limits for politicking by defining the approved political acts and the norms, against which the forms of political and other action can be measured (ibid.). Polity –constellation consists of “winners”, actors, who have managed to gain a larger share of power in relation to their opponents. An important point is the possession of the share of power the surpassed still have, which makes the polity contingent in nature. The reorganisation of polity is also a question of reorganising the temporal elements as the new politicisations introduce a set of different temporal experiences. Moreover, polity as such can be used to refer to any set of power shares in a way that creates an image of a complex of polities, connected at specific points and “transcending juridical, geographical, and other limits”(ibid, 181).

The polity of the party political field in Northern Ireland was challenged by the Coalition on the one hand by operating from the field of the civil society, in that it explicitly stated its close connections to the community work and the activism on the local level. However, the Coalition was established explicitly to function as a political party with an aim to participate in the formal sphere as opposed to a social movement trying to influence the established parties from outside the institutions. In this the point of timing, again, is

¹² Palonen defines the politics-as-activity –concept from the Weberian point of view, in which at the heart of politics is the struggle for power shares. The point of departure is that every actor does have some power, and the resources for gaining more are the object of political action. (2003, 172- 173.) I adopt this approach and use the concept of power share here with no further elaboration.

crucial. The negotiations were to provide the parties outside the established system with an opportunity to enter the race. The sense of inclusiveness of the negotiations and the decisiveness of the participants created an atmosphere, where it seemed that this time it might be possible to have an impact on the established polity. The election for the forum gave the people a right to vote for their candidates, and it is from this point of departure that the Coalition was able to argue for their case: The civil society, the community level was brought closer to the formal sphere in the form of the election. This created a situation, where the party was able to highlight a chance of getting representatives elected and thus argue for a sense of community level, those not willing to vote for any of the established parties, to have an influence in the future of the region.

Politicisation as an act of marking a phenomenon as political refers to the act of naming and turning the phenomenon into a temporal, contingent object and space for action (Palonen 2003, 182).¹³ What is understood as belonging to the realm of politicisation is relative and depends on the perspective. To politicise something successfully means that the newly opened time-space is at some part out of reach for the established forms of politicking. By politicisation some ideas historically considered impossible can be turned into outmoded ones or bring about a new innovation for the political field. The distinction between these aspects is, however, a relative one, since innovation presumes a change in the constellation; the realisation of chances in respect to which they have not previously been seen implies a change of perspective. In addition to this politicisation can operate with the layers of politicisations (a Koselleckian approach), in which a link is created with a radical break and a past politicisation. (Ibid, 182-183). The contingent nature of polity is thus based on the act of creating new politicisations. From the point of view of the political discourse this means, that at least some of the concepts and ideas of the prevailing discourse are being contested, for example, either by presenting a new approach to them or naming something as political. The strength of the arguments made in favour of this new approach and the political skill and will of the actors to utilise the temporal break they possibly have created determines, whether the politicised phenomenon is to gain an established position or have any implications for the polity or discourse for that matter.

¹³ The German expression *Spielzeitraum* Palonen uses here illustrates the outcome accurately

The polity of party politics and what has been defined as the formal sphere of politics has in Northern Ireland referred to the constitutional question. This particular set of issues concerning the status of the region has penetrated the politicking¹⁴ and policies¹⁵: after the partition the question was about securing the power share of the majority so that the constitutional status of that time could be preserved, whereas, since the power share of the minority has increased, the added element of a change in the constitutional status has gained more visibility. To put it crudely, the non-alteration of government has brought about an idea of a fixed polity of formal sphere of politics, in which the minority has had little chance to increase their power share because of the boundaries set by the majority. From this point of view the negotiations and the institutions of the agreement opened up new forums and structures to shape the relations of the power shares, not only between the minority and the majority, but also within the communities as well as beyond them. However, the voices of the minority and the minority within the majority both base their experiences on the historical narratives and fixed communities coiling up around a specific religious identity. This has deepened the established nature of the “polity of constitution”, which occupies the sphere of what is considered formal politics. Even the setting up of the political centre in the form of the Alliance Party stressed the constitutional point in a sense that the party’s cross-communal approach with a support for the union had been outlined in their core principles.

Polity as a temporal constellation of politicisations reflects the idea of political language and discourse. The temporal nature of polity is linked with the contested nature of political discourse and its concepts, when political discourse is understood as the reflecting and constituting aspect of polity. The contingency of the concepts is in relation to the old and new politicisations, and the choice that is made about the concepts under dispute indeed is a political one. Discourse as implying a constitutive aspect to polity means that the classifications and definitions characteristic of the polity are in part regulated and produced from “the top”; in the polity of party politics, in the discourse bred by either this established polity or the polity of the civil society the issues considered belonging to the agenda can be classified by the actors of the established polity to suit a certain policy or to steer the debate into a preferred direction.

¹⁴ The performative aspect of politics (in Palonen, 2003)

¹⁵ The regulating aspect of politics (ibid.)

For a newly established political party the abovementioned means that a successful utilisation of political occasions –a successful politicisation- may be rewarded with a place in the formal political sphere, after which the representatives of the party have a chance to utilise their position in defining, describing and categorising and thus shaping the political discourse and the polity. For example, in talking about the constitutional paradigm influencing the debate in Northern Ireland, an element of an alternative point of departure for this paradigm could, if effectively argued for, shake the structures so often ending up in a stalemate. Furthermore, the Coalition’s attempt to raise a question about oppression in general subjugated to the debate on oppression in terms of religion was a move towards a different point of departure within another important discourse, i.e. that of discrimination, which had its roots in the 1960’s civil rights movement – only this time the explicit point was to elaborate the term “discrimination” into having a more extensive meaning than merely that of pointing towards the Catholic – Protestant – division.

3.3. Time: Space and motion

The classification of the concepts used to express temporality is taken here as a point of departure in analysing the temporal figures in the argumentation of the NIWC. The study of Vyvyan Evans, a cognitive linguist, is on human cognition and the perception of time in relation to the internal and the external and the temporal lexicon that is created in talking about time. The contribution of this kind of theory, one not at all aimed towards understanding political rhetoric, is the differentiation Evans makes in terms of understanding time, i.e. what he calls the different ways of experiencing time. While it is by no means the purpose of this study to claim that something may be said about the actual experience behind the expression in a politically oriented text (whatever the category the expression may occupy in Evans’ terms), using these categorisations serve as one way of approaching the different modes of temporal expressions. Using these modes of experiencing time can be turned into a question of political argumentation the following way: The categories based on the different ways time can be experienced may be used in reflecting on the question of how experience is presented and constituted in a politically motivated text. This means, for example, that the different durations, repetitive moments or singular instances can be explicated, and from these it is perhaps possible to say something

about what in the text is presented as ongoing, as belonging to the past or present or marking a significant period. In other words, it is possible to detect the way the author, or whoever the addresser may be, uses time and temporal expressions to argue for a case. Another possibility is to use these categories is to reflect on the actual events and the prevailing situation, “the temporal context”, of a chosen period.

What is utilised here from the study is the perception of concepts expressing time as either those referring to motion (or the lack of it) or space. The usage of these kinds of expressions in the political argumentation of the Coalition is taken to hold a central role because of the question of timing: the very existence of the party is rhetorically based on the success of its legitimising its significance under the exceptional circumstances of the peace process. In other words, it is a party born out of the events and developments of the 1990s and utilises the turbulent times of the negotiations and the new Assembly to argue for politicisations outside the traditional agenda.

Evans begins his evaluation on the problem of time by considering the metaphysical problem of it. The metaphysical question is outlined as follows:

“If we are aware of time, and yet cannot be said to actually perceive it without, for instance, “the precise ticking of clocks”, which serves to measure its “silence”, what is the nature and status of time? Is time a primitive, an attribute of the physical cosmos, as suggested by modern physics, or is time dependent on the relations between events such as our experience of motion events, and hence not primarily an attribute of the world, but a consequence of it, an abstraction derived from comparing events, as suggested by, for instance, Lakoff and Johnson (1999), and by the psychologist James Gibson (1975, 1986)? Or is time neither a physical attribute of the world, nor a relation between external events, but rather something internal in nature? That is, is our awareness of time primarily phenomenological, deriving from internal cognitive and other perceptual processes, as suggested by phenomenologists such as Husserl ([1887] 1999) and Bergson ([1922] 1999)?”(Evans 2004, 14-15)

The relationship between the metaphysical problem and the linguistic problem concerns the connection between cognition and expression:

“While time seems to be fundamental to our understanding of other events (including motion), we ordinarily think and talk about time not in time’s own terms, whatever these may be, but rather in precisely those terms which derive from the events, which according to modern physics, time structures – after all we talk about the ‘passage’ or the ‘flow’ of time and about being ‘located in’ time. In so doing we spatialise time. This represents the linguistic problem of time: why do we use language pertaining to motion through three-

dimensional space and locations in three-dimensional space in order to think and talk about time? Is there something which is literally temporal beyond the language of motion and space we employ to describe it?” (Ibid. 15)

The main interest of Evans lies primarily on the metaphysical problem. However, for the purpose of this study, the point lies in the idea of considering expressions of time from this point of departure, i.e. in differentiating between the expressions based on motion and those based on space. It should be stressed here once more, that the reason for adopting the study of Evans into a part of the following analysis is precisely the way he distinguishes between the different layers. The problem of an experiencing subject and turning the experience into an expression on the linguistic level is of no significant concern here, nor is the problem of why the temporal experiences are expressed with concepts related to motion or space. Evans argues, that “by examining the way in which language lexicalises time, we will gain important insights into the conceptualisation of time and the nature and organisation of time” (2004, 15). In this study the focus is not on the nature of time as such, but only on the different conceptions of it that can be detected from a fragment of a text. Of course, in a way this can be interpreted to illustrate some aspect of what time is for the addresser, but considering the intentionality of argumentation the notion adopted here is merely that of what the temporalities have to say in their role of supporting an argument. Moreover, Evans divides between concepts in relation to our fundamental cognitive apprehension and those secondary to it (2004, 151). The first consist of the Duration Sense, the Moment Sense, the Instance Sense and the Event Sense of time. Those that Evans considers secondary for our cognitive apprehension include the Matrix Sense, the Agentive Sense, the Measure -system Sense and the Commodity Sense of time¹⁶.

The *kairos*, a rupture or a breakage of time can be, as mentioned above, realised through experienced qualitative differences, which may reveal multiple temporalities. Linking time and experience, the expressions of time to the way time may be experienced means that at the time of such a rupture the altered temporal experience can be detected from the text produced at the time of the breakage, as the differences start to become realised. As argued before, the time of the negotiations and the whole peace process has been an exceptional period in the history of Northern Ireland. What labels the texts of the Coalition, especially

¹⁶ The different categories will be discussed in this chapter apart from the last two (the Measurement-system Sense and the Commodity Sense), which are considered in the chapter on the parliamentary debates.

outside the parliament, is optimism and hope, which are both used as means of arguing for their case. Inside the parliament the temporal structure changes, because of the precise procedures and the scarcity in the time given to a single member to make a speech. Alongside with a change in the rhetorical strategy the party also has different approaches in terms of temporality, as the deadlines and periods all change. The temporalities of the speeches outside the parliament will be discussed here from the point of view of the classification Evans has made, and as such considered as traces of the time they have been written.

3.3.1. Motion

The first turn is to time as expressed by using the vocabulary of motion. Here time is experienced as such, whether the movement is understood in relation to the progressing subject or an approaching event. (Evans 2004, 67)¹⁷ In either case time is perceived as passing and surpassing the existence of the individual, resembling the definition of *chronos*, as a continuum with ruptures occurring in the form of events (which serve as onsets and offsets for an interval), instances and moments.

Beginnings and endings of different kinds can be used to define a temporal period in the history by naming an onset and an offset for it. The emergence of the Coalition is rooted in the past experience, marking an experienced period in history:

“The Women’s Coalition emerged out of a complex mix of years of aspirations; decades of experience; and sense of indignation. In forming the Coalition we knew that we were exposing ourselves to risk and ridicule-but all of you had the courage to listen to that deeper voice within you, the voice that says that it is no longer and option to take refuge in the safety of silence or in the shadow of an echo; instead it is time for women to be heard.” (1999c)

The “time to be heard” marks an offset to a period of time that has lasted to this point, the period of politics in Northern Ireland when women have not been accounted for, and serves as an onset for the next period, where women enter the political scene and start participating on the party political level. Evans calls this the Duration Sense of time, an interval between two points (2004, 117). From the point of view of political argumentation

¹⁷ This difference is described as “moving time mapping” and “moving ego mapping”, *ibid.*

the points, between which the interval is constituted, can be used to draw linkages between the events and moments useful to the argumentation. Moreover, using the idea of kairos, the period against which kairos is defined can be constituted by rhetorically marking certain points as onset and offset, just as kairos itself can be legitimised by “framing” and defining it explicitly as a potential period for change. For the NIWC, the onset can be interpreted to be the formation of Northern Ireland, since the role of women is constantly referred to in relation to either Northern Ireland as an entity or the conflict since the 1970s; no references to the history of the Great Britain or Ireland is made apart from the assessments on the role of religion. In this the argumentation is focused on the situation and circumstances of the region without having to refer either to the situation in Britain or in Ireland. Reducing the interval further by moving the onset even closer to the contemporary situation the party is able to avoid having to make references to the much criticised unionist regime:

“The Women’s Coalition has always accepted that we live in a deeply divided society, which is emerging out of three decades of violent conflict, and which is experiencing a process of transition.” (1999c)

Different intervals co-exist in the argumentation. One onset for a period is the origins of the peace process, whatever the exact starting point may be.¹⁸ “The peace process” as a point of reference defines the framework for present action, a period, whose offset is to be realised if the region is to move from the process into a reconciled society. By underlining progress by calling it a “process” or “peace building” the offset is made realisable; a process is bound to reach its ending point someday. The process implies a movement forward, and it is the quality and nature of the outcome the parties are fighting for, not whether there should be peace or not. The signing of the Agreement is used as a legitimate onset for a new period of governing the region, in which the politics of the past decades mark a period of undemocratic ways. The agreement, as noted above, is argued to provide “a fresh start” for the province, a beginning of a new interval of governing at the time of the peace building, with the potential offset being the reached reconciled society, after which the parliamentary culture of Northern Ireland would be normalised.

The next three temporalities outlined in the classification and occupying the territory of singular moments are related as follows: The Moment Sense is a temporal point, a punctual

¹⁸ At the conference speech from 1999 professor McWilliams notes that the peace process dates back to 1994 (1999c).

time within a temporal sequence, an interval between two points consisting of multiple moments. The Instance Sense of time marks time as an occasion, embedded in a process, activity or perhaps an event of some kind. The Event Sense marks an occurrence, one that has qualities different from the prevailing state of experience. The Moment Sense of time refers to punctual point “without reference to its duration” (Evans 2004, 133). A moment, then, can be something that marks a time of an onset of a period, this moment being a discrete one without any sense of duration or an interval between two points. The moment gets its realisation through the experiencing subject, from which it follows that an expressed moment is already linked with its context through and by the subject. The motion embedded in the moment is detected in the way the moment has occurred, passed or arrived (ibid, 134). The Moment Sense is embedded within an interval as the abovementioned discrete temporal point (ibid, 141). The difference between the Instance Sense of time and the Moment Sense is, that the former marks a singular instance of a, for example, particular event or an activity, an instance that singles out as a “special case” potentially changing the course of events. The Event Sense marks a third case of singularity in Evans’ classification (2004, 145). The Event Sense has a distinctive nature of marking an occurrence, which has qualities or features that differ from the background experience and thus stands out as an exceptional experience, embedded in ongoing experience/event –sequence (ibid.).

In the story of the Coalition, which is told in the leaflet and the speeches outside the parliamentary arena the ideas of moment, instance and event with their realisations are presented as a key element of the party. The point of this lies precisely the sense of novelty the party needs to represent itself with in order to truly differ from the traditional parties. The novelty, of course, must not be of a too extremist kind, but embedded in the contemporary society with a historical linkage with the presented past, in a sense collective, experience of the region. The moments, instances and events are a way the party highlights the actuality of its ideas, the active ethos referring to a progressing change instead of the political stagnation of the past. The motion-sense of time is expressed in the events leading to the formation of the party (the list presented by the British government, the chance of getting candidates elected after all, the cease-fires) and instances (getting involved into the peace process at the time of the election, having a women’s party present in the negotiations and the parliament as opposed to the previous attempts).

The occasions the party is willing to utilise seems to have been arised out of events or instances, out of action from the party's side or from the side of someone else. This leads to problems in terms of the Moment Sense: time is not expressed as being an entity as such, i.e. time is not referred in the non-parliamentary speeches as time, as temporality, but always in relation to an event, an occurance or an instance, a specific occasion party of a process or activity. When in the speeches "the time has come", it is always in relation to some period of the past coming to a turning point because it has been influenced by actions of others. In this sense the moment does not just arrive, but the reasons for its realisation add to its temporal point by bringing in the element of an experienced event or action. The discrete temporal point, the punctuality becomes blurred with the active role the events and actors have in creating such a moment, turning it into the realm of instances or events. The role of the party as one emerging from the developments of the 1990s is highlighted in the story told about the formation of the party by Monica McWilliams, in a speech addressed to the National Library of Ireland Society:

"The emergence of the Women's Coalition was dependant on a range of factors converging at a particular time in history, thus making it somewhat similar to the emergence of the women's movement some thirty years before. First, there was a pre-existing network or infrastructure within the base of the movement. The other factors present were the susceptibility of the network to new ideas and an international diffusion of ideas. The fourth, and probably most crucial factor, was the situation of crisis that actually triggered off the Coalition's formation. This arose in March 1996. Having created expectations of a new participatice democracy through the aspirations of the Framework Document, the British government subsequently faced strong criticism when it published its paper on the 'Designation of Parties for the Forthcoming Elections'. What became apparent was that only the parties listed by government, namely those that has stood for election previously, were to be allowed to enter the race. This in effect meant that any independent group, or those wishing to enter the political scene for the first time, would not be permitted to do so." (1999b)

With this narrative a linkage is made with the women's movement of the past, underlining the similarities the Coalition has with the civil society in terms of political action. The crisis situation marks an event due to the actions of the British government, as it seemed that despite the promises the established structures would be reinforced by defining those permitted to participate in the election. Using the classification of Evans, the Event Sense of this "situation of crisis" is articulated in the description of the differing insights of the British government and some politically active Northern Irish people.

The notion that the distinctively temporal nature of the Moment Sense is in practice absent from the argumentation also applies to another categorisation of Evans, namely the Agentive Sense of time. This mode refers to time as a productive force, through which events take place, a notion that time actually brings about change (2004, 169). As is the case with the Moment Sense, the Agentive Sense also seems to be of no significance in the texts dealt with in the present study. Moreover, in telling a story about the Coalition's formation, one is also bound to rely on a specific events and instances produced by the actions of others, and the figures, in which time is considered an active entity, remain absent in these politically motivated texts. In legitimising one's position in the political playground it would seem to be more popular to refer to actual events and favour causal relations between actions than to outline time as producing the alterations of situations.

In relation to the Agentive Sense, the Matrix Sense of time (2004, 151) also refers to time as an entity. However in this case the defining quality of this entity is its infiniteness, the idea of time without onsets or offsets. In a way this relates to the idea of *chronos*, where *chronos* is understood to be linear and to surpass the individual existence. *Chronos* implies, then, continuum in a stronger sense than the idea of intervals, which, whether the period is long or short, does have its onsets and offsets. In this sense *chronos* resembles the Matrix Sense, which is used to illustrate the idea of time as an entity with "infinite elapse", an entity subsuming all events, "the Matrix in terms of which experience is possible" (*ibid.*). In the non-parliamentary texts the implied continuum, the *chronos* or the Matrix, is the exclusion and oppression of women in general, beyond the established Northern Ireland or its conflict. This Matrix, however, is merely present as a context for the establishment of the party, an ongoing state of things in relation to the politics of Northern Ireland. The Matrix-nature of this is written into the texts to be the prevailing situation, but this does not imply that no change would ever be realised. The Matrix Sense is merely used to paint the picture of the current situation, and of what will remain the same without a sufficient action that would have the power to change the course of this prevailing situation. The Matrix Sense, then, is something to be used as a cautionary example, from which a turn should be away from. The difference in relation to the Duration Sense is the way a constituted Matrix is not necessarily given an onset, and the potential offset is also conditional to the actions taken. The intervals constituted have a characterisation through the beginnings and endings.

3.3.2. *Space*

The spatial expressions of time are the expression related to the threefold classification of past, present and future (Evans 2004, 188-189). This means that the ideas of past, present and future time are expressed through terms of location, which in turn is understood from the point of view of the experiencing subject. From the point of view of political rhetoric these locations of past, present and future are constituted on terms of the objective of the argument, which defines the location metaphors used to describe time. The locations of future are thus those that “lie ahead”, whereas the past is that “left behind”. However, the past is always in the present in the form of experiences and marks form events and the future is embedded in the contemporary choices. In political argumentation these elements of the past and future are used to legitimise the choices of the present, the policies and politicking of the present.

The personal as politics is underlined in the way the party is dealing with the past and the conflict, creating a group of victims beyond the boundaries of the traditional division. The experienced nature of the knowledge is illustrated by using a set of sentimental concepts, as the relationship of the past and the present is illustrated to be the “space between fear and hope”:

“Fear and hope describe contrasting views of the potential of human situations. For those who live in fear, they carry negative expectations about the behaviour of others. For those people it becomes easier to view the threatening ‘other’ as enemy and to visit abuse upon them before they can inflict it. For those who live in hope, they carry positive inclinations about the behaviour of others and have engendered positivity in the other.

Those who have occupied the space of fear have refused to contemplate the political changes, which the Agreement requires. They have engaged in a kind of defensive politics that stresses protecting one’s patch as the principal rationale of political engagement. Sometimes the natural thing to do is to act out of such fear but the brave thing to do is to act out of hope – to dare to have hope. Hopeful people attempt to facilitate concerns of difference and of reconciliation. They want to show how it is possible to conceive of reconciliation in a way that gives difference its due. ---Reconciliation, like hope itself, means investing in the other. ---Without this hope, too many of us are doomed to inhabit only the separate spaces within which divisions become normalised” (2000a.)

In the fragment above, taken from a conference speech delivered by Ms McWilliams in Limerick the space of fear represents the stagnation of politics, the incapability to change,

the perpetuation of the “old regime” and the ways of the past. This is due to the failed confidence –building, a result of the suspicion deriving from the historical developments. The space of fear is the past of the region, the space of the suffering. This could be altered, but some of the key actors in the process lack the courage and willingness to do this. The violence of the past, the fear of the past, could be avoided in the future, if only the suspicions would not dominate the debate. Fear as marking the experiences of the past is also a sign of a strongly asymmetrical power-relation between the parties utilising fear and those subject to it, a sign of an undemocratic development. Fear is the element of the past included in the present, alongside with hope reaching for the direction of the future. Again, by constituting fear and hope as marking the experienced violent past and the realisation of the potentiality of the present the Coalition is attempting to overcome the societal division by referring to violence and victims in general, by stressing the collective suffering of the region. This means victimising the people of Northern Ireland as a whole, and making the past violence a product of a series of unfortunate events, which is now avoidable if only the agreement is implemented. The violence is the threat, not the politics of the republicans or extreme unionists as such.

The space between fear and hope is the space of the active present, in which the chances are to be realised. The potential futures of the region are to be either one emerging out of the space of fear, or the other emerging from the space of hope. The former, as noted above, should be a space of the past, left behind, but remaining active in the present, whereas the latter is located in co-existence in relation to the experiencing subject, the space of those who have some faith in the peace process and the implementation of the agreement, a new space of the present. A more specific illustration of the people occupying the space of fear is expressed in the further quotation from the conference speech:

“For those in the grip of fear, the requirement to work across our differences, demanded too much of them. Any attempt by the Women’s Coalition to create a consensus style of politics or focus on the need for an honourable compromise was read by them as a demand for surrender. What the Agreement did was to radically disorientate people who refused to change and opposition came from two kinds of people, those who used violence outside the political process and those inside the political process who lacked the moral and political courage to move beyond their fears.” (2000a.)

Thus the ones truly committed to the peace process are the ones with moral superiority over their opponents in that the latter either feed the violence of the past or refuse to do enough, or lack the capability of doing enough, to abolish these methods of fear.

For the Coalition another spatial difference between the past and the present would be the alteration they experienced in terms of political space. In the speeches the strong linkage with the volunteer community work is outlined, and the political activity of the founding members on the communal level is stressed. Thus the now party politically active women (formerly politically homeless) all come from the political sphere, or space, of the civil society. Entering the party political scene turns these women to be part of another sphere, the formal sphere. The parliamentary level of politics is then a space of the present, but gaining an established status on the party political field remains in the future not yet realised. The locus of women, thus, is presented as occupying the space of the margins, the depths of the civil society in the past, now to be turned into a space in the frontline of the party political field. What the Coalition is advocating for is the process of reconciliation in order to transcend the historical spaces of the two communities and the space of fear, the past division into “a common space”, which would enable the co-existence of the traditions. The following quotation is from a speech given in a university:

“When I speak of the need for reconciliation, I do not mean assimilation, or fundamentalism, or some state of perfect harmony, or some kind of resignation that we have to become reconciled to sharing power not because we want to but because it is the least worst option. --- [More importantly] reconciliation matters because it opens up a common space we can all share and which is indispensable. Without this hope, too many of us are doomed to inhabit only the separate spaces within which the divisions become normalised” (1999a)

The separate spaces would be the spaces of stagnation, a temporal vacuum, in which the normalisation of the division would lead the way into political status quo dominated by the traditional parties. To present this option as something one would be “doomed” to take is to turn this possibility into a dead-end situation, out of which the chances of turning back are minimal. The addressee is forced to contemplate on two alternatives, of which the first one belongs to the realm of adjustment and the other to that of stagnation and prejudice, without an offset in sight.

* * *

As noted above, the temporal approach utilised in this study operates on two levels: On the one hand the situation in Northern Ireland influencing on the formation of the party and marking the progressing peace process are considered as marking the discourse adopted by

the party and also setting a framework for it to operate in and from. The kairos –nature of the 1990s has had an impact on the figures used by the party, as its very existence is based on the idea of “taking matters into one’s own hands”, seizing an occasion and utilising the challenge the established regime is subjected to. The Agreement is an important point of reference for the party because of the way it reflects the ideas of the peace process at the time, and the way it can be used as a framework for political action.

The established polity, as mentioned above, was forced to seek new potential approaches to the questions under dispute. This included the vocabulary of human rights, inclusion and equality, in relation to which the actors of the party political field needed to define their positions. The rhetorical ways, which the Coalition used in order to utilise this appeared breakage is considered in the following chapters, and it suffices here to merely note that they used the contemporary discourse in creating their image as the party of the present, emerging at the time of action and bringing about the element needed to complete the peace process and the negotiations.

The usage of the instances and events, as well as referring to a relatively short periods all illustrate the novelty of the Coalition, its lack of attachments to the previous regimes, and its willingness to bring about change. The progress of the peace process is utilised in the form of hope, of the optimistic statements in regard to the Agreement. Even when the problems in implementing it are outlined, the hope always remains in the fact that an agreement was reached, signed and endorsed by the people. The difficulties of the present are always less dramatic than the difficulties of the past, and the reconciled future can become political reality if the actions taken are within the lines of the Agreement. Thus at the time of dispute, the Agreement, a milestone in the history of Northern Ireland, is used to restore the order. It is an attempt to regularise the ethos of the new constitution, an attempt to secure its position alongside with the status of its architects.

The Coalition’s twofold image is created by the way it stresses the grassroots –linkages but is declared a party with parliamentary goals. The division between the informal and the formal sphere of politics is presented in a somewhat blunt way and used to stress the different spaces of women. The community level, the informal sphere, is presented as a space of the past, but also of the present and the future: the space for the future, the formal sphere of constitutional politics is introduced as complementing, not replacing, the active

female participation on the community level. Thus the Coalition is presented to function as a linkage between the informal sphere and the formal sphere: by emerging out of the grassroots activism and maintaining a strong connection with the local organisations the party is able to transmit the experiences of the communities into the parliamentary level, where, being competent politicians, they would act in order to protect the interests of their electorate. In a situation, where the representatives of the traditional parties are to reassure their constituencies about their ability to contribute to the present situation – whether by working for the Agreement or against it- the smaller parties to argue for an alternative option, a widening of the context.

4. “Humanizing the dialogue”

“As Bell Hooks (1989:131) points out

‘Dialogue implies talk between two subjects, not the speech of subject and object. It’s a humanizing speech, one that challenges and resists domination.’ ---

It is this kind of dialogue which occurs within the Women’s Coalition and which is likely to be our best resource when engaging with mainstream politics in Northern Ireland” (1997)

The following chapter is dedicated to the means the Coalition uses to legitimate its position. A fundamental temporal move the Coalition makes is that it takes the constitution as its point of reference, a key element with which it legitimises its existence among the traditional parties. The time of the constitution referred to is, as opposed to the past politics of the traditional parties, the Agreement of 1998. This is the sole source of the “constitutional politics” of the Coalition, as it refuses to take part into the discussion about the partition and the constitution with which Northern Ireland was established. The time represented by the Agreement in regard to differing forms of speeches varies alongside with the negotiations, the signing and the implementation: the negotiations for it are filled with hope about the possibility of an agreement, while the speeches outside the parliament after the signing present the Agreement as a turning point, an onset for a new period. In the parliamentary speeches the Agreement is used as a point of reference in legitimising the existence of the Assembly and the mandate of the MPs. The presence of the Coalition in the Assembly is legitimised by pointing to the Agreement as something the party has been constructing alongside with the traditional parties and is thus an equal participant in its implementation. Thus the constitutional paradigm is taken to be expressed within a different temporal context: the future of Northern Ireland as a political entity is discussed within the terms of the new constitution instead the one from the 1920s. The language of the Agreement is that of human rights and equality, as well as reconciliation. This gives the principles of the Coalition - inclusion, equality and human rights- a powerful sense of being congruent with the widely endorsed Agreement.

The argumentation of the NIWC is based on the abovementioned, newly defined constitutional approach and the politicisation of women as a category transcending the traditional division. The entrance of women as a category is argued for by using the concept of female experience as constituting the competence and importance of women as

contributors to the formal sphere of politics. In this chapter some elements about the act of politicising women is discussed, followed by an assessment on the usage of female experience. What the Coalition does is that it is able to utilise the applied point of departure –the politicisation of women- as differentiating itself from the traditional parties, while remaining in the realm of a constitutional debate. The element of female experience makes the role of women visible in relation to the recent history of the region, and thus potentially makes the idea of a women’s party less alien in the Northern Irish context. In relation to time the category of women and the concept of female experience mark an actualisation of a latent matter, previously present but not recognised by the politics of the past, now emerging as a sign and realiser of an ongoing change.

4.1. Politicising women

The Coalition, as mentioned above, is categorised to belong to the group of the centrist – cross-communal –parties of Northern Ireland. The Alliance Party has secured its position as a cross-communal party (with explicitly articulated support for the union) and thus was the one attracting votes from both communities. It has gathered support from the educated and wealthier middle class, and has a liberal basis with claims for equal citizenship, individual choice and devolution. The APNI manifesto for the Assembly elections of 1998 states that

“The elections to the new Assembly present us with once in a lifetime opportunity to change the way Northern Ireland is governed. In the future it will be the people of Northern Ireland who make the decisions about the real issues that affect our day to day lives. Our elected politicians will be given a responsibility for government in a way that is quite different from the Direct Rule of the last 25 years.

Compare our manifesto with those of the other parties and I believe you will see that Alliance is offering what thoughtful people want. --- The choice could not be clearer. It is time to reject the politics of division and despair. We offer you real benefits, real improvements in the quality of your life, and an end to sectarian politics –in short, the promise of a better future for our country.” (Alliance Party of Northern Ireland Manifesto, June 1998)

The change in the way of governing the signing of the agreement enables is present here. The Alliance also pleads to the sense of reason and rationality of the people, since they would be the ones to decide of their own future now. There would be a change in the course of politics, in a way that would bring the issues closer to those not members of the

political elite instead of having a distance rule from Westminster. The “thoughtful people” would be those not engaging into the irrationalities of the past, but to the “real issues” of the daily life. The division and sectarianism are not identified with reality or those real issues, but with the despair of the past. The usage of the pronouns of “I”, “you” and “our” deepens the sense of bringing the realm of politics with a strong linkage to the quality of life of the addressee closer to the realm of reality.

The Women’s Coalition is a child of the turbulent times of the 1990s. Being only hastily established for the election for the forum means that the rhetoric of the Coalition has the sense of activism and political participation built within. The party refers to the language of the peace process and the issues of the Agreement in its manifestos and speeches. The Alliance party secured its position at the time of the Sunningdale Agreement, the campaigns for the civil rights and equal citizenship as well as the joining of both the UK and the Republic of Ireland in the EU. Expressing the support for the union was a move of moderation in the 1970s, when the IRA was devoted to its campaign of Armed Struggle. The act of linking the civil rights campaign, mostly associated with the nationalist community, and the support for the union utilised the discourses on both sides without being too radically supportive of either. The party’s pro-devolution position gives it a common interest with the more radical unionists (although this hardly makes the DUP and the Alliance political allies). The NIWC has been rooted into the previously established centre and its issues on equality, but makes an attempt to extend and stretch the boundaries by bringing in the gender equality explicitly. A further move is made by not expressing support for either the union or the united Ireland, but only referring to the contemporary constitution, namely the Belfast Agreement. This gives the party the opportunity to present itself as one of the architects of the endorsed agreement and as the one party truly committed to its implementation, with absolutely no linkages to the failed politics of the past.

The new matter the NIWC brings into debate is women. By politicising this category it is able to appeal for the group not previously associated with the formal sphere of politics and thus does not bring in with it the package of the past, i.e. the role of decision making and the style of politicking that has led to violence and division. The women of the party is a collective of those formerly quieted down in the face of the more serious (constitutional) issues, and whose needs and identity building have been only interpreted through the

conflict. The women, thus, represent the latent matter of the society influenced by the conflict without ever having had a say in the way of ruling. This is illustrated in the speeches by listing the few women ever been elected to the British Parliament and stressing the absence of women from the local level of formal politics as well (e.g. of the speeches 1997, 1999b).

The reinterpretation of the political and politics as something ranging outside the “formal” sphere of debating the constitutional issue as well as being indeed more than the constitutional issue itself must be contested in order to create a sense of involution in the development of the region. The politics-as-activity notion is strongly promoted for. In the above quoted study about the female political participation the notion of what is understood as political is strangely twofold: The political is associated with the issues concerning the constitutional question and is seen as belong to the distant realm of formal politics of public sphere -even though the consequences of the constitutionality and division penetrate the structures of what is considered the “private” sphere. Stressing the relations with the grassroots and specifying the different forms of female activism the way the leader Professor McWilliams does in her speeches is used to point out that women also are not just influenced by but participatory to the polity.

The women as party to the conflict is used to legitimise the right for them to argue their case after “holding their tongue” for so long. As noted before, the women are presented as being the ones occupying the sphere of informal politics, which they often do not interpret to belong to the realm of any kind of politics at all. The task for the party, then, would be to point out that women have for long been engaged in politics, even though this would not be politics in its traditional sense. The work of the grassroots organisations is recognised in the manifesto:

“We know the vital role that community and voluntary groups have played in holding our society together over the last three decades. ---

When elected we commit ourselves to--- developing open access for community groups: women’s organisations; trade unions; and other organisations within civil society to our Assembly members.” (NIWC 1998 Northern Ireland Assembly Election Manifesto)

In the speeches the relation to the non-governmental organisations is repeated, for example in this general NIWC -speech from 2002:

“We try to stay consistent with our grassroots formation, seeking ways to involve our members in formulating and discussing party policies and political developments. We work closely with voluntary and community organisations, bringing their views into the decision-making process.”

The women are identified with activists, although the word “politician” is also used in referring to the delegates and members of the party on the parliamentary level. The notion of women as activists stresses the idea of impulse and action and links the party, its members and policies with close ties to civil society. It also turns the focus away from the politicians related to past ways of governing, creates an image of an actor from outside in a rather populist way. The fact that the members of the party are trying out for the party politics and for the heart of the constitutional politics and thus will not be able to pose as a non-governmental organisation is dispelled by the story of the group: The party is established for the sole purpose of becoming institutional party, but with close ties to the civil society activism, from which has emerged and whose interests it advocates.

Negotiating for a new constitution in this case means a change in the representation of the region through its parliament. In the constitution the representation of the two communities is ensured via the mechanisms of power-sharing and written into the regulations for the region. The writing of the constitution in such a situation provides the participants an opportunity to push their agendas forward, although the room of manoeuvre is encroached by the inclusive nature of the negotiations; in order to gain an acceptable draft the agendas are bound to be moderated, which in turn increases the pressure from the electorate’s part. However, to be present at the time of the negotiation and writing is to have a chance to argue for one’s interest. To politicise women, a new functional category for the party politics of Northern Ireland, at the time when a new constitution, an alteration in the constellation of the polity, was to be written provides the addresser with a space and opportunity to be heard.

4.2. Female experience

The concept of female experience is used by the party to argue for the capability of women to contribute to the political field in Northern Ireland. The concept is used in a somewhat epistemological way to describe the female knowledge as gaining from the concrete

experience of engaging in cross-communal relationships. This is completed with another experience women possess: the experience of having to deal with the problems of every day life, such as unemployment, the distortions and deficiencies in the systems of education and health care or unbeneficial infrastructure. The women can be helpful in creating dialogue, as is outlined in the NIWC-conference speech:

“The quest for commonality (and this is what women truly understand) can succeed only if it involves recognising, rather than denying, difference. Women who have been the community activists throughout the conflict know that it is a dynamic process through which we become opened up to others and as a consequence we broaden our understanding of the world”. (1999c)

The concept of commonality is a defining one in terms of experience. What “the quest for commonality” marks is the willingness of the women engage in dialogue, to find a common ground from which to operate. It is a mediating concept between the divided communities, the means of achieving compromise. Commonality is the illustration of the realisation of the idea of exchanging experiences, and highlights the search for a practical ground for working across the sectarian lines.

Experience is one of the central concepts in feminist theory, the essence of the turn to the personal politics. According to some theorists experience is the way to reveal the truth of the social relations, since the turn to experience reveals the situated nature of knowledge and activity. (Hughes 2002, 151). While from the epistemological point of view a singular experience as source of knowledge is problematical, it can be used as an argument for one’s capability in politics. Experience is central for feminist theory since it has been the key in starting the movement as “women began to talk to each other and make sense of their experiences as women” (ibid.). The Women’s Coalition uses this point of departure and argues that female experience serves well as the source of the kind of knowledge that is needed in a conflict situation. The process of “rooting and shifting” is related to this knowledge and is borrowed from feminist theory and used on more than one occasion, both in the NIWC conference-speech and a speech delivered for a more heterogeneous audience:

“To build these alliances, Coalition members like myself have engaged in what Italian feminists have referred to as a process of ‘rooting’ and ‘shifting’---. The idea is that each woman brings with her the rooting in her own membership and identity, but at the same time tries to shift in order to put herself in a situation of

exchange with women who have a different situation and identity. They call it 'transversalism' to differentiate it from 'universalism', which by assuming a homogeneous point of departure ends up being exclusive instead of inclusive." (1997, 1999b)

Also linked to knowledge are the experiences of inferiority and oppression that women possess:

"For women who have suffered through lack of self-confidence in a life-time of feeling inferior, subordinate and oppressed, to be involved in the naming, claiming and making of feminist politics is extremely liberating. But knowledge and wisdom are also the key ingredients in this process. There are many knowledgeable negotiators but there are few wise ones. Knowledge without wisdom may be adequate for the powerful but wisdom is essential to the survival of the subordinate." (1997)

The singular nature of a personal experience is turned into a collective of experiences, from singularity to plurality. The emphasis is put on the every-day experience of one, on the politics of the social relations of the "private sphere" in order to extend the concept of the political, but at the same time this experience is incorporated into the experiences of others. The owners of these experiences have the common denominator of being women, which is argued to be the one, and the most important, index all these experiences carry within. The relationship between those with wisdom and those with knowledge follow the lines of those having the experience of being subordinated (in this case the women) and those without this experience.

The concept of experience is used in the attempt to challenge the structures of the former division. By turning the focus on the collective of individual experiences of women the party is rhetorically presenting these individual experiences as the true matter of the society, as the reality of the political life in Northern Ireland. The experiences are used to justify the party's position as a party of "common sense", as it is trying to deconstruct the existing political structure; the established order is presented as having little attachments to the reality of a significant part of the civil society, i.e. those with the willingness to bring about change. This is done in order to gain space for the attempted new politicisation, the women. Talking about the experience of women can also be used to highlight different forms of oppressions occurring in the society and the discrimination against women can be focused on instead of discussing the past inequalities between the religious parties. The collective experience composed of the personal experiences of women is constituted to

mark the sufferings of the past and the reason for the active entrance of women into the party politics. The past is indeed referred to as a state of collective suffering, in which the victims are those who have had to live in such a violent society. The principle of inclusion is repeated in the speeches outside as well as inside the Assembly, as the “part of the problem, party of the solution” –view is argued for. This leaves the past with no visible subject of lay the blame on and enables the party to engage into the negotiations with any of the parties committed to the process. Reconciliation – a term and the practices for its realisation borrowed from the South African peace process - is offered as means to deal with the suffering and the bitterness, and the Civic Forum the party had been advocating for in the negotiations is presented as the forum in which the different experiences on the conflict can be articulated and exchanged.

Thus, experience is a fundamental concept for the argumentation of the Coalition. Its knowledge and capability –arguments are based on the variety and essentiality of the every-day experiences its representatives as women, as the matter of the society so long kept (and stayed) in the margins. Also the room for the attempted politicisation is argued for by using the primacy of experience: the existing constellation of politicisations lacks the experience-matter of such a significant group in numbers, namely the women. This means the contemporary situation can be viewed as not answering to the needs of the society, in which the group of women is demanding to be heard, and clearly has a right, in the name of democracy, to present their case. The polity of party politics is out of date and needs to be modified accordingly. The attention of the international actors and the human rights –ethos of the peace process has provided the party a framework for a wider demands for equality –just like the Alliance Party had been able to utilise the civil rights –talk of the 1970s in its claims for equal citizenship (only over thirty-years before the time of the Women’s Coalition discrimination was discussed mainly in the relation to the majority-minority question). In this sense the emergence of the Coalition, another centrist party to challenge the APNI, can be seen as the next step for widening the realm of the discussion on equality in the political debate of Northern Ireland.

By using experience the Coalition is also able to focus on the individual citizen –the woman of Ulster with civil rights but no significant voice. This turn is the turn from the narratives of the traditional communities into the singularity of the individual, in a sense from chronos to kairos. The former represents the conflict in the background, against

which the experience of the individual is set. The experience the individual has in regards to the situation of the present can no longer be fitted within the traditional divisions. For those thus left without a political home the Coalition provides a safe haven, free from the packages from the past (as opposed to the APNI).

* * *

The Coalition, by proposing such a turn to the experiences of the individual creates an image of a party of the present, the one stressing the solution (process and procedurals, utilising the means of negotiation) instead of the problem (the past definitions of policy). It has the advantage of having stated no other goal but to improve the conditions for gender equality and the implementation of the agreement; whether the agreement leads the region towards a united Ireland or not is of no concern of the Coalition since the reason the agreement is argued for is its role in the ending of the paramilitary violence. The importance of the singular events and instances built into the story of the early years of the party are used as highlighting the importance of these events in relation to the progress of the peace process, stressing the importance of what may seem little progress to some. For a small party it may be crucial to convince the electorate about the importance of the “mere” act of debate and seemingly small steps of progress in order to appear as an important actor among those with a substantially larger share of power.

The politicisation of women serves as a point of departure for naming a new category to prompt political action. The entrance of constitutionally active women is an act of shaking the established polity by introducing a new object needing to be added in the issues debated under the term “equality”, i.e. women’s issues. However, as the grassroots activism of women and women’s organisations is pointed out to have their roots in the 1970s (and the republican women’s movement in the early 20th century), the contemporary act is focused on the act of making these issues part of the political agenda on the parliamentary level. This, again, highlights the aim of the party, which is to raise the profile of women in terms of representative politics. This aim is meant to function within the framework of parliamentary politics, and differentiates the Coalition from a social movement.

From the point of view of the political situation prevailing in Northern Ireland at the time to attempt to form a parliamentary party as opposed to a pressure group seems like a

logical solution to make: the negotiations for the Agreement meant that the time had never been better for a formation of a new party, because of the list and the election for the forum. This would mean a fair chance for smaller parties to make an entrance. The election for the forum meant a chance for getting into the same negotiating arena with the traditional parties, which in turn meant a straight contact to the party political actors, who had been in possession of the responsibility for the decision-making for some time. By presenting itself as a political party as opposed to a social movement or a pressure group the Coalition was able to avoid being categorised as a single issue movement and extend its agenda in order to fight for its space on the formal sphere. Negotiating for an agreement gave the Coalition ammunition needed in arguing their way into the body responsible for implementing the Agreement.

5. On the scene of the crime: The novices of a commencing Assembly

After the negotiations the Coalition was to stand for the election for the new Assembly. It succeeded in getting two of its candidates elected, Professor Monica McWilliams and Ms Jane Morrice. The successful election turned the activists into representatives, who would now be active on the parliamentary level as well. This meant that one of the goals had been achieved, namely getting women elected in order to press women's issues to get on the agenda. The implementation of the Agreement, which the Coalition strongly supported, became the main issue of the new Assembly. The parliamentary practices were not familiar to everyone, since some of the representatives, such as the two members of the Coalition, did not have any previous parliamentary experience. Furthermore, the party was now concerned of getting its arguments through in the parliament as well, instead of the people of Northern Ireland. The fundamental problem in Northern Ireland has been that the leaders of certain parties would not speak to each other, even at the time of signing the Agreement, and that the language has largely coiled around the question of division and the violent conflict. Power-sharing, then, proved problematic in a culture lacking the terms of debate and discussion because of, as argued before, the development of governing Northern Ireland.

The Coalition adapted the role of the mediator, not only of the will of the people, but the party working towards both extremes, with parties from both traditions. In the speeches this can be seen as references to the Agreement as legitimising the existence of the Assembly and thus being the guidelines for making decisions as well as naming the representatives "politicians" and demanding everyone to act accordingly by governing and leading. The female experience –argument became less visible inside the parliament, while outside it used as the essence of the capability of the party. In the parliament the competence is argued for by referring to the work the members of the party have done on the community level, but stressing this as a particularly characteristic of women is not explicitly made, but rather the reference is made to the cross-communal nature of the party.

In this chapter some points are made about the argumentation of the Coalition on the parliamentary level. Firstly, some general observations about the nature of the debate in the

Assembly are made, after which the focus is on the argumentation of the Coalition. The chapter begins, however, with an assessment on representation in Northern Ireland; after all, the turn from a community activist into an MP is a question of taking a leap from the grassroots into the realm of representation.

5.1. On representation

The need for a wider representation of the formerly nearly absent figures on the parliamentary level is called for by the Coalition. Thus the idea of a political representation adopted by the party is linked with representative democracy, in which the polity is represented in the forum for debate –the parliament. The parliament is seen as a tool for managing the problem, a forum in which the differing experiences can become represented by those elected for the job.

The Coalition starts with the claim for getting more women elected in order to get women's issues on the agenda. In a way they seem to argue for what Ankersmit (1996) calls the mimetic theory of representation, i.e. the notion that the representative and the represented resemble each other, and have been accused of failing to recognise that female representation does not mean feminist representation (see chapter on women's role in political participation). Of course, the different identities included in the group of women are recognised, but what is stressed is what women have in common in the form of oppression and conditional citizenship – an alternative is provided for women to be represented by through their gender rather than ethnic or religious identity. In a society with a political culture committed to democracy this claim may have been the most obvious one to make: the absence of female candidates and representatives is easily argued to undermine the democratic ideals of the region as well as raise the question about why the parties do not promote the election of a female candidate more explicitly. Moreover, as mentioned before the politicisation of women as a collective had its advantages of being able to transcend the religious and constitutional division by claiming that the unity of this particular group was based on something that could be shared by members on both sides.

The notion of an experienced collective suffering and survival from it makes the new category of politically active women pregnant with the historical grievances of Northern

Ireland and keeps the party within the realm of the comprehensible; the arguments for the rights of women and the recognition of the issues of gender equality become more easily promoted for if they are legitimised by the input these women have had on the infrastructure and development of the civil society. The new ideas of women's participation and representation are linguistically bound to the contemporary political debate since too radical a shift away from the conceptual framework might prove fatal to the party in that it might not be able to legitimise its existence and space on the political field. However, the cross-community approach of the party comes with a challenge on the conceptual field, as avoiding the associations which could be interpreted as a shift of the policies too strongly to either side means choosing the language carefully. In this way the party has linguistic limits –not only as a cross-communal and feminist party but also a party from outside the constitutional/formal/traditional politics.

An important feature of the Agreement was the power-sharing principle. Writing it into the new constitution –which, arguably the Agreement was because it replaced the Act of 1920–ensured that, for the time being, the societal division of the region was institutionalised. This “forced” widening of representation meant that the votes would mainly be contested within the communities in the future as well, and the constitutional dispute between the two communities would remain. The new legislative parliament, with its principle of consent and power-sharing is differs from the Stormont formerly in place, and its establishment does mark a temporal rupture in the course of governing in Northern Ireland: Even though the idea of power-sharing had been introduced earlier, it had never been successfully written into an agreement that would have been signed by nearly all parties. Therefore the Agreement differs from its precedents. The same applies to the restoration of the PR; even though it was restored in the 1980s, the direct rule of Westminster was in place and the parliament in Northern Ireland was in effect without powers. Whatever dialogue between the parties has the occurred, there was no need for the inter-party debate to reach for a compromise since Westminster would see to the ruling. Hence the claims for the politicians to “govern and lead” are claims for a constructive debate, the capability to engage in compromise, to ensure the function of the Assembly. The time of the negotiation and the attempt to reach an agreement is said to have required some shaping of the vocabulary in a concrete way, as the representative of the Coalition (in this case Professor McWilliams) noted in a speech given in Trinity University:

“To achieve this accommodation [of diverse identities and difference], we each have to involve ourselves in compromise. Because the word ‘compromise’ has become such a disparaging one in Northern Ireland, and is frequently used to demean community leaders as well as politicians, we have also had to learn a new language. For example, when individuals are trying to achieve a compromise we now describe them as ‘accommodating’. In the media, at the Forum or during the negotiations, if a spokesperson from another party is attempting to be facilitative, this person is commended by the Coalition as being ‘very conscientious’ rather than ‘very moderate’”. (1997)

The negotiation for a new constitution is an opportune moment for reshaping the field of what is considered political. The “old regime” is already under a process of deconstruction and forced to rethink and reform its ideas as well in order to be able to be included into the outcome of the negotiation; it is probably far more useful to be present and attend to one’s own interests than consistently oppose to the process, especially when the determination on the behalf of others is directed toward making progress. This deconstruction opens up the space for smaller parties, non-governmental organisations and social movements to utilise the situation, to try to argue for their case - for example by politicising a phenomenon formerly absent. Should the politicisation be successful, i.e. should it become a part of the established polity and introduce a new space for politicking, the politicisation would “change the face of politics” (the slogan of the NIWC manifesto 2003). In the case of the Coalition, however, the politicisation of women and the political space they managed to gain in the course of the Agreement and the following new Assembly did not prove secure after the excitement about the Agreement diminished: the party failed to transcend its existence outside the constitutional paradigm of the Agreement in a way that would have helped them survive despite of the problems in its implementation.

The question of the new assembly relates to the idea of political representation. The act itself, namely the formation of the party, idea of getting more women elected and the claim for raising women’s issues on the agenda marks the need for these to be politically represented, since all these gained visibility at the time of the election for the forum. Furthermore, for most of its functional history Stormont has had unionist hegemony without the minority having a proper representation in parliament. The discussion on civil rights and the rights of the minority in the 1960s attracted the attention of the parties outside Northern Ireland and entered the agenda, and the equality between the communities as well as the accommodation of the minority had seen improvements over the years, including the restoration of the PR-system enabling the minority to get their

representatives elected more effectively. At the time of the negotiating forum the civil rights and equality had widened into a demand for the respect of human rights, and discussion about discrimination on the basis of gender had its opportunity to gain ground. These ideas, then, were able to become represented as the old regime was already under a deconstruction.

The idea of political representation is present in the speeches and the leaflets of the Coalition, the need for “other voices” to be heard (on the parliamentary level of politics and in the civic forum) is articulated in the form of getting women elected, the politicians being elected to govern. Ankersmit notes that

“For without political representation we are without a conception of what political reality –the represented- is like; without it, political reality has neither face nor contours. Without representation there is no represented- and without political representation there is no nation as a truly political entity” (2002, 115)

In the treaty of 1921 a legislative parliament was established in Northern Ireland, and so the idea of representative democracy of some kind has been part of the political culture of the region since the beginning. However, not until the abolishing of the hegemony the unionists had created has a more effective representation been made a possibility – a more effective in the sense of the electoral system being more inclusive for the minorities as well, not just The Minority consisting of the nationalists. Naturally, the idea of a nation is problematical in Northern Ireland, but to define the people living in it as constituting an entity within the boundaries of the region is equally challenging: the boundaries, defining the administrative province are not recognised as legitimate by a fraction of its population, and another fraction would like to see it more closely tied with the rest of the United Kingdom. To enrich the constellation of the parties of the Assembly by introducing a more plural representation might, should the Assembly successfully function, add to the image of the people of Northern Ireland as a political entity.

In Northern Ireland, the nature of political representation has featured strong linkages between the community and its representatives. As noted in the chapter on the history of Stormont, the representatives have often had such close ties to their communities, that the distance between the representative and the represented may have been diluted. The aesthetic gap Ankersmit argues for has been there, but perhaps has not been realised by the

represented –or the representatives. The close ties with the community make it more difficult for the representative to use her/his proportional independence in regard to politicking. In terms of accommodating the minority the problem the unionist hegemony deepened has not only been in terms of concrete discrimination in housing and franchising, but also in terms of political representation as potentially shaping the polity: As Ankersmit (2002, 114) notes, “representations partly determine the nature of what they represent”.

A further point Ankersmit raises concerns the issue of continental versus Anglo-Saxon democracies. According to him, the differing democratic forms are due to the challenges of different scales, from which it follows that the continental democratic machinery, having its roots in the post-Napoleon situation, is more complex than its Anglo-Saxon counterpart (2002, 102-103). The two counterparts have their strengths and weaknesses, but one thing the continental democracy is more effectively equipped for is finding a compromise (ibid, 208). Ankersmit argues that representative democracy is linked with the idea of compromise, as opposed to consensus. In democracy, the idea of compromise is more useful than that of consensus because of the flexibility and sustainability of the former: co-operation can be based on compromise, even though finding consensus would be out of the question. (Ibid.)

The abolishment of the PR in the 1920s introduced a Westminster –style of democratic system in Northern Ireland. As pointed out before, this shaped the political system of the region such a way that the representation of the Catholic/nationalist community was nearly non-existent during the unionist regime. Following the idea of Ankersmit, adopting a more continental –style of democracy for the region might have forced the parties to search for compromises in order to accommodate the minority more effectively. Of course, the problem of the province is a complex one and speculation about how a different political system would have influenced in the development of, e.g. militant republicanism, is hardly fruitful. However, considering the difficulties the power-sharing Assembly faced due to the lack of experience in finding a compromise it can be pointed out that a parliament with wider representation might have proved a more efficient form of democracy to be adopted in the first place. It should be noted once more, though, that the option of giving the power back to Westminster and living under the direct rule has always been an option, at least in theory; the parties are not forced to reach a compromise in a sense that the lack of one would be fatal to the political situation of the region, but those refusing to bend their

principles at all can always prove a point by not doing so. The worst thing that happens to the political institutions of the region would be prorogation, which is known to be of a temporary kind each time.

In a sense the Coalition was arguing for the idea of a compromise being the realistic aim of the members of different communities by speaking (in their off-parliamentary speeches) of the need for the recognition of the partiality of knowledge. This was linked with the idea that the reason women were able to work effectively across the community lines was based on the way they were engaged to the process of “rooting and shifting”, noted earlier in the text in reference to the concept of female experience (4.2.). In a way, however, this idea does introduce consensus as its potential outcome. This is because the idea of the partiality of the knowledge merely enables two (or more) parties to work together by finding the “common ground”, not necessarily mean that the outcome of this work is a creative compromise, out of which further developments may occur. The work based on partial consensus does not mean that something useful and new comes out of it, but may merely concentrate on a single issue or a moment’s co-operation.

The accommodation of the minority and the constellation of how the region and its people would be understood as an entity could have perhaps gained different shades, if political representation would have taken another course of development. It is also notable that in terms of representing a varying levels of unionist/nationalist politics the represented is actually provided with a quite comfortable set of choices, as it is possible to choose, within your own community, a less or more radical party as one’s representative. For a region with such a small number of people these choices manage to cover such a large portion of the electorate that those attempting to pursue for other kinds of interests are left with the margins. The Alliance Party has reassured those who wish to support an explicitly liberal cross-community politics, and has secured its position as a party in the middle. It has a comfortable amount of support as the fifth party after the larger ones, which has overshadowed the claim of the Coalition to be the true cross-community party on the region. As noted above, by politicising women the Coalition was able to legitimise its role in the struggle for representation.

Of the three before mentioned political changes marking democratisation the adoption of the parliamentary style is of concern here. The constitutional change of 1998 marked a

time for a new form of Assembly as well, in which the role of parliamentary procedures needed to be enforced despite of the fact that the region has had a parliament for decades. Palonen (2005a) differentiates between four temporal layers of politics in relation to the parliamentary style, namely timeliness, momentum, time-span and calendar. He discusses these types in relation to a normalised situation, in which the parliament as an institution is established and is functioning on a regular basis. This situation, of course, does not apply to Northern Ireland at the time this study is focused on, as the constitutional change has set a course for the parliament and its new direction. Kairos-situation is an exceptional situation, where the repetitions and recurrences may necessarily not apply. However, the four “ideal-typical” layers, as Palonen calls them, are here used illustrate the difficulties a newly established, devolved Assembly may have in relation to the “normalised” situation. Furthermore, Palonen uses these types to illustrate the temporal gap between a voter and an MP, derived from the idea of the aesthetic gap. This temporal gap will not, however, be considered here, as the focus is on the parliamentary level and the temporal layers are used in illustrating the times there.

The four layers are defined by Palonen as follows:

“The democratisation and parliamentarisation of politics increases the sense of timeliness by the insight into a polity, of which a regular condition is the possibility of alternation in government. The momentum in parliamentary democracies, in the sense of a turning point and the horizon opened by this turning point, is not restricted solely to the *kairos* of revolutions, wars or other extraordinary events. It is rather the regular and recurrent events of elections and alternation in government that are the crux of the matter. The time-span of politics is oriented toward a future event, above all the next elections. Correspondingly, the time-span is restricted to the electoral term and oriented toward the maintenance vs. overthrow of the present government and the re-election of an MP. The momentum and time-span also serve as political point of departure for the formation of a political calendar that divides political activities into time and requires the translation of political questions into temporal items. Additions to and revisions of the calendar can themselves serve as modes of temporal politicking.” (2005a, 114)

Firstly, in the case of Northern Ireland the possibility of alternation in government has not always been a self-evident feature of a democratic society. The unionist regime and the direct rule from Westminster have surpassed the visible alternation of government and decreased the sense of being represented among the minority. The entrance of Sinn Féin made the representation of the minority a wider matter, as it provided a more radical party

for those who considered the SDLP too moderate. The situation with the new Assembly would not differ from the conditions of the past in terms of the possibility of the direct rule should a stalemate occur, but the alternation in government was to be ensured at least in a way that prevented the rule of one community over the other. The past experiences of governing would not, however, raise hopes in terms of the potential of the power-sharing: the regular alternation of government would be conditional to the success of the parliament in terms of communication and decision-making, or the suspension of the Assembly would once more take place. Thus the MPs and the parties do not only experience insecurity in relation to the result of the next election, but also in relation to the sheer operation of the parliament. The threat of prorogation increases the pressure to resolve the issues under dispute –or provides an opportunity for those, who are not in favour of the contemporary form of governing or government, to make the conditions as dysfunctional as possible under the prevailing circumstances.

The momentum, as defined by Palonen, relates to the alternation of government and elections as well as the revolutionary situations. The realisation of a momentum requires some political skill in order to be able to utilise the momentum in the first place. The second task would be to maintain the momentum, i.e. to turn the politicisation into a part of the established polity. In the case of the Coalition, the realisation did occur, but the maintaining failed, as the party was unable to get any representatives elected in the postponed election of 2003. One of the reasons for this can be detected in the way the party was relying on the Agreement and using it as a point of reference in legitimising its presence on the parliament. The problems in implementing the Agreement escalated, and as the “confidence-building” between the parties failed, the work of the mediator, the “voice of reason” also seemed to have failed. The attitudes toward Agreement polarised in the course of events, and the reassurance of the people about the revolutionary nature of the Agreement would not be in line with the problems some opponents argued it possessed. The issue of decommissioning and the events that finally led to the suspension of the parliament damaged the reputation of the Agreement severely enough. Moreover, other parties had announced themselves as supporters of the Agreement as well, among the Sinn Féin, who argued to be one of the main contributors to its signing and assured its good will in terms of its implementation. Thus the problem the Coalition was faced with was that pro-agreement choices existed in other directions as well, and especially Sinn Féin was

able to profit from its new, accommodating approach and laid the blame on the unionist opponents, when it came to the problems in implementing the Agreement.

The time-span marks a future-oriented time, again in relation to the elections. Being restricted to the electoral term, time-span marks the way the party or an MP has a certain deadline in the form of the end of the term, but also the way the potential success in the next election would be secured. Again, the situation is very different in terms of the established parties and the smaller ones in Northern Ireland. Those following the lines of the division are racing against the parties within their own community (apart from the Alliance), but being one of the largest parties has also meant so far that some amount of success, at least enough to have representatives elected, is somewhat secured. The smaller parties, like the Coalition, has to deal with the problem of competing in a way also against another party “within the same community”, i.e. the Alliance among those most likely to be able to vote for a centrist party. For a smaller party the questions about getting enough visibility in the media and fundraising are of a different scale from the larger ones. This puts pressure on campaigning as well: the experienced time-span should be concentrated on as carefully as possible, or the momentum of gaining visibility or making a politically significant move might be lost.

Again, the political calendar in terms of elections is problematical in the case of Northern Ireland. Theoretically the elections are to be held within a certain period of time, but in practice this has not been a simple matter. Also the timetables outlined in the Agreement add to the list of events, as the act of decommissioning and prisoner release need to be agreed upon. To agree upon a timetable becomes challenging, when the legitimacy of the matter in hand is also still debated. In a way the an idea of Evans, namely the notion of the Measurement-system Sense of time (Evans 2004, 171) is related to the idea of the calendar in that the experienced durations, turned into a measured aspect of time, illustrate the difficulties in forming a timetable in the case of decommissioning: The republicans, to whom the issue was already sensitive enough, argued for a moderate solution in terms of how soon the IRA should be disarmed. The issue wanted to be delayed in order to quicken the process of disarming the loyalists. The unionist extremists attacked the republicans on number of occasions and argued that only an immediate decommissioning would provide sufficient evidence about the good will of the IRA. The republicans protested, and the question of whether decommissioning would take place turned into a question of when,

within what period and before which deadline. Here also time was used in a Commodity Sense (ibid, 187) by those, who had in their interest to hinder the process of implementation and challenge the Agreement. Raising the question about time by making claims about deadlines that would be of annoyance to the opposing side, but also utilising the confusing situation of the implementation by clinging into any potential issue creating as difficult a debate as possible are both examples of time used in the Commodity Sense.

Thus the path of the new representative Assembly of Northern Ireland is not one taking place under a normalised situation, and despite of the line of parliaments the region has had over the years, the local parliamentary culture has its distinctive features of a divided society under deconstruction mastered by the two sovereign governments of Britain and Ireland. The procedures are not established and the regularity concerning certain aspects of political calendar is more conditional than in an established parliamentary culture. Furthermore, the Agreement having a central role means, that the procedures and the issues to be dealt with are widely dictated by the concerns of the implementation. This, in turn, means that the debate over the Agreement handles issues essential to the nature of the society. Again, the discourse of the division can hardly be avoided, and the new elements prompted by the negotiations and the Agreement are in danger of being reduced into the questions about the traditional division with little distinctiveness.

5.2. The New Assembly

The New Northern Ireland Assembly, as modified in the Belfast Agreement and the Northern Ireland Act of 1998, started its parliamentary path in July 1998, before the devolved powers had been transferred to it. The debates of the “early days” (Vol 1-3 of the official reports, pre-devolution) revolve around issues on the procedures (like the Standing Orders), some practical matters on parliamentary/unparliamentary language and the formalities of appointing the First Deputy Minister (David Trimble of the UUP) and the Deputy First Minister (Seamus Mallon of the SDLP). Some examples on the issues are chosen to illustrate the nature and themes of the debates (below), but no meticulous assessment about the general debate is provided here since the focus will be on the argumentation of the Women’s Coalition representatives.

The Coalition had the experience of participating in a negotiating forum with the parties it was now to associate with on the parliamentary level. The parliamentary procedure adapted for the new Assembly were called the Northern Ireland Assembly Standing Orders, which, according to the introduction on the Northern Ireland Assembly web site¹⁹, have been formulated according to the requirements of the Belfast Agreement, with a basis on the procedures of other parliaments, mainly Westminster. It also states that the Standing Orders can be reviewed, and are done so by a committee, should the procedures need improvements. The changes and amendments follow the principle of consent, i.e. a cross-communal support for them is required. An interesting detail is the designation of identity, performed alongside with the signing of the Roll of Membership. The designation – unionist, nationalist or other- can be changed during an Assembly session, although only once per sitting. This has given those willing to change their designation an interesting tool for influencing the balance of voting. The representatives of the Coalition have changed their designations, as have representatives of the Alliance, in order to achieve the desired outcome. In a session on 9th of September, 2002, the members of the Coalition wish to re-designate their identities. The comment of Mr Ian Paisley Junior, a member of the DUP, notes the possibility of a cross-communal party to influence the balance:

>Mr Speaker:

I wish to advise the House that on 4 September 2002 I received separate correspondence from Ms Monica McWilliams and Ms Jane Morrice advising that, in accordance with Standing Order 3(8), they wish to change their respective designations to "Other". I remind the House that a change in designation notified in writing to the Speaker takes immediate effect.

Mr Paisley Jnr:

On a point of order, Mr Speaker, it would be helpful if you would inform the House what the Members' designation is now. Are they Unionists, Nationalists, Others, or just rescuers of whatever party is in trouble?
< (Vol 18, I)

Parliamentary style of rhetoric is deliberative in nature, "oriented toward weighing the "advantages and disadvantages of proposals" (Palonen 2005a, 119). In this it differs from negotiation, which has its aim in reaching a compromise rather than acquiring the majority of votes. The respect of the parliamentary procedures and their independence from the

¹⁹ <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/sopdf/so.htm>

deliberators, resulting in a situation where the arguments for and against are heard, and when this is done the representatives of both insights will be present. (Ibid.) The Coalition recognises this, as it does belong to the group of parties being able to quite freely re-designate its identity in the way described above. Professor McWilliams pointed this out during a session in 1999, in relation to a debate concerning the Standing Orders:

>Ms McWilliams:

When one is attempting to win a vote, one should not offend those who are in the position of being able to change their minds when that vote is being taken. I have a great deal of sympathy with the Back-Benchers, and there was a great deal of concern about how we could take that into account in terms of the committee. < (Vol 2, VI)

The Coalition acknowledges the need for adopting a functional procedure for the Assembly, and in doing this refers to the status of the Agreement once more. Ms Morrice comments on the work of a committee nominated to report on the Standing Orders:

>Ms Morrice:

A two-day or three-day debate on Standing Orders would not inspire the most intrepid political scientist, let alone our friends in journalism. However, it is important that they stop and read between the lines. This simple, unassuming report is, in fact, a document of tremendous significance as it outlines the rules and regulations that will govern the making or the breaking of new laws in Northern Ireland. The report outlines the procedures to be followed to guarantee that every piece of legislation is in accordance with anti-discrimination, equality and human-rights legislation.

These Standing Orders exist to ensure that every check is balanced and that every balance is checked. It is simply the translation of the Good Friday Agreement and the Northern Ireland Act into the conduct of business on the Floor of the House.

However, there is an important difference. These Standing Orders were agreed by representatives from every political party in the Assembly. In fact, the Standing Orders Committee is possibly the best example so far of all parties working together for the common good. Unionists, Nationalists, Loyalists, Republicans and "Others" sat side by side on the Committee, and together they wrote, rubbed out and rewrote the rules for the operation of the Assembly.

This is our rule book. Mr Cobain has said that we got here by looking at what happens in Parliaments in London, Dublin and Strasbourg and at what happened in the last parliamentary body in Northern Ireland and by choosing the bits that suited us best. We have in this rule book the potential for a thoroughly modern Assembly. It will place human rights and equality at the very top of the agenda, and cronyism at the very bottom. It will be open and transparent and will allow for a system of government which will be a role model for other Parliaments. < (Vol 2, VI)

In addition to the quotations above Ms Morrice argues, that by adopting proper rules and making the Assembly functional, the Northern Ireland Assembly would be of the rest of the world to envy.

The problems concerning the procedural dimension of parliamentarism in Northern Ireland include questions of language, such as the problem of using the Irish language during sessions. The limitations of the time given to a member to make their remarks proved problematical for those who wished to make their comments using the other native language, Irish. This in turn provoked a question of whether Ulster-Scots should also be allowed, or is English the only language used in the parliament (Vol 1, I - II). The quotations are from 14th of September, 1998. The removed fragment of text in the middle consists of a lengthy and finally interrupted comment in Irish made by Ms Bairbre de Brún:

>Rev Dr Ian Paisley (DUP):

Can it be made clear to Members that if they choose to speak in a language not known by all Members, that will be included in their time? They cannot speak in a language unknown to some Members and then have additional time to speak in English.

The Initial Presiding Officer:

I am happy to repeat what I said previously and to affirm that what Dr Paisley says is correct. The amount of time that Members have is not altered by the language in which they speak. I have already requested that Members using a language other than English translate for the sake of other Members.

Ms de Brún (Sinn Féin):

— ba chóir go mbeadh breis ama agam leis an aistriúchán sin a chur ar fáil.

If I or any other Member wishes to speak in Irish it is only right that we be given the same amount of time as someone speaking in any other language. If, for the benefit of other Members, in the absence of a translation system, I have to spend time saying in English what I have said in Irish, that time must be separate. If I am asked to provide such a service for Members who do not speak Irish, but am not given extra time to do so, I will not have the same speaking time as others<

In the quotations above time is used to prevent a representative from using her native language by pointing out the scarcity of the time given to each member. The lack of means to interpret text from Irish to English makes the situation difficult for those willing to make remarks in a language different from English. This also concerns the usage of Ulster-Scots, which some of the unionist members are willing to use should the nationalist use Irish. Thus the unwillingness to find a common language can be pointed out with the willingness to keep using one that marks distinctiveness from the opponents. The core of the problem is the procedures, which are still under debate.

The presence of the members from the DUP and Sinn Féin in the same Assembly is problematical on the very level of naming and referring:

>Mr M McGuinness (Sinn Féin):

On a point of order, Mr Initial Presiding Officer. Would you point out to Mr Robinson (DUP) that there is no such organisation as Sinn Féin/IRA in the Chamber? < (Vol 2, I)

Linking Sinn Féin explicitly with the republican paramilitaries is something the party wishes to avoid because of its stated willingness to participate in the democratic process, which in turn means they need to condemn violence. The members of the DUP exploit this and refer to the republican party as Sinn Féin/IRA. Later a debate takes place where it is questioned whether it is allowed to refer to a fellow MP as “murderer”²⁰. The quotation below serves as another example of the difficulties presented by referring:

>Mr Adams (Sinn Féin):

I noted Mr McCrea’s remark. It would be more appropriate if he apologised to Mrs Nelis.²¹

Rev William McCrea (DUP):

²⁰ Vol 3, I & Vol 4, II

²¹ Mr Adams has claimed he heard Rev McCrea to make a remark for Mrs Nelis (Sinn Féin), saying “go back to the kitchen and get out”.

I will not be responding to anything Adams says, and as far as I am concerned, if he does not know or he cannot listen to the truth, that is not my fault. I did not make the comments that it has been said that I made, but I do not want an apology from Mr Adams. I want the Sinn Fein movement to apologise to the members of my family for trying to wipe them out with an AK47.

The Initial Presiding Officer:

I must ask Members to take their seats. Indications that we have had from the Committee on Standing Orders suggest that we should respect each other and respond to each other with courtesy, even when that is difficult.

I have to say, Mr McCrea, that to refer to Mr Gerry Adams as "Adams" is not in keeping with proper Assembly or Parliamentary procedure. We all need to calm down a little and behave more respectfully, as we have before. < (Vol 1, V)

The problems with the issues on language as well as the other procedural problems in keeping within the temporal limits in addressing the speeches and followed by the problems in the practice of standing up while commenting are the issues of an assembly with little experience on the parliamentary procedurals. This situation provides the MPs with an opportunity to exploit the supposed lack of experience on their behalf; a question such as whether it is appropriate to refer to a fellow MP as "murderer", if one is convinced about him or her being one, is a example of an effective means for provocation. There is conversation about the procedures and practices and some of the MPs declare themselves to be more experienced parliamentarians while others grant this indeed being the case:

>The Initial Presiding Officer:

I must ask all Members, no matter how distinguished, to heed my requests. Important matters are being dealt with, and people have been impatient to hear about them. That is understandable. It is also understandable that when making a speech, one tries to save the most important part to the last. However, I appeal to Members to show courtesy.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley:

I do not see why you immediately discriminate when it comes to my party. You tell us to keep to our time. I do not intend to do that today. I have as much right to raise, wave to you and continue. I am a parliamentarian who is used to the order of the House, but not in this House. Everyone who has spoken so far has got away with running over time, yet when I stand up you immediately call on me to keep to my time.< (Vol 1, VIII)

>Mr Haughey (SDLP):

Mr Robinson is obviously a much more experienced parliamentarian than I am, and I defer to his judgement in this matter, but I still think that the matter is best left to the Committee on Standards and Privileges, which can work out an exact protocol for it.< (Vol 2, IV)

There are claims for the Chair to revise the course of the debates in the Hansard, the official reports of the sessions, and discussion on whether the language used fills the definition of being unparliamentary. The making of the constitution thus continues in the process of implementing it in the form of the parliamentary debates, as the newly established Assembly is trying to live up to the expectations laid on it by the power-sharing mechanisms. Parliamentarism as such is treated at this point as the self-evident ideal, and the claimed violations against its procedures are raised as issues to be dealt with by checking the right review on them in the Standing Orders:

>**Mr S Wilson (DUP):**

Today's proceedings have been described as verging on farce. In the light of the background to today's debate and the point that we have reached in the proceedings, it has to be said that there is some justification in that description. ---We are at this stage because the Ulster Unionist Party has been prepared to tear up its manifesto. Had it not been prepared to do that, we would not have reached this point. The Secretary of State has turned a blind eye to arms smuggling, shootings and beatings to get us to this stage. As I have said, the debate and the background to it are farcical.

Of course, in this farce, we are operating under rules which are as bent as — I suppose you know how I was going to finish that one off, Mr Initial Presiding Officer, so before you rule that I am being unparliamentary, I will not say any more. That is where we have got to.

Those looking at this objectively from the outside would see that what is going on here is not normal parliamentary democracy. The casual observer would see that we have bent and torn up the rules and that we are now debating whether Mr Mallon resigned. Does he believe he resigned, or have we imagined it? Ms McWilliams mentioned that this is like a concert. It is more like a pantomime — the Christmas pantomime season has started early. When I looked at the motion, its subject and the author, the words "Snow White" and "dwarf" came to mind. < (Vol 3, I)

The situation, where the new order concerning governing is to be realised, is turned into a debate about the procedures and how the debates are constituted in other parliamentary democracies. The question of whether there should be a parliament or not is not referred to, but it seems the participants wish to make it clear that nothing is given away without a fierce debate on the subject.

5.3. Mediating the “will of the people”

Neither of the women of the Coalition had previous party political experience from the preceding assemblies or on the local level. Their claim was that the formal (constitutional) level of politics lacked female representation and the role of women in the politics of Northern Ireland had been to participate in the grassroots organisations on the communal level where the experiences of cross-community communication had increased their capability to negotiate a peaceful and democratic development for the region. In the early period of their work in the Assembly (1998-1999) the Belfast Agreement and its successful implementation are the key issues in the argumentation of the party. Both of the representatives use the agreement and its wide endorsement as the mandate, which has been given to them by the people of Northern Ireland; the fact that more than 70 percent of the people, who voted, did so in favour of the agreement, is used as the legitimating point for the Assembly to operate and even exist in this form. The agreement as legitimising the existence of the Assembly is expressed in comments like “members came here in response to the will of the people, expressed through a referendum that led to an election (Ms McWilliams, Vol 4, III)” and “we believe that it is unacceptable for any group to impede the democratic process, particularly the Agreement, which was endorsed by the vast majority and which enshrines the principle of consent” (Ms Morrice, Vol 1, I). By using the idea of a vastly endorsed agreement the party is able to legitimise its own presence in the Assembly, as it has been among the parties involved in the negotiating forum, a notion it had already used outside the parliamentary debate as well.²²

The arguments made about the strong communal ties of active women are turned into ideas of an assembly with strong leaders prepared to do whatever they can to implement the agreement and thus ensure that “the will of the people” becomes realised:

>Ms McWilliams:

It is time that we gave the people of Northern Ireland some encouragement by doing what they said they wanted us to do in the referendum. The process has become stagnant. We are in a vacuum, and every time that happens it is the most vulnerable time in our society. The people who live at the interfaces of our communities face the outcome of that vacuum. Day by day, they are terrified that we will not reach a decision that will eventually bring peace to Northern Ireland.

²² See, for example, the party manifesto of 1998, where the achievements of the party in regard to the agreement are explicitly listed.

We have that responsibility, and it is time that we implemented the agreement and moved to this next phase.-
--I know from life and from working on committees and organisations and in education, that it is easy to be against and much more difficult to be for.< (Vol 2, I)

The idea that the representatives have a straight line of responsibility to the voters is here based on the idea that the whole existence of the Assembly is possible only because of the people who voted for the Agreement and the candidates. The Agreement is what the people want –otherwise its endorsement would not have been so substantial. The will of the people also implies a temporal point. The Agreement represents a contemporary element, which is to transcend the problematic divisions of the past. This makes it a locus of the present, and indication of the present situation providing the guidelines in terms of what actions should be taken. The logic of the argument of the Coalition is that the contemporary Agreement expresses the contemporary will of the people, which is an indispensable point of departure for governing. Stressing the ongoing process instead of immediate outcomes on the one hand is used to extend the duration of the excitement created by the Agreement and trying to prevent the opponents from hindering its implementation.

The Agreement –paradigm as such is the dominate discourse of the Assembly, and arguing for its implementation is not solely in the hands of the Coalition, but defending it is also used by the other pro-agreement parties. The NIWC is the only one, however, with no attachments to the politics revolving mainly around the constitution of the 1920s, and is thus left with the constitution of the present. The only way its representatives are linking themselves with the politics of the past is by pointing out that they have been among the forgotten and silent, who have held the society together, as opposed to have had the opportunity to influence the party politics of the region. The concept of experience has the same function in the parliamentary speeches as it did in the speeches outside it: to serve as a basis for knowledge, which stresses the capability of the women to engage in politics on this level. The novelty of the party has its advantages in that it is able to argue for it to be the “child of the peace process”, the tool for reaching the state of non-violence that everyone wants entering the scene. On the other hand, should the people and the Members fail to be convinced about the knowledge and wisdom provided by the experience, the party is left with its display in the forum. In this case using the negotiated agreement as a source of legitimating the position of the party is problematic, when the implementation of the Agreement and its contents are the issues under dispute.

The “vacuum” mentioned in the remark is in relation to the ongoing process, a “stagnation” of it, a hindrance in its further moving time. In the parliamentary speeches, like in those outside it, the interval of the process is often used as something not to be endangered, as a point of reference in regard to the contemporary state of things as they necessarily are; the Coalition treats the peace process and the agreement as facts of life, as something everyone needs to recognise as a part of political reality and hence act accordingly in relation to them. The process and the agreement are presented as undeniable evidence on what “the people” want for their political future. This future – a peaceful society and both communities accommodated, another “fact” – can be realised if the proper actions are made, i.e. the implementation of the agreement takes place. The Coalition uses the dichotomy of new and old in its argumentation in placing the dysfunctional old against the potentiality of the new, like Ms Morrice in her statement that “[the people] realise that in this new climate of democracy in government it is possible that their voices will be heard”.

The people of Northern Ireland are referred to as being subject to the unproductive politics of the political parties against their will. There is a sense of being indebted to the voters, for those who have had faith in changing course of events:

>Ms McWilliams

“I have compared this to queuing up to get into a concert – to waiting and waiting and waiting. The poor people of Northern Ireland have been the watchers and waiters, and it is now time for us to give some action.
“< (Vol II, 2)

The “agents of change” figure that McWilliams had used in her article in describing the role of women in the politics of Northern Ireland is present in the parliamentary speeches as well, although not explicitly stated. The constant claim to reject the politics of “blood and loyalty”, as she puts it, and to “move mountains” in order to be able to influence the prevailing situation presents the members of the Coalition as having a central role in doing so. The experience –argument used in stressing the cross-communal nature of the party is always in relation to the idea of being able to work with representatives from any background. In this sense, although the party is trying to approach the changes patiently in terms of the implementation, it also makes claims about more determined decision-making and “action”, and presents the new situation of the Assembly as an opportune moment to send determined messages for the people.

5.4. Leading the country

The Belfast Agreement is used by the Coalition in a strong sense as representing the “will of the people”, as a framework within any representative should consider keeping should she/he be willing to fulfil the duties of a responsible politician. Using the agreement this way leaves the Coalition with a strong point of reference, with which the arguments for negotiating and moving forward with the issues under debate can be linked. Implementing the agreement means some decisions about how this should be done and steps into the direction of some visible progress need to be reached in order to avoid the dangers of a political stalemate, which would leave the people with sense of having voted for another paper ceasing to make any difference. In the parliamentary speeches of the Coalition a sense of striving for the power for reaching the decisions and finding a way of effectively creating a strong local parliament is found. This is expressed in claims for a more efficient and stronger governing, which are pointed out to be what the politicians, once elected, should be capable of:

Ms McWilliams:

>Where are we going if we do not set up an Executive on 15 February? Have we invested all this time, work and commitment, together with receiving the will of the people, only to say that we, the politicians, cannot agree and are not prepared to govern and lead? That is a dire message to be sending at the beginning of a new year. > (Vol 1, IX)

> The people of Northern Ireland did not send us here, as Mr Hume said, to sit around and talk or to sit around and shout at each other, but to start building. We went out in June to fight and win elections. Now we have been tasked to govern and lead. < (Vol 1, II)

The grassroots approach to politics can be detected in the argumentation, as the issues of communal development are stressed as important for the peace process. However, as elected representatives, the women of the Coalition claim, that the work of the politicians is the abovementioned task to “govern and lead”, in this case, the country into the direction of new kind of politics. Although the women’s issues and the interests of the community – based organisations as well as the need for a further investment in children are raised as important for the party, a strong emphasis is laid on the change in the nature of political culture, a turn away from “the politics---, in which God is on his [Cedric Wilson’s, NIUP)] side –the politics of self-righteousness (Vol 3, I)”. What the party is arguing for are

improvements in the means of governing, after which the more efficient and “positive” (Jane Morrice) leadership would be possible.

The idea of working as a linkage between parties not willingly working together is stressed to be the job for those with required tools needed. This space between the parties, or between the spaces of the before mentioned fear and hope, is the space occupied by those willing to work as the mediators and bridge-builders, the reasonable and the practical:

>Ms McWilliams:

I am not sure to whom I should address my remarks because, as a pragmatist, and having worked with pro-agreement and anti-agreement parties for months, I believed that we could make the Agreement work. --- In any democracy, there will be those who will vote for a treaty and those who will vote against it. But for the first time since the referendum I have become extremely concerned about the direction in which we are going. ---

We did not have a shared agreement on what constituted the problem, but we still had to resolve it through negotiation. Were agreement to be reached, none of us could achieve all that we wanted, and this agreement had to include ex-combatants. Others call them terrorists, but the word "terror" is ideologically loaded, and that is exactly what we are trying to do to each other now — we are trying to terrorise people into saying that this will not work. I am not prepared to do that. Václav Havel believed that politics was the art of the possible. I believe that we can make that determination the art of the possible. < (Vol 1, IX)

* * *

The position the party puts itself in within the context of the new Assembly is based on its initial arguments about the competence of working on a cross-communal basis, the willingness and capability to negotiate, and the need to increase female representation. The party outlined an explicit goal for in at the time of its formation, i.e. to become a political party gaining space on the party political field and getting more women elected. This was realised. The time of the formation became the basis for its argumentation, and within the parliament this was turned into the discussion about the constitution, the first one to have a woman as a signatory. The two themes of the party, the realisation of the will of the people, and the claims for a stronger leadership are used in trying to steer the political culture of Northern Ireland into the desired direction. The idea of a strongly governing, power-sharing executive and Assembly was, perhaps, not realisable at the time, and pleads the party made on behalf of a compromise in order to keep the Assembly in place, failed to convince the addressee.

The parliamentary level of politics differs from the non-parliamentary level temporally and rhetorically, and in addition has a distinctive set of procedures. The lack of these procedures, or rather the novelty of them, is challenging participants from all parties. It also provides those within their interest to hinder the processes of the decision-making and debate to utilise the sketched nature of the Standing Orders. On the other hand, the Assembly would have the chance of shaping the procedures to best suit its framework, which differs from Westminster and has its own local specialities.

The Coalition keeps the Agreement in the centre of its argumentation, leaning on its principles as guidelines to the procedural aspect of the parliament. At times the Agreement serves as a reminder that some results have already been gained along the lines of the peace process, and the progress of this process is presented as an inevitable course of developments. Even though, outside the parliament, the party argues for the need to concentrate on the “process” and not the “outcomes”, it seems to fail in terms of recognising the conditionality of the process. Referring to a “process” is also problematical, since the term presumes an idea of an outcome of some kind. In terms of Northern Ireland, defining the outcome solely as the end of violence is simply insufficient, as those able to control the level of political violence, at least to some extent, have differing conditions for its cessation. To demand willingness for reconciliation at such an early stage of implementing the Agreement is to be unrealistic about the timetables of that implementation, both mental and institutional.

6. Discussion

The turbulence of the mid-1990s marked the whole existence of the Coalition. It was born out of the elements of that discourse; what prompted the idea of a party was the poor numbers of female candidates on the party political level. The expressed frustration stated in the newsletter initiates the idea that the case of women's issues was once more surpassed by the constitutional issue, through which, ironically, the problem would be solved by entering the formal field and participating in the writing of the constitution. The question of women's issues was incorporated into the debate about human and civil rights, inclusive approach to the negotiation and equality in representation. This was a realisation of a momentum, a chance that could be taken because of a selection of reasons, such as international interest, the way the British government forced an election for the forum, and the challenge the old regime was to face in terms of writing a new constitution. It should also be acknowledged, that lobbying for enough votes to get candidates elected was surprising and an accomplishment at the time that other options tried out their competence as well: the Green Party also made an appearance representing a centrist choice alongside with the Coalition, but it failed.

The renewed constitutional issue became the cornerstone for the argumentation of the Coalition. Outside the parliament the story told about its formation was based on the hastiness of the moment, the ability to seize it and the contribution the party has had to the forum and the negotiations. The grassroots –approach and the close ties to the civil society became one of the key issues, as the role the civil society and the voluntary organisations had taken during the violent decades were raised into the agenda as representing the essence of the Northern Irish society. The need for wider representation was raised as well, as the lack of women on the visible political scene was pointed out and the argument made about the competence of women to work in a way that transcends the traditional divisions of the community lines. The central argument made in favour for the competence of women, women as irreplaceable matter of the society and the party as a legitimate one among the traditional parties, was that of the element of female experience. This experience was how the members and delegates of the party where linked into the civil society of Northern Ireland, as participants and contributors. The experience also became the source of wisdom and knowledge, when wisdom was what the oppressed needed in

order to survive. It gave women the experience they needed about the experiences of others, and thus made them able to work across the differences.

Getting two women elected into the Assembly changed the role of the constitution within the argumentation of the Coalition. While outside the parliament it was something to be promoted for and given hope with, inside the parliament it became the legitimating factor, with which the existence of the party and its role among the traditional parties in the parliament was argued for. The new constitution was also presented as the one Agreement legitimising the existence of the whole Assembly and the mandate of the representatives. The wide endorsement of the Agreement was used as an expression of the will of the people, the proof of a license to govern and lead the country within the framework of the Agreement. The optimism of the non-parliamentary speeches turned into a reassurance addressed to the other parties about the need for implementation and co-operation, the need to give “the people” hope about the future of the region. The female experience –argument is nearly gone, although the ability of the party to work with any other party is stressed. The question of representation becomes one with the Assembly being the representative of the whole “nation”, in that the Agreement is the one giving the MPs their mandate and thus dictating the rules. If the former state of things was “a time for getting women elected”, now the time is “to govern and lead”.

The strategy of the Coalition was to utilise the temporal breakage, to argue for it explicitly and to use it and its outcomes as legitimising its existence. The focus of this study was to concentrate on the temporal figures the party uses to legitimise kairos, to argue for their opportunity in order to convince the voters for the chance behind the party. The existence of the party remained twofold: on the one hand it had its responsibility to the electorate and had to present itself as an advocate of its interests, as a part of the civil society. On the other hand the Coalition made it into the parliamentary level, and needed to gain credibility as a parliamentary party, as a party of politicians rather than community workers. Thus, it turned the temporal point of having seized an occasion into an argument about its necessity on the parliamentary field and governing. It needed to present itself as a party of political substance in terms of governing, not as a new party with a surprising election result.

What the different temporal expressions, or figures, indicate, is the temporal experience written into the text. Outside the parliament the temporalities concentrate on history

writing in the sense of creating intervals and matrixes. Inside the parliament the temporal experience is changed, as the time for an argument is limited, the question is about making a point as effectively as possible, and the parliamentary calendar has a differing pace as did the calendar outside the Assembly. Time becomes more of a scarcity than it was before, and the nature of the task presented for and by the party changes. Outside the Assembly the NIWC is the tiny women's party that has miraculously entered the party political field. Inside the Assembly getting into Stormont is no longer an achievement in itself, but the presence of the party on that level must be legitimated and constantly argued for, in order to be taken seriously.

In its most simplistic form the Women's Coalition is a feminist party acting out of the liberal tradition. According to Young (2000, 4), liberal feminism takes the view that women can change the social and political institutions, and in order to bring about this change, it needs to be integrated into these institutions. From this, two points underpinning a liberal feminist party follow: Firstly, this view considers the state as its potential ally, and secondly, the categories of "women" and "feminist" are overlapping (*ibid.*). In the case of the Coalition this applies in the way the party is utilising the institutions of the province and aims at participation on the parliamentary level, making the precise argument that the experience of women is a fundamental matter in the course of the peace process. The liberal tradition can also be detected in the way the Coalition is arguing for the increase in the numerical representation of women, which would then ensure the debate of the women's issues on the parliamentary level. The Women's Alliance, an Icelandic women's party, had similar claims in 1987 about the contribution women could have on the social and political system. Its aims were said to be firstly, "to make women's perspectives, experiences and culture a no less important policy-making force in our society than that of men", and "to nurture that which is positive in women's outlook on the world and to harness it for the betterment of the society as a whole" (quoted in Koester 1995, 572). The party differs from its Northern Irish counterpart in that it explicitly prefers to be referred as a "movement" and also has an explicitly outlined environmental agenda (Siaroff 2000, 296). A further difference is that the Women's Alliance managed to get representatives elected into the parliament on more than one occasion (*ibid.*), whereas the NIWC failed. The irony is that the Women's Coalition had an explicit goal to matter as a parliamentary party, whereas the Women's Alliance has kept to its informal nature.

The failure of the Women's Coalition to establish a sufficient constituency has its basis on the successes and failures of the Belfast Agreement. The problem of the Coalition was the problem of the "updated" constitutional paradigm; the new version, although significantly extended the range of reference of the outdated one, failed to transcend the fundamental problems of the latter in a way that would have enabled a further search for compromise. Thus, as it seemed that the Agreement as a whole was overshadowed by the disputes of its details (such as decommissioning), its significance as such was forgotten, and the Coalition lost its most important point of reference.

To embed its argumentation within the Agreement-paradigm was essentially linked with the realisation of the momentum, the ability to seize the opportunity raised by the discourse and the partial deconstruction of the historical institutions. In time this act of realisation, however, turned into a state of stagnation, as the Coalition was somehow enabled to distance itself from the Agreement and create a form of argumentation less dependent on it. The Agreement and its problems became part of the every-day life of the politics of Northern Ireland and was not the source of optimism it used to be. Even though the Coalition tried to argue for patience and the importance of the process, the lack of potential outcomes of this process gave the argumentation a sense of hollowness. The party failed to point out the progress already made, as it started to seem like, apart from the level of political violence, things had not changed at all. Furthermore, it should be noted that not all parties were so enthusiastic about the Agreement at all, and denied it having a significance role. The new constitution was not considered a constitution at all by some parties, which in turn means that the traditional idea of a constitution remained as an important element of political discourse.

The Coalition, thus, seemed to realise an occasion, but stopped using its temporal sensitivity after this, as if its potential had already been used in the early days of the parliament. It seized the moment, analysed the course of things and kept to its path, even though this would not be the politically intelligent thing to do. As such it failed to overcome the characteristics of a single issue movement and to extend its agenda and argumentation in a fruitful way. Using the Belfast Agreement as a legitimating point, to which one could safely return in a moment of dispute, refers to a form of argumentation presuming consensus. In the argumentation of the Coalition the Agreement takes the role of representing the one thing the parties have agreed on – and even those who have not, are

inevitably to change their course because of the general will of the people. This attitude fails to recognise the fact that the anti-agreement parties, such as the DUP, have a strong support among their constituency, and represent a substantial part of people from their community. The Agreement has by no means been supported by “everyone”, and to use it as representing a common ground, based on a reached consensus, is to form a distorted analysis of the situation. The Coalition leaned on the idea of having a majority of the parties supporting the Agreement and miscalculated the power of the opposition in a fragile situation. It also relied on the willingness of the other parties to back the Agreement at any cost and failed to recognise the fact that it was the only party, to which the Agreement was a living condition.

The problem of using the Agreement as the reason for inter-party co-operation indicates the way that the Coalition interprets the parliament to be a forum for solving problems rather than a legislating body with a distinctive procedure and a deliberative form of debate. Even the claim for the politicians to “govern and lead” stated by the Coalition are linked with its idea about how the people of Northern Ireland should be given some “action”. These are comments strangely undermining the role of debating. In the speeches outside the parliament the phrase “deeds not words” is used to describe the intentions of the party, which illustrates the failure of the Coalition to recognise the role of the parliament as a distinctive deliberating body, and reduces its tasks to the mere acts of negotiating and legislating. The need for a procedural rule book and the idea of getting different voices into the parliament is prompted by the idea of effectively implementing the Agreement, rather than recognising the importance of the parliamentary style of politics as such. Perhaps the lack of parliamentary experience is turned into impatience and the willingness to start legislating as soon as the Assembly has taken its seats. In fact, at some point debating is even seen as contrary to governing (see quotation from September 14th, 1998, where McWilliams notes that “we were not sent here to sit around and talk to each other but to start building”). This can be considered more as a sign of the lack of parliamentary experience than an underestimation concerning the importance of debate. At the very least it indicates a failure of reconciling the ideas and rhetoric of the party with the new situation it was facing in the parliament.

The political significance of the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition should not be undervalued. It did play a role in the negotiations and raised the profile of women’s issues.

It was not left without recognition. In fact, the Coalition has succeeded in adding to the pile of books, now perhaps little higher than before its existence, written about the political life of Northern Ireland.

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