Robert C. Mizzi, Seán Byrne, Tara Sheppard-Luangkhot, Nancy Hansen

Marginalized Voices and the Good Friday Agreement: Inclusion and the Northern Ireland Peace Process

This article explores building transnational queer and disabilities communities, disability-queer peace, and disability-queer activism in post-peace accord Northern Ireland (NI). Through in-person and virtual interviews with activists, staff, and leaders who are disabled, queer, and/or in allyship, it became clear in the data that respondents were ashamed, frustrated, and sad that ableism and queerphobia continues in NI. Attacks on disabled and LGBTQIA+ people have escalated as a result of the Brexit fallout and the COVID-19 pandemic that negatively impacted marginalized communities that are targeted by legal exclusion, discriminatory, and hateful practices as well as structural and interpersonal violence. Dialogue, diversity, and inclusive practices and policies and a political system that benefits all NI citizens are crucial to building sustainable peace in NI.

Keywords: LGBTQIA+ and disabilities, marginalization, inclusion and peacebuilding, Belfast Agreement, Northern Ireland peace process.

Marginalizirane skupine in Velikonočni sporazum: Vključenost in severnoirski mirovni proces

Članek obravnava oblikovanje transnacionalnih kvir in invalidskih skupnosti, invalidska in kvir gibanja za mir ter invalidski in kvir aktivizem na Severnem Irskem po podpisu mirovnega sporazuma. Podatki, zbrani z osebnimi in spletnimi intervjuji z aktivisti, osebjem in voditelji, ki so invalidi, kvir in/ali njihovi podporniki, kažejo, da so anketiranci razočarani in žalostni ter da jih je sram, da so na Severnem Irskem še naprej prisotni predsodki do invalidov in kvirfobija. Napadi na invalide in osebe LGBTQIA+ so se dodatno okrepili po brexitu in pandemiji covida-19, ki sta še posebej negativno vplivala na marginalizirane skupnosti, deležne pravne izključenosti, diskriminatornih in sovražnih praks ter strukturnega in medosebnega nasilja. Za vzpostavitev trajnostnega miru na Severnem Irskem so ključni dialog, raznolikost, vključujoče prakse in politike ter politični sistem, ki deluje v korist vseh državljanov.

Ključne besede: LGBTQIA+ in invalidi, marginalizacija, vključevanje in vzpostavljanje miru, sporazum iz Belfasta, severnoirski mirovni proces.

Correspondence address: Robert Mizzi, Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba, 71 Curry Place, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2, Canada, e-mail: robert.mizzi@umanitoba.ca; Seán Byrne, Arthur Mauro Institute for Peace and Justice, University of Manitoba, 70 Dysart Road, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2, Canada, e-mail: sean.byrne@umanitoba.ca; Tara Sheppard-Luangkhot, Arthur Mauro Institute for Peace and Justice, University of Manitoba, 70 Dysart Road, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2 Canada, e-mail: sheppart@myumanitoba.ca; Nancy Hansen, Disability Studies, University of Manitoba, 71 Curry Place, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2, Canada, e-mail: nancy.hansen@umanitoba.ca.

1. Introduction

The 1998 Good Friday Agreement (GFA) has brought changes in Northern Ireland (NI) in specific ways as "former enemies share power in government, an internationally supported decommissioning process has ensured that most weapons are beyond use and the police service has undergone reform and become more representative of the population" (Marijan 2017, 77). NI has experienced the dominant liberal peacebuilding approach through external funding from the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) and the European Union (E.U.) Peace and Reconciliation Fund as well as through E.U., British, and Irish government practices and norms (Hyde & Byrne 2015). As Roger MacGinty writes, the limitations of a generalized liberal democratic peacebuilding paradigm is that it lacks creativity and does not fit all societies and intersections of identities within those societies (MacGinty 2008, 33). There remain competing perspectives among working class communities where both the Protestant Unionist Loyalist (PUL) and Catholic Nationalist Republican (CNR) communities live separately and consider each other as benefitting untowardly from the peacebuilding process (Byrne et al. 2022).

Ordinary citizens, and not just local elites and international actors, shape the peacebuilding process through everyday practices (Marijan 2017). This can range from participating in events and organizations that aim to build peace, to learning the bigger picture of what led to the conflict, to practicing civility, respect, and understanding in daily interactions. Everyday life in NI and the Border Counties can both "constrain and enable the emergence of a more locally rooted and legitimate peace process" (Marijan 2017, 82). Forms of precariousness and unease remain. Creating opportunities to enhance civic engagement is paramount to the success of peacebuilding because political participation "is a satisfier for a range of psychosocial needs, which include identity, dignity, role-defense, self-determination or self-actualization" (Hancock 2017, 264). Inclusive, locally owned peacebuilding is essentially a "call for increased agency for locals in post-conflict peacebuilding settings" (Hancock 2017, 268).

We agree with Hancock: people desire belonging and to believe that their contributions and their perspectives are appreciated for a peace process to succeed. In response, we focused on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer, intersex and asexual (LGBTQIA+) community and disabled people because their voices are often excluded from peace processes. By exploring these perspectives and identities, we hope to uncover gaps and traps in peace processes often masked and upheld by heterocisnormativity and ableism. A peace process can be helpful to some, but it can function as a double-bind for groups on a social periphery because once again they need to justify their existence, advocate for inclusion, and demonstrate that violence continues for them.

The focus on marginalized perspectives on peacebuilding is gaining momentum in the Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) literature (Mizzi & Byrne 2015;

Senehi et al. 2023). Marginalized perspectives include the experiences of youth, women, Indigenous, LGBTQIA+, Black and people of colour, and disabled people. Marginalized perspectives provide an account of how peacebuilding impacts their lives, and whether inclusion/exclusion patterns prior to the conflict carried forth into the peace process, or if there was some form of transformative social change because of the conflict. These perspectives enrich a peace process; they can decentralize violence from being strictly connected to only one cause (e.g., ethnonational conflict), suggest alternatives to violence, and conceptualize a truly inclusive society. Marginalized groups have important local experiences, knowledge, practices, and wisdom from everyday experiences with conflict and violence that are crucial to building sustainable and comprehensive peace (Byrne et al. 2017).

In addition to these important perspectives, recently, there has been a turn away from positioning communities in silos. Since 1993, there has been a focus on the importance of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1993). Intersectionality is the lived experience of many overlapping identities, membership in many communities, and intersections of oppression such as queerphobia,[1] xenophobia, ableism, sexism, and classism that cut across identity differences and restrict access to rights and privileges in civil society (Crenshaw 2012). Social action is also a part of intersectionality, which means that there must be some kind of activism or direct intervention to alleviate one-dimensional conceptualizations of identity, oppression, and human experience (Collins 2019).

Considering this turn to intersectionality and of the focus on marginalized perspectives in the peace process, this article focuses on the disability and LGBTQIA+ communities and their treatment and peacebuilding efforts after the 1998 GFA in NI came into effect. More specifically, we researched the lives of individuals who are primarily disabled and/or are LGBTQIA+, and those with demonstrable allyship to these communities. We sought to understand their relationship with the conflict and invited their perspectives on the peace process, Brexit, COVID-19 and intersections among each of these developments.

2. Context

Women, youth, and LGBTQIA+ and disabled people feel excluded by the GFA and the NI peace process, as cultural wars like the flags protest continue to rage on (Byrne et al. 2022). Adding to this complexity are the developments of Brexit and the NI Protocol, political dysfunctionality, the COVID-19 pandemic, and a new census showing that NI is majority CNR. Brexit and the Protocol created a border in the Irish Sea to prevent a hard border on the island of Ireland that led to ongoing tensions arising, such as protecting the Irish language and same-sex marriage (Doyle & Connolly 2019). The Protocol's preamble stresses its commitment to maintain the GFA and subsequent agreements that are embedded

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in North-South cooperation, underpinned by E.U. law, and supported by E.U. rights frameworks (Harvey 2020). The Protocol also outlines that discrimination should not occur in NI because of U.K. withdrawal from the E.U. This is because human rights and equality bodies functions were created within NI (Harvey 2020).

NI remains part of the U.K.'s customs territory having access to its internal markets, yet customs checks are also required between NI and the U.K. that are subject to E.U. law (Harvey 2020). The Protocol places emphasis on preserving the GFA and a commitment to the E.U.'s human rights and equality frameworks, maintaining funding under future U.K. and E.U. funding programs, and continuing with the Common Travel Area that prevent a hard border on the island of Ireland (Harvey 2020). Brexit hardliners within the Conservative party and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) opposed the interests of politicians in the Republic of Ireland that wanted to preserve the peace process and the single economic market (McEwen & Murphy 2022). The issue divided people and political parties across sectarian lines in NI, highlighting the socio-economic division within the PUL community, where the working class voted "Leave" compared to the business and middle classes (McGovern 2018).

Obstacles preventing women's inclusion in the civil society and political arenas in NI include a conservative culture, resistance from PUL political parties to recognize the influence of patriarchy in politics, and an electoral system that benefits conservatism (Galligan 2019). Brexit negotiations, in particular, negatively impacted NI's political stability (Cochrane 2020) and destabilized multiple political relationships and institutions. Brexit poses the largest economic and political challenge for NI and the constitutional question, since the 1921 partition of the island, challenges that will persist for the next century (Cochrane 2020). Cochrane (2020) argues that Brexit is a second phase of partition, this time from the E.U., that will have long lasting impacts on the political and economic relationships on both islands, and the relationship of NI with Britain. As a result of Brexit, women's rights progressive legislation has ground to a halt, with few formal channels as outlets for women's voices including workplace rights and the protection of part-time workers and flexible work, protection of pregnant women and new mothers, and abortion (Galligan 2019). Women noted that losing the E.U.'s vibrant human rights laws have unleashed conservative patriarchal viewpoints that support male dominance and perpetuate violence against women, leaving fewer outlets to articulate women's concerns and interests (Galligan 2019).

Consequently, the focus on shared politics in NI didn't spill over into people's everyday lives that were evidenced throughout the 2012–2013 union and Irish flag protests that divided the political parties along sectarian lines (Goldie & Murphy 2015). The flag issue became a powder- keg that reopened ethnonationalist wounds and reignited political frictions in NI. The flying of the union

flag was reduced from 365 days to 18 in 2008, which the PUL community perceived as a threat to their identity, and as a culture war levelled against British and Loyalist symbols (Mastors & Drumhiller 2014). The stark contrast between the peace process's infrastructure with its emphasis on equality and shared power, and informal local community networks harboring distrust and fear were divisive with little emphasis on collaborative powersharing (Goldie & Murphy 2015). Yet bottom-up micro and local level peacebuilding sometimes can be exclusionary, partial, sectarian, and removed from emancipatory peacebuilding (Maiangwa et al. 2022).

Diverse, public, and shared spaces are favorable to build a sustainable peace process yet managing them became even more antagonistic and combative within NI (Bryan 2015). For example, the changing coordination of the Lord Mayor's Show and St. Patrick's Day celebrations were efforts to generate and renegotiate more inclusive public spaces that were quarrelsome and violent sites like rebranding both events as carnivals, embracing Pride Parade, reclassifying Orange Parades as Orangefest, and composing policies to authorize more inclusive public spaces (Bryan 2015). While these developments show some promise, the disability and LGBTQIA+ communities have also been largely omitted from the peace process, and the progressive nature of the GFA. Section 75(2) of the 1998 NI Act ensures that public agencies protect all citizens equally (Shea-Irvine & Hansen 2019). For example, NI's disability community were always behind in terms of the U.K.'s development of human rights as disabled groups remained hidden and protected (Hill & Hansen 2011). As we explore further, the GFA has had minimal impact for LGBTQIA+ and disability rights at the local level as the NI powersharing government excluded rights issues at the macro level as they remain a low priority and both communities are forced into silos (Byrne et al. 2017).

3. LGBTQIA+, Disability, and Inclusion

Chronic surveillance and a natural lack of trust exist in society whereby disabled and LGBTQIA+ people were subject to social and individual discipline as their bodies and minds were perceived as out of control (Foucault 1977). Disabled and LGBTQIA+ people were seen as having a defect, weak, and extraordinary rather than naturally occurring part of the human condition and those elements of the individual were ignored because to draw attention to them would be regarded as pathological and abnormal (Foucault 1977).

As disability and LGBTQIA+ identities are also intersectional and apart of the ethnic and social politics in Northern Ireland, the scant and existent literature points to the importance of considering the impact of the peace process, along with an analysis of their ongoing experience with structural and interpersonal violence (Byrne et al. 2017). Both groups are disenfranchised in society, and so

therefore they are structurally separate (i.e., one can be gay or disabled, but never both) and yet both groups are socially aware and connected to one another through discourses of human rights and equity struggles (Byrne et al. 2022). As described below, both groups have been subjugated to human rights violations, violence, and injustice in NI. The problem is that both groups are considered as abhorrent or unnatural in some way by military and paramilitary figures, which is often made worse when people hold membership to both groups (i.e., LGBTQIA+ and disabled).

3.1 LGBTQIA+ People

LGBTQIA+ people live in politically hostile and discriminatory societies wherein they have historically not been treated as equals under the law or in society (Yavuz & Byrne 2022). Similar to how there is an increase of violence that target women (Handrahan 2004), there is also an increase of violence that target LGBTQIA+ people as a means to assert social control and regulation (Mizzi 2009). Queerphobia has limited LGBTQIA+ people to be open about their identities and affected their sense of belonging. The latter has affected opportunities for change and collaboration and restricted changing the *status quo* that privileges heterosexuality and cisgender people (Breitenbach 2004; Mizzi & Byrne 2015). For example, in an earlier survey conducted in NI, Breitenbach found that more men (2/3) than women (1/2) perceive homosexual sex as wrong, yet younger, single women were demonstrating a trend of women's acceptance of homosexuality and resistance to discrimination based on sexuality orientation. This data mirrored similar findings from the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), which showed that rates of homophobic harassment were higher in NI compared to Irish and British rates (Breitenbach 2004). The study also showed pervasive patterns of homophobia in media, police, and government institutions.

3.2 Disability

Approximately 15 % of the global population are disabled, however, disabled people are significantly marginalized and under-researched (Hill & Hansen 2011). Disabled people are indeed heterogenous and may have complexities, heightened by violent conflict. For example, bombings of NI's civilians caused disabled people to be stranded while others fled for safety so that violent conflict endangers disabled people and can create more disabilities (Hill & Hansen 2011; Kerr 2013). For example, Hill and Hansen (2011) describe how there were exclusions of disability needs in relief agencies and emergency planning. Throughout the Troubles, politically motivated violence created barriers to safety. In the 1960s, Loyalists clashed with civil rights marchers and in the ensuing violence

Loyalist and Republican paramilitaries emerged as civilians and state forces were targeted during the Troubles (McGlinchey 2019). The sectarian and military violence caused 30 years social strife for disabled and non-disabled people alike.

Hill and Hansen (2011) explained that the Troubles disrupted social infrastructure that affected the daily life of disabled people trying to navigate bombed roads, strict parking violations due to fear of car bombs, and difficulty fleeing during bombings, due to hearing, mobility, and visual impairments. This led to pervasive social isolation of disabled people, who were forced to become isolated, infantilized, and dependent on others, while trapped in their homes, and unable to access transport. During the Troubles, disability support workers attempting to help people were also attacked or ambushed, due to Northern Irish hypervigilance about outsiders. People with hearing or mobility impairments experienced verbal taunting, or were physically attacked at checkpoints, when trying to communicate with state forces. Disabled people continue to struggle to this day in NI while the peace process has been based on ableist values (Byrne et al. 2017). The common feeling amongst the larger nondisabled population is that disabled people are vulnerable and in need of charity, care and protection as the medical model functional limitations approach remains dominant (Flaherty & Hansen 2015). The social model in NI is key to reconciliation and emancipation for people with disabilities. Disabled people's voices must be part of the remembering processes of conflict and social breakdown, for inclusive reconciliation to occur within the post-peace accord period (Brichtova 1998, cited in Hill & Hansen 2011).

3.3 Inclusion

Historically, there are parallels as both groups were disadvantaged, and stereotyped, and suffered from post-traumatic stress as a result of the violence that faces them daily. Little is known on the intersection of disability and the NI conflict (Hill & Hansen 2011; Kerr 2013; Flaherty & Hansen 2015) and similarly, very little is known on LGBTQIA+ perspectives of the NI conflict (Curtis 2014; Hoewer 2014; Livingston 2003). Current efforts in this regard are relatively tokenistic and there is no serious consideration around centralizing disability and LGBTQIA+ issues in structural and social engagement. This lack of effort sustains normative perceptions of peacebuilding that excludes disability, sexuality, and gender diverse experiences at the fore, and results in very little substantial change towards disability and LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Inclusion of these perspectives means that a peacebuilding process is inclusive and diverse as well as promoting the notion of peace to finally provide some political and legal considerations to marginalized and underrepresented groups.

In NI, equality discourses emerged in the 1990s. Disability, sexual orientation, and race/ethnicity have begun to be discussed instead of a hyperfocus on

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nationalist and religious ideologies. This shift in values were integrated in the 1998 GFA. The NI Act includes Section 75, which is a statutory requirement to care for people within nine categories. These categories include disabled and non-disabled people, age, gender, religious belief, political opinion, people of diverse sexual orientations, married or unmarried people, people with dependents or not and ethnic origin. While these political changes are fundamental to peacebuilding, a nuanced understanding of how these changes are actually making an impact on LGBTQIA+ and disabled peoples' lives is necessary to understand if the GFA is building peace and equity for these communities.

4. Methods

This research project remaps NIs social and political post-peace accord landscape by exploring and centralizing the perceptions and experiences of people from both disability and LGBTQIA+ backgrounds. The research questions for this study were: 1) How do LGBTQIA+ people and disabled people envision life in post-peace accord NI? 2) What does the peace accord and recent developments around the pandemic and Brexit mean to both communities? The research aims were to: 1) gain an understanding of minority perspectives and experiences on peacebuilding processes and 2) create new knowledge around peacebuilding processes in NI and its effects on minority communities.

Qualitative data was generated through semi-structured, in person, interviews with LGBTQIA+, disabled, or ally activists, politicians, community leaders, and adult educators from September-December 2022 in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. The method of in-depth interviewing used in this research is semi-structured or focused interviewing (Bogdan & Biklin 2006). Semi-structured interviews allowed us to be flexible and adjust to the insights and experiences being shared with us, seeking clarification when necessary and probing to understand the participants' realities. We contacted the organizations directly to disseminate our study poster, and individuals (clients or staff) reached out to us if they chose to participate in the study. There was no renumeration provided to the study participants, thus increasing the likelihood of trustworthiness and commitment to the research.

The questions were centred around participants'experiences during the creation or aftermath of the NI Protocol, the impact of Brexit, and their LGBTQIA+ or disabled identity and experiences. As we demonstrate below, some participants identified as both having a disability and being LGBTQIA+ and expressed a sense of exclusion from the peace process due to these identities, which underpins the importance of exploring intersectional experiences. Some participants were too young to reflect on the Protocol, and so spoke more broadly about their familial experiences with the conflict and its impact, electing to concentrate a greater amount of the interview on Brexit. Other participants who

lived through the Troubles described their experiences with paramilitary police, raids, and other forms of violence. This diversity enriched the study to allow for a more comprehensive and intergenerational understanding of the problem.

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5. Data

We recruited 15 participants from a wide range of gender, sexuality, and disability backgrounds (Table 1). These interviews and group sessions were conducted either in-person in Northern Ireland or virtually. The participants were diverse in the sense of ranging from rural and urban backgrounds, careers (community workers, organizational leaders, politicians, civil servants, unemployed), age differences, and various religious and non-denominational backgrounds.

Table 1: Participant demographic

Participant	Gender Identification	Sexuality	Dis/Ability
James	Cisgender Man	Gay	Disabled
Aiden	Cisgender Man	Gay	Non-Disabled
Emilia	Cisgender Woman	Heterosexual	Disabled
Erin	Cisgender Woman	Heterosexual	Disabled
Andrew	Cisgender Man	Gay	Disabled
Ailbhe	Non-Binary	Bisexual	Disabled
Cathleen	Cisgender Woman	Heterosexual	Non-Disabled
Alistair	Cisgender Man	Heterosexual	Non-Disabled
Bridget	Cisgender Woman	Heterosexual	Disabled
Caitlin	Cisgender Woman	Heterosexual	Disabled
Ethan	Cisgender Man	Gay	Non-Disabled
Nicola	Cisgender Woman	Heterosexual	Non-Disabled
Roberta	Cisgender Woman	Heterosexual	Disabled
Saraid	Cisgender Woman	Queer	Non-Disabled
Sheila	Cisgender Woman	Heterosexual	Non-Disabled

Source: Own research and data.

As we read through the interviews, we coded the texts, such as coding evidence of different understandings of conflicts, as a means to identify recurring concepts. Codes were then organized into categories, such as expressions of risk and safety, to enhance data organization and interpretation and to develop themes from them, such as changed understandings of identity or inclusion (Bogdan & Biklin 2006).

6. Findings

From the list of dominant codes emerged four distinct themes in the data: (1) frustration, (2) targeting, (3) appreciation for diversity, and (4) community education. Each are explained below, with sub-themes offered to enhance analysis.

6.1 Frustration

Frustration became a dominant theme for nine participants. Frustration means there was expression of sadness towards ongoing LGBTQIA+ and disabled persecution, shame that queerphobia and ableism continues in NI, embarrassment that NI has not progressed beyond the Troubles and therefore continues to negatively attract international attention, and complications caused by political stalemates, Brexit and the cost-of-living crisis. For example, James shared, "It is a shame to feel like it's [social exclusion caused by Brexit] still there. It's [poor treatment towards LGBTQIA+ people] still happens." In contrast Aiden believed that the legacy of the Troubles looms over the current peacebuilding process as the conflict is framed within an ethnonational narrative:

> But my generation, which is the majority of my generation who weren't involved, don't have any connection to it and want to move on. When someone brings up the Troubles, a lot people just stop listening. My whole life has been surrounded by the Troubles. Why are we still talking about it? Why can't we just move on?

Aiden went onto say that the Conservative government's legislation and policies don't protect NI's LGBTQIA+ community because the Tories aren't compassionate or understand the real needs of the community:

> I don't trust a Conservative government led by a TERF [Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist] to make sure my community are safe under law. A lot of people think that if you pass a bit of law that protects LGB people, then that's great. We can start working on it to get the T involved, get the Q involves get the I and A involved. But actually, while that legislation doesn't protect us all, that's really dangerous for all of us, mostly for those who it doesn't protect at all.

The Conservative government's withdrawal from the E.U. has negatively impacted marginalized communities and has undermined the GFA. Ethan highlighted the need to both protect and reform the GFA:

> In relation to Brexit and the Northern Ireland protocol, we must protect the Good Friday Agreement. That is true, but why can't it be updated? Whether they don't see why isn't essentially reviewed and updated to some degree, because it was a mechanism at the time to bring peace and stability.

The GFA is not a finality to the conflict as it is a living organic document. In contrast, Cathleen's narrative focused on how the DUP's actions are maintaining divisions in society. She noted that, "It's become "them" and "us." I keep on talking like I hate DUP, that's because I hate the DUP." The DUP's refusal to take part in the powersharing executive is negatively impacting marginalized communities that need access to government resources.

6.2 Targeting

All participants reflected on the Troubles and how their first-hand or second-hand experiences emerged from the Troubles, such as neighbours raising children who lost parents, violence and harassment towards Catholics or Protestants, and parents choosing to stay neutral during the Troubles. All participants expressed a deep social connection to the Troubles in some way, suggesting the conflict influenced their way of life (c.f. Byrne et al. 2017 for similar reflections). Perhaps the most troublesome finding is how LGBTQIA+ and disabled people continue to be systemically and socially targeted, through purposive policy and legal exclusion or through violence. Nine participants described how LGBTQIA+ and disabled persons are being targeted for violence. The lack of political commitment to advance respectful treatment for LGBTQIA+ and disabled persons during and after the peace process may have permitted continued targeting of them, which we argue is rooted in queerphobia and ableism.

The GFA may indeed have equality provisions, but that has not led to a culture shift towards inclusion, resulting in ongoing violence towards disabled and LGBTQIA+ people. This violence is largely based on value and social differences that view both groups as outsiders and inferior. Aiden, in describing his life as a gay politician, noted that he was trolled and gaslighted by people attacking his political party:

> I got sort of attacked online by Loyalists, which was quite significant and very, very public. There hasn't come up to the same degree for any other LGBT reps. I think for me, it was very much like, we can attack his party through him because he's such a high profile. Well, here we can use this gay man as a scapegoat.

Drawing on Crenshaw (2012), an intersectional analysis could suggest that Aiden's sexuality is violating patriarchal, heterocentric rules for political spaces (Foucault 1977). Loyalist colonial power only allows white, heterosexual Loyalist men to hold political and gender power, and that a white, gay politician with a Loyalist background is violating the rules of both Loyalism, race, and patriarchy, and therefore should be punished and excluded as an exercise of power (Foucault 2010).

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Ailbhe articulated how the instabilities created by COVID-19 created spaces for ableists and queerphobes to attack disabled and transgender people.

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> I would say been disabled more so and more so in the last couple of years, especially with the pandemic has been concerning, and obviously coming out as queer, or you know, genderqueer, gender variant is scary, and you don't know how people are going to react. And sometimes people are very good at keeping those kinds of homophobic/transphobic opinions to themselves until you're in their face.

Crenshaw (2012) writes that intersecting identities vary in society in terms of power and advantages. For Ailbhe, being a disabled, gender variant, queer person, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, meant they received less opportunies for power and advantage, given that both their workplace and Northern Ireland's colonial, patriarchal society tendcrensh to preserve power and advantage for able-bodied, cisgender, heterosexual identities who may more easily request and be granted remote work opportunities. The nature of Ailbhe's disabilities physically required remote work, causing Ailbhe to challenge normative human resources systems to receive work accomodations during the pandemic.

That said, Bridget mentioned how the double minority status of being a political and disabled minority allowed online ableists to post virulent hateful messages targeting disabled people:

> It's like double disadvantage if you're coming from a minority community within a minority community [Unionist Community]. I've seen some of the stuff that has been posted [online] and it's horrific. They're basically being told they're not worthy, and question why you communicate and what you know, what do you think you have to contribute to society to the point that disabled people actually posted everything that they had contributed and their life. That's a terrible situation where someone feels they have to justify their very existence.

Further, Brexit has fueled social divisiveness, with 13 participants commenting how this has led to financial insecurities for LGBTQIA+ and disabled peoples. Brexit functions as a form of structural violence in the data, where those most vulnerable are feeling increasingly isolated and with diminished support. There is little responsive leadership to address their concerns. Without access to E.U. grants and a broader E.U. market, the cost-of-living crisis largely connected to the COVID-19 pandemic, and a current political paralysis in Stormont, there is greater reliance on Westminster to fund crucial support programs and health care. For example, Ailbhe shared that it takes five years to receive gender affirming care, and Saraid discussed ongoing barriers to abortion access. While there has been some investment from Westminster to supplement loss of the E.U. funds, this dependency is not unproblematic given the political and military history in the region. Alistair noted that the political challenges in forming the

powersharing executive has complexified issues for marginalized communities in NI:

> I would say political tension, lack of government and some economic, just complexities, and obstacles around the provision of goods are the three things you would really notice on a day-to-day basis. But those who are quite serious because it can't get the government back up at all.

Participants who are more familiar with LGBTQIA+ realities often commented on pervasive queerphobia, and participants who are more familiar with disabled people were fluent on discriminatory and hateful practices towards disabled people. Participants with multiple marginalizations were able to fluidly shift their discussions between ability, sexuality, and gender differences throughout our interviews. For example, nine participants discussed systemic sexism such as the continued political exclusion of women and the fear of misogynistic and transmisogynistic violence. A broader understanding of social and systemic exclusion was commonly expressed among all participants, but perhaps most deeply articulated by those participants who are members of either the LGBTQIA+ or disability communities, particularly disabled women.

6.3 Appreciation for Diversity

Fourteen participants highlighted that diversity is a cornerstone to social development and peace dialogue, and this realization is lacking among political leaders in NI. This theme included participants' historical or contemporary connections to a broader social diversity (race, class, religion) in addition to discussions about ability, sexuality, or gender identity. This appreciation led to participant reflections on inclusive practices and broader conversations about how addressing queerphobia and ableism are part of a larger peace movement. For example, Nicola articulated that many newcomer communities as well as the LGBTQIA+ and disabled communities are diversifying the cultural and political landscape, thus challenging the ethnonational identity framing of the conflict.

> In contrast what has happened is that NI is a more outward looking place and is getting more diverse populations including LGBTQIA+ and disabled people. There is more to life than the sectarian and ethnic divide […]. An inclusive peace accord must continue to engage underrepresented groups.

Similarly, Alistair noted that certain political groups hijack identity politics for their own particular political agenda:

> I certainly had more conversations in recent years, arising from the question of use of pronouns and things like that. I think we're in a situation where it's hard because what's

transphobic on one side is usually the retort is this is legitimate conversation on the other side. So it's always creates a complex environment.

140 The diversity of cultures and identities has created a new political climate that is creating new conversations and a healthy political discourse that is not solely encapsulated within divisive ethnonationalist rhetoric and politics.

6.4 Community Education

Twelve participants highlighted, in some part, how community education has both improved their sociopolitical situations or community organizations, or, at least, has demonstrated some potential for change. Education in this context means queer or disability education, awareness, and dialogue for the broader NI community. Participants, particularly those from an older generation, commented how education has led to important changes over time, whereas participants from a younger generation shared how community education has historically benefitted them, and seek to continue this strategy for social transformation.

James avowed that disability and queer education would broaden the public's awareness of the issues impacting the communities and make them more understanding and compassionate about their needs:

> It would be really nice if more teaching and education and awareness was made necessary or made available to people. Just to broaden their awareness and make them a bit more considerate, or that where it can sometimes feel like the idea of both disability and queer identity are still very foreign or not thought of by people who aren't affected by them.

Caitlin was also of the opinion that the COVID pandemic had made it possible for the public to become more aware of disabled citizens and their needs but governmental institutions need to do more to include disabled people:

> I think it's government bodies, organizations and companies that need more an understanding of disabilities. […] But I think the like of COVID has maybe had a bit of a better understanding for people because of COVID because of lockdown.

Alternatively, Roberta averred that religious communities either supported or prevented the LGBTQIA+ and disability rights communities from advocating for social change:

> Thankfully, within the Catholic community, they're a bit more open. I think religion played a key role in gay rights here in Northern Ireland and of disabilities. The disabled community would have been seen as very much I think third class or fourth class citizens or even being disabled myself. I think we do still get treated as second class citizens.

Overall, the data suggested that more change is needed to advance disability and LGBTQIA+ rights and advocated for integrated education from a young age. The struggle for social justice is supported by most of the younger generation many of whom have rejected the dominant ethnonationalist narrative in exchange for a narrative centred around pluralism and respect.

7. Conclusion

The GFA has not significantly implemented disability and LGBTQIA+ rights or inclusion, which Brexit reconfirmed from its onset. Brexit has escalated the NI conflict and intensified sectarian relationships as progressive politics becomes marginalized by a hyperfocus on ethnonationalist politics. According to our data, queerphobia and ableism has limited disabled and LGBTQIA+ people's sense of belonging and increased their lack of security as they continue to deal with stress. Interpersonal and structural violence target disabled and LGBTQIA+ individuals. Whereas there may be have been some optimism for peace as a result of the GFA, for our study participants, social peace and equity remains an elusive concept. Perhaps the potency of this research is how intersectionality cuts across different identities, thus creating spaces for social activists to challenge heterocisnormative, ableist, sexist/misogynist, transmisogynist, and sectarian discourse and patriarchal structures and work for all genders. Marginalized communities, in collaboration with each other, have crucial and critical insights and perspectives of how peacebuilding affects their everyday living. Their political inclusion and insights will undoubtedly build a sustainably equitable, diverse, peaceful and inclusive society in NI.

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Notes

[1] Queerphobia is an umbrella term that includes hatred, fear, and discomfort against all LGBTQIA+ people based on their non-normative sexualities and/or genders (Allen et al. 2020).

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