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Special Issue: Researching Ethnic, Indigenous, and Strategically Undervalued Communities in Divided Societies

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Biographical Statements

Lucie Besken is a recent graduate of the Joint Master's program in Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) at the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg. She earned a bachelor's degree in international relations and history at the University of Erfurt, Germany. Her areas of interest include the study of ethnic conflicts and of migration into the European Union. She was a recipient of a University of Manitoba Graduate Fellowship.

Sean Byrne is Professor in the Peace and Conflict Studies graduate program at the University of Manitoba. He is cofounding director with Jessica Senehi of the Arthur V. Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice, St. Paul's College (2003-2018), as well as cofounding Director of the Peace and Conflict Studies Ph.D. Program (2005-2014) and the M.A. Program in Peace and Conflict Studies (2009-2014). His recent book publications include *Routledge companion to peace and conflict studies* (2020); *Routledge handbook of peacebuilding and ethnic conflicts* (2022); and *Local experts' practical knowledge, wisdom, and practices: Civil society, peacebuilding, and economic assistance in Northern Ireland* (2023). He received the University of Manitoba Graduate Student Association Teaching Award (2022-2023), the University of Manitoba teaching award certificate (2018), St. Paul's College, Fr. Cecil Ryan sj Memorial Endowment Fund Award, (2018) and the University of Manitoba outreach award (2018) as well as the Faculty of Graduate Studies award for excellence in graduate student mentoring (2017).

Paul N. Cormier earned his Ph.D. in Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of Manitoba. He is Chairperson and Associate Professor of *Keewatinase* - Department of Indigenous Education at Lakehead University. He teaches, researches, and publishes in Indigenous education working with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. He has published numerous articles and book chapters in the areas of Indigenous methodologies through "learning with each other while they are doing" - *Kinoo'amaadawaad Megwaa Doodamawaad*; violence towards Indigenous peoples in the education system and traditional Indigenous learning systems; and culture, identity, and Indigenous peoples in colonial contexts. Paul Cormier is a status Indian and proud member of the Red Rock Indian Band residing with his family in Nipigon, Northern Ontario, Canada. He has won multiple awards for his work with Indigenous peoples across the country.

Calum Dean recently received his Ph.D. in Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of Manitoba. He has been published in *Peace Review*, coauthored an article in the *Journal for Peace and Justice*, as well as two chapters in the *Handbook of peacebuilding and ethnic conflicts* (Routledge, 2022).

Nancy E. Hansen is Professor and Director of the Interdisciplinary Master's Program in Disability Studies at the University of Manitoba. She is a human geographer and her research

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Ilker Kalin holds a PhD in Political Science from Wayne State University. He is currently a Research Fellow at the Institute for Democracy at Matej Bel University, where he leads a project on contemporary threats to democracy. He is also a Visiting Scholar at the Institute for Turkish Studies at Stockholm University, working to connect academic research with policy relevance. His research agenda focuses on the dynamics of violent and nonviolent conflicts, authoritarianism, state repression, and protest movements.

Peter Kulchyski is a professor in the Department of Indigenous Studies at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg. He comes originally from northern Manitoba and although he is not Indigenous, he attended a government run residential school (Frontier Collegiate). He has published extensively on northern Indigenous history, law, politics and culture in Canada. Among his books are *Like the sound of a drum: Aboriginal cultural politics in Denendeh and Nunavut* (2005), *Aboriginal rights are not human rights* (2013) and *Report of an inquiry into an injustice: Begade Shuhtagotine and the Sahtu treaty* (2018). His newest book, co-authored with Henry Heller, is called *Mode of production: The final horizon of practice and theory;* it takes a theoretical approach to a variety of issues including pertaining to Indigenous cultural politics. Kulchyski is also an activist and has supported Indigenous land-based struggles in Temagami, Nitassinan, Stoney Point, Grassy Narrows and elsewhere.

Robert C. Mizzi is a Canada Research Chair in Critical and Creative Continuous Learning and Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. His recent book publications include *Queer studies in education: An international reader* (Oxford University Press, 2023). *Adventures in teaching: Your guide to becoming a successful international educator* (Globesspire Press, 2025), and *LGBTQ+ issues in education: Theoretical interventions in curriculum and pedagogy* (Palgrave, 2025). Professor Mizzi is a member of the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame, a member of the College of New Scholars, Royal Society of Canada, and a TEDx speaker.

Marie Olson Lounsbery is a Professor of Political Science and Director of Security Studies at East Carolina University. Her research examines the dynamic nature of civil wars, peace processes, and foreign military intervention. Her work has been published in journals such as the *Journal of Peace Research*, *International Interactions*, *Civil Wars*, *Journal of Global Security Studies*, and *Terrorism and Political Violence*. Olson Lounsbery's manuscripts include *Civil wars: Internal struggles, global consequences* (University of Toronto Press, 2009, with co-author Frederic Pearson) and *Conflict dynamics: Civil wars, armed actors, and their tactics* (University of Georgia Press, 2017, with co-author Alethia Cook).

Frederic S. Pearson is Professor of Political Science, and Gershenson Distinguished Research Faculty Fellow at Wayne State University in Detroit, USA; for the past 32 years he served as Director of the University's Center for Peace and Conflict Studies. He is also Distinguished Service and Teaching Professor. He was previously professor and research fellow at the University of Missouri-St. Louis and twice a Fulbright scholar in the Netherlands and U.K. His Ph.D. dissertation was on Middle East conflict systems, and his numerous books include *Civil war: Internal struggles, global consequences* (with Marie Olson Lounsbery); *Arab approaches*

to conflict resolution (with Nahla Hamdan); *Arms and ethnic conflict* (with John Sislin) and *Arms and warfare, negotiation*. An authority on international military intervention, arms transfers, conflict resolution and peacemaking, Dr. Pearson was editor of the 2001 special issue of the *Journal of Peace Research* on Identity-based Disputes and Conflict Management, and governmental consultant on US National Security, 21st Century, in Washington, DC, as well as at the UN. Other relevant recent articles have included studies of post-hostilities stability in civil wars, as well as intervention and the prospects for democratization and peaceful protest successes, inter-organizational collaboration, nuclear arms control, and conflict exit strategies.

T. Sheppard-Luangkhot is a recent graduate of the Ph.D. Program in Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Manitoba. T's research and praxis interests are preventing and intervening in colonial violence, violent extremism, and facilitating peace, justice, and human rights for 2SLGBTQ+, women, Indigenous, and racialized identities. T is the founder and Director of the Organization for Peace, Equity and Nonviolence, an NGO dedicated to global prevention of and intervention in violent extremism and hate. T has published in the *Internet Journal of Restorative Justice* (2021), *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* (2022), *Journal of Ethnic Studies* (2023), and contributed a book chapter to *Power, race and justice* (Routledge, 2022).

Chuck Thiessen is a senior research analyst with the Government of Canada. He earned his Ph.D. in Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of Manitoba. He was formerly an Associate Professor at the Centre for Peace and Security at Coventry University (2013-2022). He has published numerous books, articles and book chapters on international peacebuilding and conflict resolution including *Local ownership of peacebuilding in Afghanistan: Shouldering responsibility for sustainable peace and development* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), and coedited volumes including *Conflict transformation, peacebuilding and storytelling* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018) and *Expanding the edges of narrative inquiry* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019). His research has also appeared in *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *Civil Wars*, *Third World Quarterly*, *International Politics*, *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, *Cooperation and Conflict*, *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, *Humanity and Society*, *Peace Research: Canadian Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies, Development in Practice*, *Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*, and *Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies*.

Mehmet Yavuz is a recent graduate of the Peace and Conflict Studies doctoral program at the University of Manitoba. He is an Assistant Professor of Conflict Resolution and the Director of the Creative Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation Lab (CPACT) in the School of Human Sciences in the College of Health and Human Sciences at Kansas State University. Dr. Yavuz's recent research investigates queer people's perceptions and experiences of peacebuilding and activism in divided societies. His latest publications have appeared in *Conflict Resolution Quarterly, Journal of Homosexuality, Peace Review, Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies, Peace Research: Canadian Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies, Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice,* and *Journal of Ethnic Studies.* His book titled, "*We need to fight and have a battle every day!": Queer perceptions of peacebuilding and activism in Bosnia and Herzegovina* is forthcoming with Michigan State University Press.

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Researching Ethnic, Indigenous, and Strategically Undervalued Communities in Divided Societies: Some Challenges and Critical Observations

Sean Byrne

Introduction

Protracted ethnic conflicts are driven by a complex interplay of multiple internal causes that include objective and subjective factors as well as various external regional and international actors meddling in these conflicts (Byrne, 2019; Smyth & Robinson, 2001). "Chosen glories" and "chosen traumas" are passed intergenerationally causing competitive dehumanizing victimization narratives of past events that manipulate group's collective memories and escalate conflict (Volkan, 1997). Yet ethnic group's collective memories of the past can also be used as reconciliation tools for healing as cultural peacebuilding rituals, constructive stories, and practices play a crucial role in transforming historical narratives (Senehi, 2020, 2022). At the same time, however, a complex interplay of homophobia and xenophobia (othering), historical and systemic violence (colonial institutions), manipulated information (scapegoating) and lack of empathy (no support) often target both ethnic and strategically undervalued groups coexisting in divided societies (Brett, 2020; Rivas & Browne, 2019).

Hetereonormativity reinforces and prioritizes masculinist practices as strategically undervalued groups like asylum seekers; Black, Indigenous and Brown people; disabled people; ex-combatants; LGBTQI+ individuals'; newcomers; refugees; women; youth; and the very poor are violently targeted and excluded from power so that it is useful to utilize a queer lens focusing

on complexity, heterogeneity, and multiple stories while rejecting the "positive-negative peace binary" (Mizzi & Byrne, 2015). Strategically undervalued groups can be targeted by global actors like funders, international agencies, and powerful states while also being decimated by state driven "necropolitics" as the political and economic elite decide who lives and who dies among the excluded (Mbembe, 2019).

Qualitative research must, therefore, include local ethnic, Indigenous, and strategically undervalued communities in peace research that is inclusive and respects their needs, while quantitative studies can help in our understanding of interesting patterns that emerge across a myriad of cases that impact these groups (Olson Lounsberry & Pearson, 2009). Critical qualitative methodologies are important as they centre Indigenous peoples and strategically undervalued communities as subject in decolonizing research contributing to the pursuit of social change (Smith, 1999). Reflexive, transparent, and accountable researchers who bring their ideas into the research domain can partner with local, Indigenous, and strategically undervalued communities in a transformative research process that includes their epistemologies, cosmologies, and stories that analyze and deconstruct unjust structures (Senehi, 2020; Wilson, 2009). The reflexive researcher builds trust with local strategically undervalued communities and Indigenous research participants while having a nuanced comprehension of the local cultural milieu and conflict context while ensuring local research participant's confidentiality, security, and data security (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2009).

That said, ongoing intergroup conflicts and wars were affected by the recent COVID-19 global pandemic that disrupted research plans and participant recruitment, causing researchers to restructure research designs and change their studies focus which caused delays in terms of setting up virtual interviews to generate qualitative data (Archibald et al. 2019; Howlett, 2021;

Keen et al., 2021; Mwambari et al., 2021; Rivera-Holgun et al., 2024; Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021; Zagar, 2022).

Partnering with ethnic, Indigenous, and strategically undervalued communities during violent conflicts and a global pandemic often limited these groups from meaningful participation in research that necessitated a rethink of how scholars could do the research (Chirambwi, 2023) and the reimagining of utilizing new creative research methods with these groups (Kaihko, 2020; Khan & MacEachen, 2022; Maphosa, 2013; Tomas & Bidet, 2024). Researching ethnic, Indigenous, and strategically undervalued and vulnerable communities also has an ethical dimension of preventing power imbalances and doing no harm (Kostovicoa & Knott, 2020; Morgan, 2020; Owor, 2022) especially regarding gender diverse communities (Jennings, 2020) while also dealing with ethical tensions and logistical complexities in terms of virtual remote qualitative research (Ladd, 2024).

Consequently, this special issue on researching ethnic, Indigenous, and strategically undervalued communities offers some interesting observations that inform research, social justice, and peacebuilding practices. The special issue provides an important discussion exploring research with strategically undervalued communities in intergroup, Indigenous, and ethnic conflicts relative to their marginalization at the global level. The primary aim of this special issue is to generate a better apprehension of these conflicts within a Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) research lens exploring challenges of researching ethnic, Indigenous, and strategically undervalued groups while providing some practical insights to those challenges. This special issue seeks to influence PACS research and praxis to grasp how factors ranging from cultural practices, economic resources, Indigenous epistemologies, decolonization, and peacebuilding behaviour impact ethnic, Indigenous, and strategically undervalued group's

identities and their survival that is threatened by structural inequalities, terrorism, ableism, homonationalism, homophobia, and transgenerational trauma.

Overview and Organization of the Special Issue

This special issue offers a discussion of some of the challenges of researching ethnopolitical conflicts, and Indigenous and strategically undervalued communities.

For example, Ilker Kalin, Frederic Pearson, and Marie Olsen Lounsbery explore why governments negotiate with some terror groups while not engaging with others in ongoing civil conflicts? Research often handles terror groups as a single type, omitting significant differences about how they interact with local people. The article separates rebel groups according to their public images and standing and their employment of civilian violence. The article concentrates on three structures of legitimacy-building, namely media presence, political affiliation, and public goods provision, exploring how each form interrelates with civilian targeting behavior. The authors utilize data from the Reputation of Terror Groups (RTG) and Peace Negotiations in Civil Conflicts (PNCC) datasets (1980–2011). The findings indicate that political affiliation substantially expands the possibility of negotiation, yet only when groups forgo their use of high levels of civilian violence. Public goods provision is correlated with a higher probability of negotiation irrespective of targeting behavior, while media presence indicated no congruent effect. These findings indicate the strategic importance of constituency-building in fashioning negotiation interactions during civil conflict.

Next, Chuck Thiessen, Calum Dean, and Sean Byrne explore relationship-building within the Northern Ireland peace process. Drawing on 120 interviews, conducted by the third author, with individuals including Civil Society Organizational (CSO) leaders in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Armagh, Cavan, Derry, Donegal, Fermanagh, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan,

and Tyrone which received funding from the European Union (EU) PEACE III Fund and/or the International Fund for Ireland (IFI), to support their peacebuilding efforts. This article considers the enduring concerns around building connections between Protestant Unionist Loyalist (PUL) and Catholic Nationalist Republican (CNR) communities, and highlights several of the positives and potential ways forward. Accomplishments within connection building across PUL and CNR communities is evident, however, of ongoing ethnocultural and political tensions that have limited the aptitude for relationship building. This was a central goal of the peace dividend; to foster improved cross-community relations. Thus, the capacity for people in Northern Ireland to experience peace has been inhibited, restricting the ability to truly move beyond the Troubles, and leaving the past and latent tensions unaddressed.

In addition, Paul N. Cormier and Sean Byrne discuss a needed critical turn in economic inequality-political conflict (EI-PC) research that will benefit from qualitative and Indigenous methodologies. Given the oppressive nature of colonial processes towards economic exploitation, and the manufactured poverty of Indigenous peoples around the globe, scholarship and research that requires moral dialogue with, and the participation of Indigenous communities, is suggested as the foundation for postcolonial transformation. This involves exploring the disciplines contested interests with the EI/PC debate as one of those conflicts (Battiste, 2009, p. xxi). Critically strategically undervalued groups including Indigenous peoples in the EI-PC debate are severely impacted by a globalized and inherently unjust global economic system. The global capitalist system has evolved to their detriment with the appropriation of traditional lands and other exploitations for economic gain. The system's violence remains largely hidden, and the struggle for the land's food, water, and natural resources required for ceremonial purposes is often disregarded in debates over inequality. By localizing research approaches to the EI-PC

debate, opportunities for bringing further clarity to these issues will open the debate and calls for action.

Peter Kulchyski notes that *Makeso Sahahikan Inninuwak* pointed out that "*Oochinehwin,*" as enunciated in the Fox Lake Cree Nation Report, is "the belief that a negative action against an animal, a person or the land could negatively impact the fate of a person, family members, or the next generation." Other practices that might end in *Oochinehwin* comprise being impudent and unkind to orphans, as well as including other variations of prejudice. "The knowledge that there are consequences for inappropriate behaviors... was an important part of the people's worldview and directly influenced the choices they made in their daily lives" (FLCN, 2012).

Following, Lucie Besken and Sean Byrne analyse the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan through the lens of the "social cubism" analytical framework (Byrne & Carter, 1996). The analysis focuses on how the six interrelated internal dimensions of demographics, economics, history, political, psychocultural, and religious factors helped to shape this intractable conflict over time to gain a deeper understanding of why this protracted conflict is so difficult to resolve and what it would take for successful and constructive intervention to deescalate the violence and build trust and reconciliation between both countries. The analysis shows how the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan cannot be understood by focussing solely on material or psychocultural factors alone. Rather it is their unique combination and interaction over time and across levels of analysis that shape the behaviour of the groups in conflict and reveal its complexity. The social cubism analytical model has been applied to understand other ethnic conflicts as well. Applying the social cubism model to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict assists in comprehending why international peacebuilding efforts in the past

have failed and illustrates how any constructive peacebuilding intervention must be multi-dimensional, multi-modal, and multi-level, including the behaviour of external regional and international actors, and be informed by a complexified understanding of the conflict to have any chance of success.

Next, Sean Byrne, Robert C. Mizzi, Nancy Hansen and T. Sheppard-Luangkhot note how the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, culture wars and sectarianism, and exclusion continue to estrange strategically undervalued communities living in Northern Ireland as ableist, cisgender, and heterosexual white privileged men make decisions that affect their local everyday lives. Disabled people and LGBTQI+ citizens continue to bear the brunt of direct, cultural, and structural violence and the heightened siege mentality in Northern Ireland as well as exclusion from peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts. Their efforts during the pandemic to travel to Northern Ireland to complete inperson interviews with disabled people and LGBTQI+ people were marred by COVID-19 travel restrictions. They also experienced potential participants who were hesitant to participate in any research with external researchers. The purpose of this article is to reflect, as critical researchers, on the tensions of initiating a qualitative research study at a geographical and social distance. The authors discussions reveal that outside researchers seeking to work with highly vulnerable populations in protracted ethnopolitical conflict and civil war settings must be cognizant of their liminal roles as well as the psychosocial triggers that impact people living in marginalized spaces. Participant-centred research is a form of social action that can be valuable exploration.

Northern Ireland hosts a complex web of actors, including Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), government bodies, commercial enterprises, and strategically disadvantaged communities, which coexist in fragile and often unpredictable ways. Sustaining peace in this

contested space remains a significant challenge. In such a system, peacebuilding is less static, and it involves constant survival and negotiation modes. Mehmet Yavuz and Sean Byrne explore how CSOs in Northern Ireland navigate this evolving ecology of peacebuilding amid the persistent challenges to the peace process, peacebuilding projects, and shifting political and donor bureaucratic requirements. By exploring these dynamics through the lens of local CSO leaders, we gain some insight into the precarious balance CSOs must maintain to foster local people's agency, democratic accountability, and social justice in deeply polarized post-peace accord Northern Ireland.

Researchers use decolonizing research methods to amplify and tell the stories about the lived experiences of strategically undervalued and vulnerable groups in conflict milieus by building strong relationships through inclusive and participatory research that addresses their basic human needs (Douedari et al., 2021; Senehi, 2020, 2022).

Conclusion

As seen later in this special issue, the articles explore researching ethnic and Indigenous groups and strategically undervalued groups. The issue focuses on a need for equality, diversity, and inclusion among ethnic, Indigenous, and strategically undervalued and vulnerable communities that goes beyond powersharing along ethnosectarian divisions. It also includes a recognition of these communities economic and political needs, decolonization, and connections between healing practices and micro and macro-based reconciliation practices so that incorporating local peace methods and norms into international, regional, and state peacebuilding and human security interventions can be adapted to the local and state levels. Overall, this

special issue tries to comprehend some of the challenges faced when researching ethnic, Indigenous, and strategically undervalued groups in protracted conflict milieus.

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Reputation and Restraint: When Do Governments Negotiate with Terror Groups in Civil Conflict?

Ilker Kalin, Frederic S. Pearson, and Marie Olson Lounsbery

Introduction

The effectiveness of terrorism has been attributed in recent literature to its ability to extract political concessions from governments or force them to give in to terrorist activities. The often-heard slogan "we do not negotiate with terrorists" would suggest that such tactics to achieve any sort of political goals would be counterproductive. In fact, the general premise in the extant terrorism literature seems to suggest that terrorism is an ineffective but damaging tool of the "weak" (Crenshaw, 1981; Pruitt, 2006) and groups utilizing terrorism are no more likely to extract political gains than other non-state actors (Abrahms, 2006, 2012).

This logic, however, though generally accurate about comparative weakness, runs counter to the idea that terrorism can be a calculated tool utilized by so-called rational actors (Kydd & Walter, 2002) and fails to explain the recurrent use of terror tactics by insurgent groups (Pape, 2003). Besides, depending on how sustained the terror activity becomes, governments, despite their frequent vows never to negotiate with terrorists, frequently are obliged to offer political concessions ranging from prisoner exchanges and ceasefires (an example is the case between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan government) to peace agreements (as is the case between the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) and the British government).

These opposing views on terrorism efficacy raise questions that need to be addressed in further scrutiny of the literature, including the following: What are the factors that account

for the variation in peace negotiation onset with terror groups within and across conflicts? Why do some governments initiate talks with certain terror groups, while others resist such talks? Are there any specific groups or types of groups to which governments are more likely to extend concessions or offer talks, or any particular scenarios or terrorist strategies conducive to such interactions (concessions/talks)?

We address these questions within the context of civil conflicts. While terrorism and civil conflicts have historically been treated as separate phenomena in some early political violence literature,[1] more recent scholarship recognizes that they frequently overlap in practice and should be analyzed in relation to one another (Fortna, 2015; Stanton, 2013; Thomas, 2014). According to Stanton (2013), terrorism is one of many tactics that rebel groups may employ within the broader strategy of civil conflict, and many insurgent groups shift tactics depending on political and military dynamics, as well as their relationships with constituencies. Thomas (2014) and Fortna (2015) similarly show that rebel groups often use terrorism strategically during civil wars to shape conflict outcomes, highlighting its role as a tactical choice within intrastate conflict.

We acknowledge that the term "terrorist" is often politically expedient and used by states to delegitimize opposition and that states also sometimes indulge in terroristic behavior. To avoid conflating diverse types of violent actors, our analysis focuses on the strategic use of violence against civilians as a distinguishing characteristic (Clarke, 2025), allowing for a more behavior-based definition rather than one rooted in political labeling. In this study, we treat terrorism as a tactic employed by insurgent actors in the context of civil war, rather than as a distinct type of conflict, and adopt the term "terrorist rebel groups" (see, Fortna, 2015). Throughout the article, we use the terms "rebels" and "insurgents" interchangeably. When we

[1] There are, however, certain exceptions, such as Boulden, 2009; Findley & Young, 2012; Kalyvas, 2004.

use the term "terror group," we refer to rebel groups that engage in intentional civilian targeting, consistent with the coding in the Reputation of Terror Groups (RTG) dataset. Thus, this usage reflects a behavior-based definition, not a politically contested designation. Importantly, not all such groups employ civilian targeting to the same extent or with the same consistency over time. We conceptualize variation in civilian targeting as an important source of reputational dynamics that may influence a group's perceived legitimacy and its likelihood of being engaged in negotiations.

We examine how the constituency reputation of terror groups influenced the likelihood of negotiation during civil conflicts from 1980 to 2011. Drawing on the RTG dataset, we disaggregate domestic terror groups by the reputational signals they send to the communities they claim to represent. In particular, we assess whether groups that provide public goods, maintain political affiliations, or engage in media outreach – indicators of constituency engagement – are more likely to be offered formal negotiations by governments. We also explore how these reputational signals interact with the tactical decision of using violence against civilians.

Previous work by Heger and Jung (2017) suggests that rebel factions that can build a positive reputation with the community through the provisions of public service are proficient in leveraging that reputation through negotiations with their government. Does this same benefit apply to rebel groups who engage in the intentional targeting of civilians? We know that governments are reluctant to negotiate with "terrorists," often drawing that line in the sand as a mechanism to discourage the use of such tactics or to obviate the need for concessions. Yet, governments do indeed engage in peace-related negotiation with groups they have identified as terrorist at times. We suspect that terror groups may also be able to develop good will among the community and legitimize their opposition to the government in

ways like those found by Heger and Jung (2017) among rebels, but the relationship is potentially complicated by tactical decisions by the nonstate actors involved.

Governments' response to terrorism or to any opposition, by default, is generally to suppress any dissidents (Davenport, 2007). The consideration of negotiation as an option emerges only after exhausting alternative counter-terrorism strategies such as repression, cooptation (divide and conquer), foreign assistance, or isolation (Pruitt, 2006). These governmental tactics may prove less efficacious against terror groups enjoying high esteem within their constituency, especially if that constituency represents a substantial or influential portion of the population, *and* refrains from specifically targeting civilians. Moreover, a positive constituency reputation bestows upon a terror group the status of a legitimate political actor, at least within a segment of society, thereby mitigating a commonly cited barrier against negotiation with non-state actors. Thus, we argue that governments may perceive peace negotiations with popularly supported terror groups as less costly and even beneficial, as opposed to engagements with groups negatively or weakly reputed by their constituency, unless that reputation is offset by high levels of civilian targeting.[2]

The article proceeds as follows. First, we review the existing literature on negotiation initiation and the strategic effectiveness of terrorism. We then present the theoretical framework, focusing on how the constituency reputation of insurgent groups may influence the likelihood of peace or accommodation negotiations, primarily through the lens of governments' cost-benefit calculations. The research design section outlines the methodological approach and describes the key variables. This is followed by the presentation of empirical results and discussion of their implications. The article concludes by emphasizing

[2] The focus here is on decisions by the government to engage in negotiations with rebel factions. While states can and do target civilians, the impact of those tactics is not part of our theoretical approach.

the role of reputation-building in shaping negotiation dynamics between terror groups and governments in civil conflicts.

Negotiation Initiation and Terrorism Efficacy

The question of whether terrorism works or not has been a long-standing debate in the literature. The existing results regarding the efficacy debate are at best mixed. On one hand, some scholars have argued that terrorism is an effective means to achieve political gains, especially for weaker parties. Pape, for example, suggests that terror groups can gain modest concessions from governments through conducting suicide terror (e.g., bombings) (Pape, 2003, 2005), though one must note that such tactics can also result in repressive moves such as building barrier walls. Terrorism can work "because it causes governments and individuals to respond in ways that aid the terrorists' cause" (Kydd & Walter, 2006, p. 50). By applying "power to hurt" logic, Thomas argues that as rebel groups begin to exert an increasing number of terror attacks, governments become more likely to extend concessions and participate in negotiations, though of course, the opposite may also be true as in more desperate government crackdowns (Thomas, 2014).

On the other hand, others perceive terrorism as a relatively ineffective tool. Abrahms argues that terror groups seldom extract significant political concessions from governments (Abrahms, 2006, 2012). Terrorism can only bring minor gains, such as media attention, obtaining financial support, and advancing voluntary membership, which Abrahms refers to as process goals (Abrahms, 2012). Of course, some of these outcomes, such as increased notoriety, may in themselves be highly valued by the group(s). However, Abrahms argues that terrorism fails to produce major political gains, such as reaching specified political ends, which he refers to as outcome goals. By the same token, Cronin (2009) argues that terrorism generally yields only partial achievements for terror groups and cannot provide a complete success of the group's stated political objective. In a comparison of terror and rebel groups in

civil conflicts, Fortna (2015) argues that the former are less likely to achieve their stated political objectives, concluding that "terrorists do not win."

These differences regarding success are mainly due to studies' varied conceptions of success (Fortna, 2015). Without reaching an agreement as to what constitutes success, it is unlikely that the controversy can be settled. In that regard, Thomas (2014) criticizes the literature for exerting too much focus on the full achievement of the group's political goals while neglecting negotiation attempts and concessions *per se* as a success for rebel groups. Indeed, formally engaging in talks with governments presents significant benefits, such as group recognition and consideration of demands. For this reason, it is possible that governments may insist on secret or indirect talks through third parties. Nevertheless, negotiation itself is a breakthrough, particularly when those talks are aimed at underlying grievances (Crenshaw, 1981). Moreover, some scholars have emphasized the importance of taking negotiation as a process, rather than just an outcome (Ari, 2023; Kaplow, 2016; Pearson et al., 2011). In response to this call, recent studies on negotiation with non-state actors during civil conflicts have taken serious steps to parse negotiation into stages and consider it as a process (Findley, 2013; Ogutcu-Fu, 2016). Scholars have also asserted that any negotiation attempt during conflicts may be an indicator of future talks, signaling the willingness of the parties to discuss the conflict issues further, including their relative statuses (Kalin & Abduljaber, 2020; Pearson et al., 2011).

A few studies have systematically analyzed the conditions for initiation of talks with dissidents in general (Bapat, 2015; Walter, 2002), while terror group concerns have been included by only a limited number of studies (Fortna, 2015; Thomas, 2014). A large body of literature has focused on the obstacles that constrain parties to a civil dispute from participating in talks (Miller, 2011; Neumann, 2007; Wilkinson, 2006). At their heart lie the issues related to the legitimacy and complexity of groups, whether terrorist or not (Toros,

2008). Other concerns for initiating negotiations on either the group or government side include the possibility of spoilers (Kydd & Walter, 2006; Stedman, 1997), the terror group's potential hidden intentions (Duyvesteyn & Schuurman, 2011; Hewitt, 1984), the credibility of the other side (Iklé, 1971; Pillar 1983), rewarding bad behaviors (Thomas, 2014), and the government's reputation and political standing as "concession-prone" (Walter, 2002). On the other hand, a group of studies asserts that some of the obstacles (i.e., affording credibility and legitimacy) preventing the warring parties from holding talks can be overcome through the aid of third-party mediators and/or multilateral military interventions (Olson Lounsbery et al., 2011; Olson Lounsbery & DeRouen, 2016), as in the sporadic indirect talks we have heard about between Israel and Hamas during the Gaza war.

Despite these obstacles, peace negotiations between governments and terror groups do occur more often than might be expected (Neumann, 2007). The ripeness theory, posited by William Zartman (1989), is the most pronounced argument in the literature to explain when conflict negotiations occur. Zartman (1993) argues that parties are more likely to negotiate when they find themselves in a "mutually hurting stalemate" whereby they cannot successfully escalate the costly conflict further in pursuit of their goals. In such a situation, they seek "a way out" through negotiation (Zartman, 2000). Similarly, negotiations occur when "one side demonstrates that it cannot push or punish the enemy beyond a certain point" (Pillar, 1983, p. 59). Both Pillar's argument and Zartman's ripeness theory point to the imposed cost of ongoing conflict on the warring parties as the determinant of negotiation initiation. Following the same logic, scholars have suggested that rebel groups can increase the cost of conflict on governments and coerce them into concessions through terrorist attacks, violence against civilians, irregular warfare, and provocation strategies (Kalyvas & Kocher, 2007; Lake, 2002; Thomas, 2014).

The main gap in the literature, however, seems to be the lack of disaggregation of terror groups concerning the possibility of negotiations. As such, our attention is drawn to the question of whether there are specific groups or types of groups with whom governments are more likely to initiate negotiations. Although the former question has been partially answered by several studies (Pruitt, 2006; Zartman & Alfredson, 2019), finding negotiations with non-ideological ethnonationalist terror groups more common than with other terror groups, both questions should be addressed in further scrutiny since there may be other important group and situational characteristics that make talks more or less palatable and that have been overlooked or downplayed.

Theoretical Premises

We build our theoretical framework on three core premises about the strategic behavior of governments and terror groups during civil conflicts. First, terrorism may be a rationally selected strategy in the hands of insurgents during civil conflicts (Kydd & Walter, 2006). This means that groups using terrorism, including intentional targeting of civilians, expect to gain specific benefits from their actions, though of course some extremists may simply be anarchic and destructive. A terrorist act is defined as "the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence to attain a political, economic, religious or social goal through fear, coercion or intimidation" (Lafree & Dugan, 2007, p. 184). One of the ways that terror groups will instill fear, coercion, or intimidation is through the targeting of civilians. This is how one distinguishes terrorists from rebels: "Terrorism… is characterized by the use of violence by sub-state actors to attack innocent civilians in order to garner attention for their cause and ultimately, create pressure in order to attain political ends" (Clarke, 2025, p. 442). Interestingly, not all groups identified as terror (either by their own governments or by the Global Terrorism Database) specifically target civilians. We agree with Clarke and suggest that there is an important distinction between 'terror' groups that victimize civilians and those

that do not, and further, this distinction will influence decisions by governments to engage in peace talks with opposition groups.

Second, both governments and terror groups rely at least to an extent on public support to achieve their political goals. Neither governments nor terror groups are unitary actors. Albeit in different manners, both actors rely on constituent support (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003). Hewitt (1984) states that terror groups need three essentials to function: personnel, weapons, and popular support. Admittedly, the need for public support generally holds more for governments than for terror groups, as the former need the support or tolerance of a significant portion of the population for political survival (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003). Indeed, the respective government and insurgent constituencies also react to the opponent, with greater and lesser degrees of tolerance; highly unpopular governments will tend to strengthen the hand of insurgents, and highly reviled insurgents will do the same for increased government constituency support. Work by Cook and Olson Lounsbery (2017) suggests that popular support for either the government or insurgents will in part determine tactical decisions by both actors, including decisions to engage in negotiations.

Third, terrorism efficacy can be evaluated in a variety of ways other than a mere focus on significant political concessions or winning on the battlefield (Abrahms, 2012; Cronin, 2009). These include gaining attention (Dershowitz, 2002), survival of terror groups (Kirisci, 2020), international support, and bringing governments to negotiation tables (Thomas, 2014). As such, terror groups might perceive even a failed negotiation as a partial success granting the group at least *de facto* legitimacy and popularity, which are believed to ripen the conditions for future bilateral talks in each conflict. Thus, examining negotiations held between warring parties, whether successful or failed, is a valuable first step since negotiations often precede and determine the ensuing phases of peace processes or reversion to violence.

Building on these premises, we argue that governments, regardless of regime type, privately weigh the reputational signals of terror groups when considering negotiation. Groups that cultivate positive reputations within their constituency, such as through political ties or public service provision, are more likely to be seen as legitimate actors. However, this reputational benefit may be undermined by civilian targeting. Thus, we expect governments to be more willing to negotiate with groups that demonstrate positive constituency engagement and avoid indiscriminate violence against civilians, particularly when the timing and political context are conducive to talks.

It is important to clarify, however, that the measures used in this study reflect groups' efforts to cultivate support rather than direct indicators of public approval. That is, providing public goods or operating a media outlet does not necessarily mean the group enjoys strong popular legitimacy. Nonetheless, following the framework of Tokdemir and Akcinaroglu (2016), we assume that these actions are strategic signals aimed at building or sustaining reputation among key audiences. Governments, in turn, may interpret such efforts as indicators of organizational strength, local embeddedness, or constituency engagement, factors that could shape their willingness to negotiate, even if actual support levels vary.

Our focus is limited to domestic terror groups within the context of civil wars or violence for several reasons. For one thing, it allows for the judgment of terrorism efficacy when groups have other available strategies to employ in pursuit of their political goals, such as anti-government combat insurgency (Thomas, 2014). On the other hand, the effect of constituency reputation could be even more relevant for domestic terror, which we discuss further in the next section.

Reputation of Terror Groups and Negotiations

Governments may initially perceive any negotiations with terror groups off limits, largely due to fears of legitimizing the group and appearing weak. Engaging in talks may harm their

reputation as “concession-prone” (Bapat, 2015; Walter, 2002), as they must depart from their common “no negotiation with terrorists” rhetoric. This reluctance can be especially pronounced at the early stages of conflict or when dealing with groups that target civilians. Therefore, a significant portion, if not all such formal negotiations during civil conflicts are preceded by informal or secret talks, two-way or back channels, and shuttle diplomacy (Pruitt, 2005).

Pruitt (2006) outlines a range of strategic options governments can pursue when confronting terror groups: capitulating, combating, isolating, mainstreaming, and negotiating. Capitulating, meeting the group’s demands, is rare and generally politically untenable. States typically begin with repression (combat) and only consider negotiation if the group manages to survive and persist during this period (Bapat, 2015). Even then, alternative strategies may still be preferred. Isolation (or marginalization) targets the group’s support base by offering political and social incentives to its presumed constituency, in hopes of undermining support (Pruitt, 2006). This strategy has a higher chance of working with more loosely attached or marginal constituencies. Mainstreaming, on the other hand, encourages terror groups to end terrorist activities and pursue their objectives through political means (Pruitt, 2006). This has been a key element in peace agreements in Northern Ireland and Colombia, for example. This strategy is more likely to work with groups that are affiliated with semi-legitimate or newly formed political parties like Sinn Fein.

The term “terrorist” is often politically expedient allowing the government to delegitimize opposition to their rule. However, many such groups actively cultivate support among local populations and seek to represent a constituency. Like other political actors, they aim to appeal to their audience as well as the audience of their adversaries in government. This is why terror groups may target both audiences in their actions and strategies, as they presume that targeting civilians is a strategically adopted tool for non-state actors to achieve

political ends (Lake, 2002). As with rebel groups in general, terror groups evaluate how the target government population and their constituency will respond to their actions (Stanton, 2013).

We argue that governments may see negotiation as less costly, and more potentially rewarding, with terror groups that have cultivated a positive reputation among their constituents, for several reasons. First, when groups are deeply embedded in their communities, isolating or mainstreaming them becomes less viable. Negotiation may then become a more attractive option. Second, governments are wary of commitment problems, especially the risk of internal spoilers disrupting peace processes (Stedman, 1997; Walter, 2002). However, groups with strong internal legitimacy and a supportive base can be seen as more reliable to uphold agreements. Finally, governments have better chances of framing potential negotiations as a key opportunity to end the violence with groups who have built a positive constituency reputation, especially if these groups avoid targeting civilians. In a sense, terror groups with a positive constituency reputation extend an olive branch to governments by providing them with better excuses to put negotiation onto the political agenda without losing face to the public.

We propose three ways that terror groups may build constituency reputation and legitimacy, and in turn influence the likelihood of negotiations.

Public Good Provision

All rebel groups claim to represent a group of people, gathering along the lines of religion, ethnicity, nationalism, or other ideologies. While some groups invest time and finance in winning the "hearts and minds," or at least the tolerance of a civilian constituency, others forego such efforts. In weaker countries that lack the ability, or even the willingness, to effectively care for their citizens, nonstate actors can replace the government as the provider of essential public goods. Heger and Jung (2017) suggests that rebel factions that can build a

reputation with the community through the provisions of public service can leverage that reputation through negotiations with their government. Terror groups may similarly use social service provision as a strategic tool to challenge the state and enhance their legitimacy; this has been noted for example in Hezbollah's appeal especially among Shi'ite populations in Lebanon (Asal et al., 2022; Kirisci et al., 2023; Yetim, 2023). In Lebanon, Hezbollah has provided "a vast network of social services that include infrastructure, health-care facilities, schools, and youth programs" (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024). In doing so, legitimacy of the group increases as allegiance to the group improves relative to the government. When nonstate actors are willing and able to provide such services, particularly amid civil conflict, their existence seems necessary for survival. As support and legitimacy of the group increases, the threat posed to the government of the state increases as well.

We suspect, however, that the reputational benefits from providing public goods will only be experienced when terror groups refrain from targeting civilian populations. The case of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the Philippines offers a suggestive illustration of this logic. Representing the Moro Muslim minority, the MILF cultivated local legitimacy through public service provision in areas under its control, including community policing, Islamic legal institutions, and socio-economic development programs (Podder, 2012). In contrast to more radical groups like Abu Sayyaf, the MILF generally refrained from large-scale violence against civilians, focusing its attacks primarily on state security forces (Abuza, 2005). This combination of constituency engagement and tactical restraint may have contributed to the group's perceived credibility, contributing to its eventual inclusion in formal peace talks that culminated in the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro.

When rebels refrain from indiscriminate violence, efforts to delegitimize the group will likely fall on deaf ears as the experience of the citizens under the group's care or

influence will speak louder than countering narratives that paint such groups as terrorists. As the battle of the conflict narratives shifts in favor the nonstate actor, governments will be forced to minimize their loses but also maintain their privileged position, and thus peace negotiation seems more likely. Therefore, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 1a: Governments are more likely to engage in negotiation with terror groups that provide public services.

Hypothesis 1b: This effect is weakened or reversed when those groups engage in high levels of civilian targeting.

Media Influence

Nonstate armed actors may also seek to build legitimacy and improve their base of support using media. As groups seek to justify their opposition to the government, as well as their use of violence to achieve their goals, they may harness the power of the media as a mechanism for delivering their narrative; in doing so, such groups can provide an alternative to the delegitimizing campaign typically put forth by the government. Groups that can deliver their message regularly have an advantage over those that do not have that capability. Media access suggests a certain level of organization and institutionalization, in addition to providing the tools to persuade and mobilize a potential constituency. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in Colombia, for example, had long broadcasted a radio program, called "Voice of Resistance," to spread its propaganda and enhance the social status of its fighters. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, also, provided public services (i.e. health, education, and law) for the Tamil youth to increase community support (Tokdemir, 2021). Again, the benefits of media access will be curtailed with civilian victimization.[3] Whatever messages of legitimacy that are portrayed in the media by the

[3] While we acknowledge that the effects of civilian victimization may vary depending on the nature of the conflict, particularly in ethnically charged contexts where violence is directed at rival

terrorist organization, indiscriminate violence and the fear it generates will speak louder than those messages. Therefore, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 2a: Governments are more likely to engage in peace negotiations with terror groups that demonstrate media influence.

Hypothesis 2b: This effect is weakened or reversed when those groups engage in high levels of civilian targeting

Political Affiliation

Nonstate armed actors identified by either their government, or by other entities, as terrorist groups struggle to obtain legitimacy given their direct challenge to the state. To legitimize their cause and their organization, some groups will move to create a political party allowing them to enter into the existing political realm. In fact, it is not uncommon for terrorist organizations to create a political arm for this purpose (see, for example, Sinn Fein's relationship with the Provisional Irish Republican Army and Batasuna and EH Bildu's relationship to ETA or *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* in the Basque region of Spain). The ability to do so will provide a level of legitimacy.

A well-known example is the relationship between the Provisional IRA and Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland. As Sinn Féin gained electoral traction, the group's political visibility increased, but legitimacy remained limited as long as the IRA engaged in indiscriminate violence (Borsuk, 2016). It was only after the IRA declared a ceasefire and reduced civilian targeting that Sinn Féin became a credible participant in peace talks leading to the Good Friday Agreement (Moloney, 2002). This suggests that political institutionalization may enhance a group's chances of negotiation, but such benefits are conditional on tactical restraint. We, therefore, suspect that governments will be more likely to engage in

communities, we maintain that, in general, indiscriminate or high-profile civilian targeting carries reputational costs and tend to turn supporters off.

negotiations with such groups compared to those who lack that level of legitimacy. That legitimacy will again be undermined when the armed faction of that movement targets civilians.

Hypothesis 3a: Governments are more likely to engage in negotiation with terror groups with political party affiliation.

Hypothesis 3b: This effect is weakened or reversed when those groups engage in high levels of civilian targeting

Research Design

We construct our dataset by combining information from the Reputation of Terror Groups (RTG) dataset by Tokdemir and Akcinaroglu (2016) and the Peace Negotiations in Civil Conflicts (PNCC) dataset by Ari (2023). The RTG dataset is based on the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) (Enders et al., 2011), which defines terrorism as "the premeditated use (or threat) of violence by subnational groups in the pursuit of political, economic, social, core religious goals, in the aim of which is to intimidate an audience beyond its immediate victims" (Tokdemir & Akcinaroglu, 2016, p. 269). All domestic terror groups are included that engaged in at least five such terror attacks as identified by the GTD over the time period under study. Comparatively, the PNCC dataset relies on the dyadic UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (ACD) (Melander et al., 2016). Our analysis focuses on dyads consisting of domestic rebel groups and state governments involved in civil conflicts between 1980 and 2011. These rebel groups that are classified as "terror groups" in the RTG dataset due to their consistent or sporadic use of terrorist tactics.

Our unit of analysis is the dyad-year, meaning each observation captures a single year of interaction between a given group and the government. The dataset includes both active conflict years (when violence occurred) and inactive years (when violence did not occur) if a negotiation took place during those inactive periods. This allows us to capture the political

dynamics that may lead to negotiations even outside of active fighting. In total, our sample includes 88 rebel–government dyads, resulting in 644 dyad-year observations.

In defining civil war, we rely upon the definition of the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), that is internal armed conflicts between a government and a non-state armed group over incompatibility regarding control over territory or governance that result in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a year (Gleditsch et al., 2002; Harbom et al., 2008). In defining terrorism, we employ the definition of the GTD already provided above and originally attributed to LaFree and Dugan (2007), that is "the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation."

Dependent Variable

Our dependent variable is *negotiation*, a binary indicator coded 1 if any formal peace or accommodative negotiations took place between a state and a terror group during a given dyad-year, and 0 otherwise. This measure is drawn from the PNCC dataset, which systematically records when a government and a non-state actor entered and exited formal negotiations. The dataset captures not only active talks but also distinguishes years without negotiations, offering a comprehensive view of negotiation activity. Negotiations refer to any formal meetings, direct or indirect talks, mediated discussions, or agreements aimed at resolving conflict either partially or wholly.

Independent Variables

Our primary independent variables capture the extent to which terror groups cultivate a positive constituency reputation, operationalized through three main indicators: public goods provision, media presence, and political party affiliation. These variables are drawn from the Reputation of Terror Groups (RTG) dataset. *Public goods provision* is a binary variable coded 1 if the group provides any form of public services to the local population (e.g., education,

healthcare, infrastructure), and 0 otherwise. The provision of public goods is used as a proxy for a group's effort to build legitimacy and support among its constituency. This variable corresponds to Hypothesis 1 (H1).

Media presence is a binary variable coded 1 if the group demonstrates active media engagement, such as operating a TV or radio station or publishing newsletters, and 0 if no such media activity is observed. Media presence reflects the group's capacity to disseminate its narrative and engage with its audience, aligning with Hypothesis 2 (H2).

Political affiliation is a binary variable coded 1 if the terror group is affiliated with a political party or has established a formal political wing, and 0 otherwise. Political affiliation indicates institutional development and signals an openness to political engagement, as outlined in Hypothesis 3 (H3).

To assess whether the reputational benefits of public goods provision, media presence, or political affiliation are conditional on tactical behavior, we include a measure of *civilian targeting* as a moderator. This variable captures the extent of indiscriminate violence committed by the group. Specifically, we rely on RTG's coding of the number of civilians killed, logged to address right-skewed distribution. All four independent variables, public goods provision, media presence, political affiliation, and civilian targeting, are lagged by one year to reduce concerns of reverse causality and to better reflect the temporal order of effects.

Control Variables

We include several control variables grouped into conflict-related and country-level factors, relying on the RTG dataset. Among conflict-level characteristics, we control for *the number of terror groups* operating in a given country-each year. Governments presumably become less willing to grant concessions when there are multiple potential claimants in the country (Walter, 2002). It is also possible that governments may seek to divide and weaken the opposition by offering concessions to some groups over others (Cunningham et al., 2009).

Additionally, we control for the *age* of insurgent groups (logged), believing that groups with greater longevity are more likely to be viewed as durable actors, and therefore more viable candidates for negotiation. We also include a *religious group* indicator, coded as a binary variable for whether the group is identified as having a religious ideology. Prior research suggests that conflicts involving religious groups tend to be more protracted and resistant to negotiated settlements, which may influence the likelihood of talks (Pruitt, 2006; Svensson et al., 2024). We include a binary variable for *cross-border operations*, coded as 1 if the group engages in activities in more than one country, and 0 otherwise.

At the country-level, we also control for *regime type* by including a *democracy* indicator based on the Polity IV score (Marshall et al., 2016). Countries with a score of *6 or higher* are coded as democracies, while others are classified as non-democracies. Democracies are thought to be both more constrained in their counterterrorism responses and more susceptible to public pressure, potentially shaping negotiation dynamics (Chenoweth, 2010, 2013).

We also include a *pre–Cold War* dummy variable to account for structural shifts in international conflict resolution after 1990, a period associated with a rise in negotiated peace settlements (Harbom et al., 2006). Finally, we include the logs of *GDP per capita* and *Population size* (from the RTG dataset) to account for state capacity and broader development, which may influence both the feasibility and the attractiveness of negotiating with insurgent actors.

Empirical Results and Discussion

Before turning to multivariate models, we first present descriptive and bivariate results to explore patterns in the data and provide context for the regression analyses. Table 1 summarizes the distribution of the main variables of interest. Approximately 52.2 percent of groups provided public goods, 38.7 percent had a media presence, and 79.2 percent were

affiliated with political parties. Around 31.7 percent of group-year observations involved some form of negotiation with the government.

Table 1. Descriptives

Variable	N	Min.	Max.	Mean/Freq. (%)	SD
Negotiation	644	0	1	31.7	-
Public goods	644	0	1	52.2	-
Media presence	644	0	1	38.7	-
Political affiliation	644	0	1	79.2	-
Number of civilian casualties	644	0	1028	49	106
Democracy	616	0	1	53.4	-
Religious group	637	0	1	22.1	-
Number of terror groups	644	1	24	4.1	4.3
Log GDP	616	4.69	10.45	7.96	-
Cross-border group	644	0	1	19.7	-
Pre-1990 Conflict	644	0	1	25	-

Since civilian targeting functions as a moderator in our analysis, we also explore whether groups with positive constituency characteristics are systematically more or less likely to harm civilians. Table 2 presents mean comparisons (using t-tests) of civilian casualties across groups with and without each characteristic. These averages are reported under the “Mean Casualties (Yes)” and “Mean Casualties (No)” columns, respectively.

The results suggest that groups with positive constituency traits are not uniformly less violent toward civilians. In fact, groups providing public goods or maintaining a media presence were associated with significantly higher average civilian casualties than those without. However, no statistically significant difference is observed between politically affiliated and non-affiliated groups. These findings indicate that legitimacy-building efforts such as public service or media outreach do not necessarily translate into more restrained violence. This sets the stage for our multivariate analysis, which examines whether these characteristics interact with civilian targeting in predicting peace negotiations.

Table 2. *Group Comparisons on Civilian Casualties*

Characteristics	Mean Casualties (No)	Mean Casualties (Yes)	*p*(t-test)
Public goods	32.19	64.48	< 0.001
Media presence	32.63	75.06	< 0.001
Political affiliation	43.35	50.53	0.44

Table 3 presents logistic regression models examining the likelihood of peace negotiations between governments and terror groups, focusing on how constituency-building efforts interact with civilian targeting. All independent variables, including civilian targeting, are lagged by one year. This lag structure accounts for the reduction in the number of observations, particularly due to the exclusion of the first year of each dyad, where lagged values are unavailable.

In Model 1, we test the association between public goods provision and negotiation. The results show that public goods provision is positively and significantly associated with the likelihood of negotiation ($b = 1.131$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that groups providing public services are more likely to be engaged in peace talks. However, the interaction between public goods and civilian targeting is not significant, indicating that the benefit of public service provision for negotiations is not meaningfully altered by a group's level of civilian violence.

Model 2 tests media presence. Neither the main effect of media presence nor its interaction with civilian targeting reaches statistical significance, indicating no robust association between media access and negotiation outcomes.

Model 3 introduces political affiliation. The main effect of political affiliation is positive and statistically significant ($b = 1.533$, $p = 0.05$), but notably, the interaction term between political affiliation and civilian targeting is negative and statistically significant ($b = -0.297$, $p < 0.05$). This implies that the benefits of political affiliation for negotiation are conditional: they erode as civilian targeting increases. In other words, political affiliation

increases the likelihood of negotiation only when groups refrain from or limit targeting civilians.

Model 4 includes all three group traits and their interactions with civilian targeting. Public goods provision and political affiliation remain positive and significant predictor of negotiation (b = 0.973, p < 0. 1 and b = 1.465, p < 0.05, respectively). The interaction between political affiliation and civilian targeting also remains significant (b = -0.319, p < 0.05), reinforcing the idea that the reputational benefits of political party affiliation are undermined by civilian victimization. Media-related variables remain insignificant across models.

Table 3. *Interaction Effects of Group Characteristics and Civilian Targeting on Negotiation*

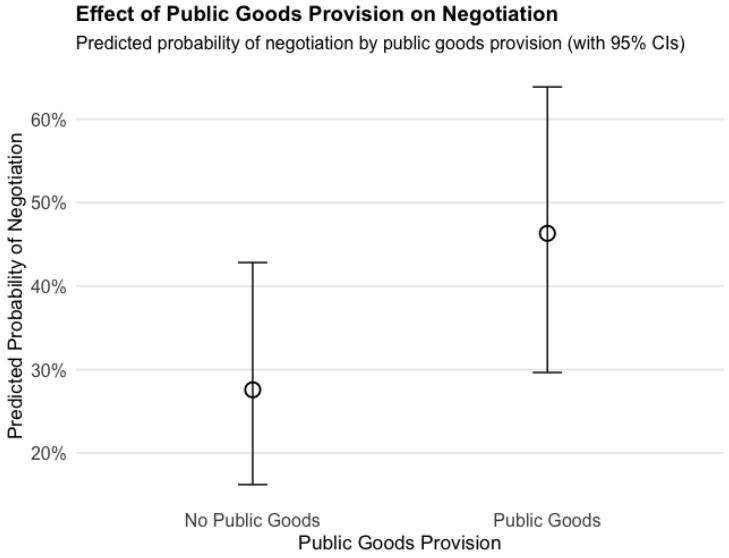
	Dependent variable: Negotiation			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Public Goods	1.131**			0.973*
	(0.551)			(0.523)
Media Presence		0.152		-0.087
		(0.543)		(0.585)
Political Affiliation			1.533**	1.465**
			(0.646)	(0.588)
Target Civilians	-0.056	-0.091	0.132	0.192
	(0.101)	(0.069)	(0.121)	(0.154)
Democracy	0.974**	1.112**	1.344***	1.160***
	(0.448)	(0.453)	(0.461)	(0.448)
Religious Group	0.337	0.398	0.527	0.364
	(0.568)	(0.604)	(0.516)	(0.535)
# of Terror Groups	0.081	0.093	0.097*	0.081
	(0.060)	(0.058)	(0.058)	(0.057)
Log GDP	-0.787***	-0.946***	-0.944***	-0.755***
	(0.256)	(0.228)	(0.239)	(0.261)
Cross-border Group	-0.063	-0.157	-0.046	0.014
	(0.241)	(0.246)	(0.261)	(0.254)
Pre-1990 Conflict	-0.694*	-0.542	-0.619*	-0.763*
	(0.409)	(0.385)	(0.372)	(0.404)
Group Age	0.596*	0.830**	0.842**	0.613*

	(0.331)	(0.340)	(0.342)	(0.354)
Log Population	-0.831***	-0.916***	-0.993***	-0.891***
	(0.207)	(0.187)	(0.196)	(0.203)
Public Goods × Target Civilians	-0.120			-0.066
	(0.143)			(0.144)
Media × Target Civilians		-0.039		-0.033
		(0.122)		(0.132)
Politics × Target Civilians			-0.297**	-0.319**
			(0.134)	(0.152)
Constant	6.142***	7.479***	6.368***	4.886**
	(1.875)	(1.476)	(1.550)	(1.961)
Observations	430	430	430	430
Log Likelihood	-232.668	-238.523	-234.031	-229.016
Akaike Inf. Crit.	489.336	501.046	492.062	490.031

Note: *p<0.1**p<0.05***p<0.01. Standard errors clustered around the warring dyad.

While public goods provision appears to have intrinsic reputational value, political affiliation is more fragile, losing its positive effect when paired with indiscriminate violence. Figure 1 shows the predicted probability of negotiation for groups that provide public goods versus those that do not, holding continuous variables at their means and categorical variables at their modal values.

Figure 1. *Predicted probabilities of negotiation based on public good provision (based on Model 4)*



Our expectation that the reputational benefits of group characteristics depend on restraint from civilian targeting is supported only for political affiliation. Figure 2 shows the predicted probabilities of negotiation for groups with and without political affiliation across varying levels of civilian casualties, holding all other covariates at their mean or modal values. The shaded areas around each line represent 95 percent confidence intervals for the predicted probabilities of negotiation. Where the intervals do not largely overlap, particularly at the low end of civilian casualties, the predicted probabilities for groups with and without political affiliation are statistically distinguishable. The wider bands at the extremes (especially toward the right) reflect greater uncertainty in predictions at those levels, likely due to fewer observations or higher variance in the data.

Figure 2 indicates that for groups without political affiliation, the likelihood of negotiation increases with more civilian casualties. This is in line with the "power to hurt" logic (Thomas, 2014) which posits that greater violence may compel governments to negotiate. In contrast, for politically affiliated groups, the likelihood of negotiation markedly declines as civilian casualties increase. This divergence aligns with our expectation that the political legitimacy gained through affiliation is undermined when groups target civilians.

Figure 2. *Predicted probabilities of negotiation based on political affiliation and civilian targeting (based on Model 4)*

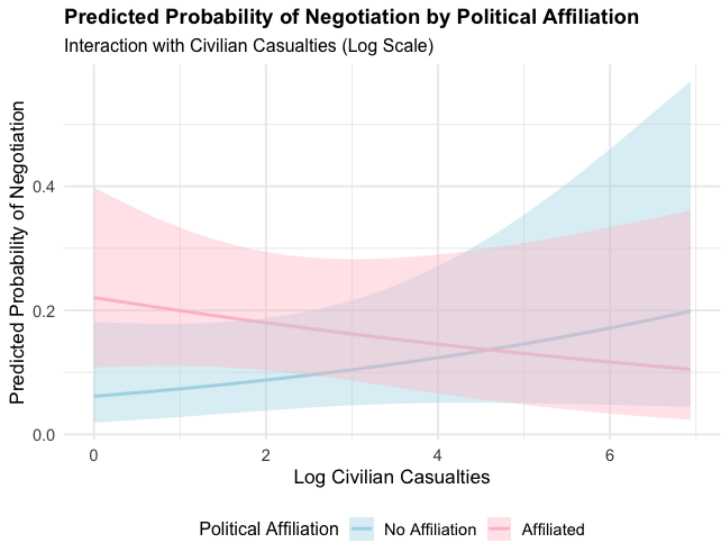
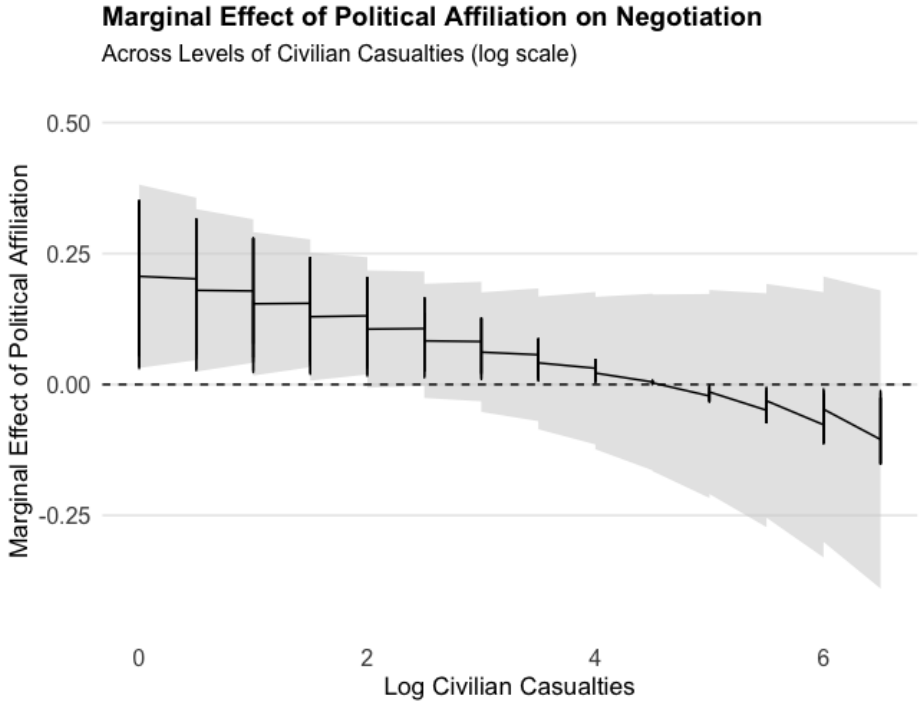


Figure 3 presents the marginal effect of political affiliation on negotiation across the spectrum of civilian casualties. Political affiliation has a significant positive effect on the likelihood of negotiation when civilian casualties are low, but the effect becomes negative and not statistically distinguishable from zero when civilian casualties are higher. This suggests that political affiliation enhances negotiation prospects only when groups exercise restraint in their use of violence.

Figure 3. *Marginal effect of political affiliation on negotiation across levels of civilian casualties (based on Model 4)*



Overall, the findings provide support for Hypothesis 3 and partial support for Hypothesis 1, while Hypothesis 2 is not supported. Although we do not find evidence that media presence influences the likelihood of negotiations, this may stem from limitations in how the variable is measured. Specifically, a binary indicator may fail to capture important variation in the quality, reach, or credibility of media engagement across groups. Public goods provision, however, significantly increases the likelihood of negotiation regardless of civilian

targeting behavior. This lends support to the findings by Heger and Jung (2017) that groups can leverage community-oriented service provision into political gains at the negotiation table. This finding implies that such efforts to build legitimacy may have an intrinsic value that is not easily undermined by violent tactics, or alternatively, that groups capable of providing services may also possess other traits conducive to negotiation.

By contrast, the benefits of political affiliation are conditional on restraint from civilian targeting, as we hypothesized. Groups with a political wing are more likely to be engaged in negotiations only when they do not engage heavily in civilian violence. This highlights the reputational cost of civilian targeting for politically institutionalized groups and underscores the importance of tactical discipline in securing political dialogue.

Concluding Remarks

This study offers a revised perspective on the conditions under which governments negotiate with terror groups during civil conflicts. Building on the assumption that both states and nonstate actors operate with political constituencies in mind, we posited that groups that cultivate a positive constituency reputation, through service provision, media messaging, or political organization, are more likely to be engaged in peace talks. However, this reputational effect is not unconditional. Our findings reveal a crucial tension between reputation and restraint: the benefits of legitimacy-building are conditional upon the group's restraint from targeting civilians. In other words, a group's political credibility can be undone by its strategic use of civilian violence.

In armed conflicts, negotiations tend to occur when "the time is ripe" and parties begin to "seek a way out" (Zartman, 1989, 2000). Yet this moment may still depend on group-specific characteristics that can facilitate or impede the process. In this context, constituency reputation might emerge as an important strategic factor. Accordingly, our findings should be interpreted as probabilistic rather than deterministic. Popular support of terror groups might

serve as a catalyst in easing governments' punitive "no negotiation" stand into a more conciliatory tone. A group's positive constituency reputation evidently signals to the government that (1) the group has a strong support base, which makes it harder to marginalize the group; (2) the group has become a legitimate actor at least for some share of the society; and (3) the group has an internal consistency and likely staying power, which render it as a relatively more credible negotiation partner.

We find support for our hypothesis regarding the influence of political institutionalization on the likelihood of negotiations. Political affiliation, usually in the form of a political party, significantly increases the likelihood of negotiation, but only when the rebel group refrains from high levels of violence against civilians. Political affiliation may signal credibility, resilience, and a constituency that the government cannot easily ignore or marginalize. Civilian targeting, however, undermines the perceived legitimacy of groups that might otherwise be seen as potential political actors, particularly when those groups are embedded within formal political processes. We also find partial support for our hypothesis regarding public goods provision. Groups that offer public services are more likely to experience negotiations, regardless of their targeting behavior. This aligns with prior findings by Heger and Jung (2017). We interpret these finding to mean that governments do weigh the reputational standing of terror groups, particularly among their own constituencies, when calculating the costs and benefits of having talks.

Our expectation, however, was not conclusively met regarding media presence. Certainly, some groups, such as Sinn Fein, the PLO, and ETA have benefited from their media presence and were able to garner international support as a result, but our findings do not support the importance of media presence more generally. One possible explanation is that our binary measure of media activity fails to capture qualitative variation in reach or credibility. Additionally, the media presence variable in the dataset primarily reflects

traditional media platforms, such as radio broadcasts, television appearances, or printed publications. However, the role of digital communication and social media, which are increasingly used by armed groups to build support and engage with constituencies, is not captured by this measure. Future work could benefit from incorporating measures of digital media use, including social media campaigns and online influence networks, to better assess the reputational effects of media engagement.

It is important to note that our research only captures whether negotiations occur, not whether they are successful or durable. Nor do we explore the internal dynamics within groups that may shape negotiation probabilities or outcomes. Future work should investigate whether reputational characteristics affect durability, agenda scope, or bargaining strength, as well as explore non-constituency reputation and third-party mediation. Understanding whether a group is negotiating for a ceasefire or full autonomy, for example, is a critical step in refining this analysis. Indeed, we should analyze different types of negotiation and the particular issues on the table.

Our findings carry important policy implications. Policymakers should assess the strategic benefits of negotiation earlier in the conflict cycle, rather than ruling it out categorically. A more nuanced interpretation of group demands, and societal ties may help open space for reform or dialogue that weakens incentives for violence. If groups with positive constituency reputations are more likely to be offered talks, as this study suggests, then addressing those constituencies' needs could be a more productive path toward de-escalation. Governments that ignore these dynamics, as in the case of Syria, risk pushing moderate communities toward extremism. For non-state actors, the path to negotiation requires more than constituency reputation alone. They must reckon with the dual imperative of reputation and restraint: building credibility among their constituents while refraining from violence that could undermine it.

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Relationship Building Through Funded Civil Society Organizations in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of the Republic of Ireland: Some Critical Reflections

Chuck Thiessen, Calum Dean and Sean Byrne

Introduction

The article explores civil society actors' experiences and perception of external economic aid in funding local peacebuilding organizations to facilitate inclusive social relationships. Peacebuilding processes are dependent on context. In the case of the Northern Ireland (NI) peace process, significant economic and social changes prepared momentum for the success of the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement (GFA). Before the GFA, during the Troubles, the period from 1968 to 1998, high levels of social polarization in NI enabled devastating violence. Tens of thousands of people were injured, and the region of 1.9 million inhabitants suffered 3,720 conflict-related deaths (Holland, 2022). Undoubtedly, for peace to emerge, a different context must be prepared.

In NI, international economic aid targeted grassroots organizations who helped amplify the voices of previously strategically undervalued and excluded people (Byrne et al., 2009a). The grassroots focus of international economic assistance was an important factor in securing the trust and public support necessary for sustainable and ever deeper forms of peace to emerge. Indeed, the inclusion of the most vulnerable groups within society reduces hostilities between competing groups and builds communities' self-confidence and cross-community ties to avoid the recurrence of conflict (Lederach, 1997). Beyond economics, structural inequalities also deny

opportunities for political participation and provide new energy to human rights to exclude social groups as the exacerbation of these inequalities creates ideal conditions for conflict (Cederman et al., 2013; Wucherpfennig et al., 2012).

Despite general recognition by policymakers of the importance of international economic assistance for peacebuilding, keeping economic aid only at macro levels of institutional design and state-building, without reaching local social economic development and grassroots peace programs, may unintentionally reinforce cleavages and divisions between the conflicting groups (Byrne et al., 2009a). Moreover, it could also be the case that following international donors' interests and conditions, international economic assistance as an instrument of the liberal peace may fail to back up local peace and development efforts in part because of the disconnection between local communities and donors in terms of local cultural approaches to development and reconciliation (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2007). Thus, understanding the mechanisms underpinning grassroots-oriented financial investment in NI to reduce structural economic inequalities between local Protestant Unionist Loyalist (PUL) and Catholic Nationalist Republican (CNR) communities through international economic aid sheds light on its impact. This paper explores the nuances of these mechanisms in NI in terms of inclusion and relationship building.

This article examines the civil society sector of the NI peace process, involving Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) who were recipients of European Union (EU) PEACE III or/and International Fund for Ireland (IFI) funding to nurture cross community peacebuilding. It argues that economic and political concerns have superseded social issues, community building, and the needs of everyday citizens. The consequences of this are an overly professionalized, technocratic peace process that has left many in NI disenfranchised and uncertain about the future. The NI

peace process includes a substantial peacebuilding investment, as well as the social consequences of ignoring strategically undervalued communities like ex-combatants, disability and LGBTQ communities that risk squandering this investment as well as the lessons learned that could be considered with regards to other ethnic conflicts (Mizzi et al., 2023). The political infrastructure is showing the cracks that have been apparent at the local level as Stormont was deadlocked between 2022-2024 in political issues steeped in division between the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Fein (SF). Other divisive political issues included the political referendum on the 2016 United Kingdom's (UK) membership in the EU and its impact on the GFA, devolved government, and powersharing.

The paper analyzes interviews which were conducted during the summer of 2010 by the third author with 120 civil servants, development officers, and recipients of EU PEACE III or/and IFI funding in NI and the Border Counties (BCs) of the Republic of Ireland (RoI). This paper points out how deep reconciliation has been supplanted by an apparatus of liberal economics and capitalism. It begins by outlining critical emancipatory peacebuilding and the concerns of on-the-ground operatives, those working within civil society to build peace. It follows by describing in brief the modern context within NI, focusing on the flying of the flag's controversy, the collapse of the Stormont parliament in 2017 and again in 2022, and Brexit. It describes critical emancipatory peacebuilding as a pushback against the (neo)liberal undercurrents within international peacebuilding, and the use of IFI and EU PEACE funding for local grassroots organizations' reconciliation purposes. It then proceeds to analyze the relational and social concerns along the lines of ongoing social issues, positives and successes, and what can be done in the future. Next is a discussion that emphasizes current dynamics in NI and international peacebuilding, and what can be learned from these interviews with CSO leaders in

NI. Finally, this paper concludes by summarizing the main points raised throughout the article and re-asserting the idea that as a peace-oriented endeavour, peacebuilding should remain committed to local people, respect their voices and learn from their knowledge and experiences of peacebuilding.

Northern Ireland Context

Civil society is composed of voluntary organizations that exist in a semi-permeable space, in between and within the realms of the state, politics, economics, and private sectors, operating separately from these spheres, but often in close connection with them (Paffenholz & Spurk, 2010). In Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS), the 'local' or 'cultural' turn in peace theory have emphasized the use of civil society to localize peacebuilding, such as with the use of CSO networks in NI, as well as 'everyday' actors who work outside these more formal networks (McGinty, 2021; Paffenholz, 2015). Since 1998, the GFA ushered in an era of financial support directed towards civil society projects with the goal of facilitating more peaceful relations within NI. However, tensions remain high, and over the last fifteen years instances and representations of the ongoing divide and crevasse between both communities shows that the conflict persists underneath the surface.

The controversial ruling in the Belfast City Council in 2012 regarding the flying of the Union flag prompted protests from Loyalist communities (Goldie & Murphy, 2015). Although typically peaceful, these protests escalated into violence and created new battlegrounds online which reignited Loyalist and Republican divisions (Bryan, 2015). The collapse and devolution of the powersharing government following the DUP's mismanagement of the renewable energy incentive scandal that became known publicly in 2016, signified the inability of major political parties to function, and resulted in the suspension of government creating tensions throughout NI

(Heenan & Birrell, 2021). The newest issues following the election of SF to the Stormont parliament as the largest political party in 2022 caused another breakdown that neither side was willing to address until the issues involving the Brexit border disputes are resolved (Black, 2022; Tonge, 2022). Further, the Brexit negotiations created unease and threatened the economic stability created by the GFA and economic policies like a single-island economy and freedom of mobility for goods and people (Doyle & Connolly, 2019).

The placement of the land and sea customs border created complex cultural, social, economic and political issues (Doyle & Connolly, 2019). The customs border also threatened EU funding and other EU human rights programming and infrastructure that were important contributions to the peace process (Doyle & Connolly, 2019). In particular, the unemployment and relative poverty of contingencies of young Protestant men have stoked tensions (Guelke 2014). The ongoing border issue that British Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer is dealing with, signifies the complexity and difficulty of managing the NI conflict. A July 2024 news article published in the *Belfast Telegraph* by Claire Williamson, illustrated that Starmer wanted "to reaffirm the principles of the GFA" and "get a better deal with the EU than the 'botched' deal agreed by Boris Johnson." Brexit reinvigorated nationalisms and divisions within NI, providing an arena for Eurosceptics and British nationalists largely aligned with PUL communities to pose challenges to cross-community reconciliation, partnership, and coexistence. As a result, CNR community disillusionment with the political system was amplified yet again (McCann & Hainsworth, 2017; Van Abswoude & de Vries, 2020).

EU PEACE and IFI funding were two major financial investments into the NI peace process as part of (neo)liberal peacebuilding. The EU PEACE program has had four iterations and is currently implementing PEACE PLUS (essentially PEACE V) which covers 2021 to 2027

and the Irish government's Shared Island initiative and fund (2021-2025) of €500 million (Kolodziejski, 2022). The EU PEACE Fund was created in 1995 after the ceasefires between paramilitary groups, with a focus on grassroots organizers (Byrne et al, 2009c; Hyde & Byrne 2015; Karari et al., 2013). The IFI, which focuses its funding along the BCs of the RoI is based on an agreement between the UK, NI, and the government of the RoI from 1986 to support the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, with $895 million USD (Buchanan, 2014; Fissuh et al., 2012; Skarlato et al., 2016). Financial investment plays an important role in peacebuilding to address the economic concerns and sociocultural dimensions by investing in human capital (Byrne et al., 2009b, 2010; Creary & Byrne, 2014a). The early funding structures of EU PEACE I, II, and III were informed by a specific formula of post-war reconstruction predicted in liberal economics and democracy as well as engaging with CSOs, and civil and political rights (Creary & Byrne 2014b). The more recent strategy document for the *International Fund for Ireland 2021 – 2024: Connecting Communities* emphasizes the promotion of reconciliation, engagement with communities and individuals with a focus on youth, and support for the development of leaders (IFI, 2020). It articulates the IFI's goal as building "a peaceful and shared society of empowered and connected communities" (IFI, 2020). To highlight issues within community-building, this strategy document emphasizes that 93 percent of children attend segregated schools, those identifying as neither Unionist nor Nationalist is at its lowest in 15 years (IFI, 2020). Despite successes and deep forms of reconciliation, the community-building aspects of the peace process have clearly faced and continue to face barriers to successful implementation. The renewed emphasis on connecting communities is a welcome advance, however as recent struggles and the 2022 shutdown of Stormont illustrate, this ongoing work is difficult and complex.

The fact sheet on EU PEACE programing states "this programme is now seen as an example of peacebuilding policy to be shared throughout Europe and other regions" (Kolodziejski, 2022). Brexit and the UK's withdrawal from the EU caused concern amongst EU funding recipients (Doyle & Connolly, 2019). The PEACE PLUS and the Shared Ireland Fund have helped ameliorate some of these concerns, while the peace dividend is threatened with underlying cultural and socioeconomic issues at the forefront of the conflict that civil society continue to address in NI (Byrne, 2023). The very poor, disability, and LGBTQ+ communities shows the government's lack of engagement with social justice, and there are further concerns with the inclusion of these groups and a lack of success connecting strategically undervalued communities in these community-building endeavours (Byrne et al., 2018, 2022; Holland, 2022; Tomlinson, 2016). The inclusion of strategically undervalued communities has always been a part of the NI peace process. The Equality Scheme stemming from the NI Act and negotiated peace in 1998, requires government departments to consider and give due regard for promoting equality related to differing religious and political beliefs, racial groups, gender, marital status, age, disability, dependent persons, and sexual orientation (Department of Communities, 2019). Yet, community engagement has largely focused on religious and political divisions and not, for example, on social issues and the very poor, disability and the LGBTQ communities (Byrne et al., 2018; Mizzi et al., 2023). Therefore, not only is the community-building capacity of this funding in question, but also its ability to include strategically undervalued communities within the construction of post-war communities.

Funding, Civil Society Organizations, and Critical Emancipatory Peacebuilding

Under the leadership of the British and Irish governments, the United States (US) and the EU, economic interventions were implemented to help prepare the ground for peacebuilding

negotiations in NI. Did this economic assistance help to overcome structural inequalities and segregation? What role did CSOs play in grassroots economic development and peacebuilding in NI? This section describes how economic investments in CSO's projects working to promote social inclusion, trust and hope for the future, and public support and political transformation have not overcome some of the structural inequalities impacting NI's people.

Critical emancipatory peacebuilding (CEP) comprises of critical social theory to understand power dynamics and emancipatory frameworks of considering and resolving conflict (Thiessen, 2011). These approaches deconstruct power within conflict, and promote social justice, local ownership, building upon local capacities, knowledge, and methods of peacebuilding to resolve conflict in more sustainable, long-term approaches (Thiessen, 2011). Building off critiques of the local turn by Thania Paffenholz (2015), CEP emphasizes seeing conflict as relational, oriented toward the local, all the while conceiving of power as a central concept (Lederach, 1997; Sellick, 2019; Thiessen, 2011). As such, it centralizes social relations between conflicting groups as being the bedrock upon which peace can be built, while deconstructing power within conflicting societies.

Liberal peacebuilding is "insensitive on the grounds of gender and class divisions and is blind to ethnic and national identity" (Knox & Quirk, 2016, p. 2). Critiques of the liberal peace thesis and (neo)liberal peacebuilding led to CEP emerging as an alterity to the status quo, implying the importance of local actors, which are by in large engaged through civil society (Chandler, 2010, 2017). The traditional state-building of (neo)liberal peacebuilding, through (neo)liberal economic and political reform, are the central goals of the liberal peace project (Paris, 2004). This neo-colonial and neo-imperial method of reifying Western authority over global politics and economics has been critiqued as pushing national foreign interests, over local

needs (Jabri, 2010; Pugh, 2004, 2005). These are antithetical to the establishment of peace, due to privileging Western interests over prioritizing resistance and well-being of everyday citizens (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013; Thiessen & Collins, 2020). In certain capacities, this has led to civil society being coopted to administer programs while allowing (neo)liberal concerns to remain unaccountable for issues and shifting blame for any devolution into conflict back onto the local population, despite not addressing root causes of violent conflict (Chandler, 2010). CEP points out the key of including local knowledge, wisdom, and peace consciousness embedded in relationships.

Lederach (2005) articulates the psycho-social dimensions of conflict and emphasizes the need to imagine the 'other' within our web of social relations. The 'other' in the case of NI are those on the other side of the PUL and CNR divide. Along with the need to embrace the complexity of conflict without slipping into binary constructions of 'us versus them', it is critical to recognize the potential and need for creativity and taking the risk of stepping into the unknown (Lederach, 2005). There is a need, therefore, to embrace the risk of peacebuilding, to re-imagine communities emerging from conflict as working together, as opposed to working in opposition or in competition. A fundamental peacebuilding goal must be restoring relationships between communities, and this goal must be addressed hand in hand with political and economic concerns. This overarching goal, by necessity, challenges the underlying currents of (neo)liberalism within peacebuilding. Peacebuilding that does not challenge the hegemony of (neo)liberalism does little to create sustainable change. Lederach provides a paradigm for how individual and communal-level peace-consciousness can be constructed that fundamentally challenges the impositions of (neo)liberal political ideologies.

At this juncture, Lederach helps describe the ways in which psychosocial dynamics influence and play intrinsic roles within building peace and sustaining relationship-building. What the moral imagination invites us to do is re-center relationship-building: understanding ourselves living within and across a multitude of relationships that consists of both sides of a conflict (Lederach, 2005). At a foundational level this means challenging the (neo)liberal impositions that emphasize the political and economic concerns of reconstructing post-war societies. It poses an alternative ethos to that of (neo)liberalism and liberal peacebuilding. Predicated on democratic institutions and economic reform at the level of governance and macro-economics, this focus deters the local initiatives that are less formulaic and mechanical, and less measurable and tangible (Thiessen, 2011). Lederach (2005) emphasizes that peacebuilding initiatives should embrace the risk and uncertainty involved in peace work – so called peacebuilding failures must be viewed with the complexity and circular nature of reconciliation and peace work in mind, as opposed to being viewed with a linear understanding of conflict resolution and development. This perspective on peacebuilding breaks traditional confines – and facilitates creativity in how we think about, understand, and move down the path through conflict. This research has a core objective to listen to and put local co-called everyday people who are working towards peace in their communities on the same plane as (neo)liberal political and economic concerns.

Voluntary Civil Society Organizations

A distinction can be made between the role of professionalized voluntary organizations and informal local community organizations and how they relate to the peace process and provide an outlet of alternative ideas to the status quo as well as being a source of government hegemony as these CSOs are operating within the context of neoliberal external aid rather than

they are challenging it. There is the view of what civil society's role in peacebuilding ought to be in terms of the vision of the funders and what it is in reality.

There are close to 5,000 voluntary and community sector organizations in NI that employ close to 28,000 workers that have become more dependent on government funding, grants, and partnerships (Knox & Quirk, 2016, p. 14). "Over half of civil society income derives from government purchasing of goods" (p. 15) to provide services to strategically undervalued communities which "in turn, challenges their independence and ability to call government to account" (Knox & Quirk, 2016, p. 17). Civil society and third sector voluntary and nonprofit organizations played a positive role during the conflict and in the peace process in terms of the "British or metropolitan liberal perspective" while being perceived as an adversary by Republicans and Unionists (Guelke, 2003, p. 68). Yet civil society has failed to influence the macro political level due to the GFA 's implementation and its consociationalism top-down elite structure that marginalized the voluntary sector (p. 74). As Guelke (2003) noted, "it is evident that in the Agreement as a whole too little attention has been paid to the drawbacks of consociational settlements, not least their implications for the entrenching of divisions and the reduction of the influence of cross community groups and civil society more generally on the political process" (p. 75).

The voluntary and community sector may not be real advocates for change for the strategically undervalued and disenfranchised working class as they have become dependent on the aid with the government using the sector to regulate civil society and the grassroots to generate "social stability" so it can implement its neoliberal agenda (Hughes, 2019, pp. 61-62). The government's outsourcing policy to the previously marginalized sector embraced this new collaborative partnership with government willing to transfer neoliberal values and norms to the

local level using funding to do so in the process (pp. 63-64). Government austerity measures adapted because of neoliberal policies, and the free market means that workers have not benefitted from the peace dividend (p. 65). Through New Labour and the EU, relationships between the voluntary and community sector and economic and political elites became more entangled in "network and civil society boosterism" (p. 65). After the GFA, the sector grew and prospered through EU and IFI funds, and government and private foundations as it expanded its delivery and consultation services with government in "cross sectoral creative and interdependent partnerships" becoming both an object and instrument of policy and in developing networks and community revitalization (p. 66).

The 2011 concordant between government and the sector created a professional voluntary and community sector that dialogued with government departments to deliver services and build cross community relations and, post-GFA, developed relationships with local politicians and political parties (p. 68). The local voluntary sector has token consultation with government with the "sectoral hierarchy" maintaining that illusion with NI's government pretending its consulting with local communities as it co-opts local networks as it has funded the sector as funds from the EU, IFI, Atlantic Philanthropies wind down (p. 70). Government created a contract and procurement culture to outsource its public services through the voluntary sector that has bred competition among voluntary organizations (p. 72). There is a concern in the voluntary sector that some ex-combatants in the sector are promoting distrust as government tries to co-opt them to "buy stability" in local communities as they "carve up the funds" to control their local constituency (p. 71). Top-down government has promoted the voluntary sector's dependent role and "cross sectoral relationships" as it uses it to promote "social enterprise, private sector investment" and government's neoliberal programs to embed these norms and values within

local communities to generate "social stability" so that there is no agency to have an "effective opposition" or "critical common sense" from the voluntary sector to organize and resist government neoliberal policies and the "outsourcing of its programs" (p. 73).

Working class communities have not experienced the peace dividend. Economic reconstruction is critical to embed peace and "an asymmetric 'peace dividend' can store up resentment and create circumstances which are unlikely to be conducive to the long-terms social change that will embed peace" (Knox & Quirk, 2016, p. 37). As Coulter (2014) notes, "while there is some evidence that a 'peace dividend' has materialized in the region, its benefits have, however, been neither universal nor evenly distributed" (p. 766). Direct investment into NI tapered off by the turn of the 21st century as "the unemployed and workless" are underpaid in low end jobs and find it difficult to look for work while the privileged class has accrued benefits from the peace dividend (p. 767). The 2008 global economic crash led to a recession in which NI's fragile economy succumbed to austerity measures, cuts in spending, and erosions of welfare benefits as powersharing efforts failed while the so-called socialist SF and the DUP agreed on economic policies like reducing corporate taxes and cutting welfare benefits that hurt the very poor (p. 772). This was due to their "willing embrace of the established dogma that private finance is an indispensable prerequisite of public enterprise" (Coulter, 2019, p. 129). "When we look more closely at the way in which NI's society is structured, it becomes readily apparent that the fundamental line of material fissure in the region is, now more than ever, that marked by social class" (Coulter, 2014, p. 773).

The application of neoliberal policies and the failure of the GFA to deliver a peace dividend to NI's poorest strategically undervalued communities has ensured that the working class derived limited economic benefits while austerity measures continue to erode the welfare

that these communities need as politics is framed in ethnocultural terms (Coulter, 2014; Knox et al., 2023). “When the sap of ethno-national feeling rises in NI, among the first casualties is the space available to socialists” (Coulter, 2019, p. 135). Poverty, inequality austerity, and lack of economic opportunities continue to harm the very poor in North and West Belfast neighbourhoods as there are few quality jobs being created in meaningful numbers “and of sufficient quality, to alter meaningfully the material conditions of these neighbourhoods that bore the brunt of the Troubles” (p. 127). Both SF and the DUP signed onto a budget in 2015 that cut welfare benefits and allowed for public sector job losses while allowing the British government to “legislate welfare reform” (p. 133) “imposing even greater misery on the poorest sections of NI’s society” (p. 134). The People Before Profit Alliance elected socialists to the Stormont Assembly to represent the interests of working-class people that eventually evaporated in the wake of Brexit and the turn to identity politics (p. 135).

A few external funders have provided economic aid to the third sector to build peace like the EU PEACE Funds, IFI, and Atlantic Philanthropies (AP). Philanthropic organizations can assist the aid recipients to be creative and imaginative about social change, advocacy, and service delivery (Knox & Quirk, 2016, p. 45). For example, AP provided $604 million to 618 grantees to “shore up” the peace process through a social justice framework to support changing political structures in the areas of ageing, disadvantaged children and youth, population health, and reconciliation and human rights (p. 56) by building networks and “advocacy coalitions to effect social change through different engagement forms” (p. 63). AP became a “driver of change by supporting some of the most marginalized groups in NI” (p. 222) like ex-combatants, pensioners, children, and youth generating empirical data on intervention and prevention so that grantees could “hold the new government accountable to its prior commitments, making sure that peace

had a real and positive impact on the day-to-day lives of everyone in NI" (p. 231). CSOs evaluated their projects and used those findings to influence macro politics to effect social change.

However, AP went from advocacy for strategically undervalued groups to using its leverage to influence government policies becoming a "driver of social change" (p. 233). AP selected certain community groups to fund without any public accountability to do things at its behest to agitate on common inequality problems as community gatekeepers slowed down the change process (p. 236). Tensions arose over unrealistic expectations as some groups did not desire or have the capabilities to "navigate the policy landscape" (p. 240) and felt abandoned by AP's cozying up to government in which it had a complex friend/foe relationship. "Some officials and politicians have at times viewed APs role as reckless. Others perceived AP as having the resources to experiment with radical ideas free from the shackles of public sector accountability associated with spending taxpayers' money" (p. 236).

The EU designed the Peace and Reconciliation Program as a "bottom-up networked style of metagovernance" to facilitate cross border and local interdependence among a myriad of "actors and networks" in the third sector to address "the deep structural roots of the NI conflict" especially deprivation and unemployment (Lagana, 2021, p. 135). Jacques Delors, President of the EU Commission, created a special NI Task Force in 1994 to bring "the public and private sector together to form a consensus approach on the way forward achieving cohesion within NI and the BCs together with accelerating economic growth" (p. 138). As part of the Task Force, NI's three MEPs, Hume, Nicholson and Paisley, worked together on a superordinate goal to design the program and to connect it with local groups for the betterment of NI's people (Lagana, 2016). They knew that "there was a lot of commitment in voluntary organizations and

private actors to cross the religious divide and do things together to further community development" (p. 140). For example, John Hume consulted with European parliament committees to ensure that the PEACE program would support all NI's citizens (p. 142). This would be done through local CSOs that "had already developed and built on the existing solidarity within communities and had already encouraged cross-community cooperation" (p. 144) to work to regenerate strategically undervalued and deprived communities through the fundings grants to generate "new forms of cooperation" and initiatives across the bicommunal divide (p. 147).

The PEACE I Fund involved many key stakeholders including CSOs, both governments, Intermediary Funding Bodies (IFBs), local authorities, and private sector organizations with the EU Commission acting "as the metagovernor" in bottom-up peacebuilding (p. 149). Supranationalism of the region and transnationalism and local cultures superseded the nationalism of the British and Irish governments. "The PEACE package, therefore, embodied the EU commitment to multi-level structured social partnership, which included peacebuilding networks empowered by metagovernance mechanisms" (p. 150). PEACE I encountered problems that included cross border links, different currency and tax systems, lack of coordination between statutory agencies on both sides of the border, lack of an effective method to target CSOs, and its short-term support of projects (pp. 151-152). However, a "new style of multilateral dialogue and compromise" (p. 154) emerged with the cross-border focus providing "the scope for a broader framework of cooperation" to assist in overcoming zero-sum politics and "IFBs and bottom-up consultations were an ingenious metagovernance tool of devolving responsibility to the grassroots and building capacity in the region" (p. 153).

In contrast, the EU PEACE II Fund provided "new cultural places across the Irish border" on cross cultural activities like arts, storytelling, and multi-media initiatives, and recreational programs to promote "mutual understanding and reconciliation" to "explore commonality and diversity outside the theatre of the conflict" (Lagana & White, 2021, p. 157) because they were less contentious politically and encouraged participants to think differently about local needs. The EU used these cross-border initiatives to "Europeanise the conflict by undermining historical communal tensions" (p. 160).

Consequently, local political actor's short-term interests were to look after their own ethnic communities while the EU bureaucrats and technocrats short-terms interests were to make sure that member states resources were spent appropriately (Knox et al., 2023, p. 291). "The precise and overly rigid means of implementation, where the absence of direction leads to ineffective implementation" in terms of policy implementation remains with the member states (p. 261). Knox et al.'s (2023) EU PEACE IV's findings indicated that respondents did not believe that relations would improve between both communities while results were mixed for those wishing to live in a mixed neighbourhood or remain in segregated neighborhoods with 16-year-olds having a pessimistic view of future relations (pp. 298-303). Local politicians were interested in getting resources for their communities and not in implementing EU policy that made the program "difficult to deliver in practice" (p. 305). Measuring "financial accountability" might be overcoming transformative change leading to "administrative ambiguity" so that "bums on seats and crude sectarian head counting alone is a poor measure of success" as it sustains sectarian relationships and structures (p. 306). "At the same time as the local administrators adhere to the strict rules of the policy, these policies are at odds with the local political interests and priorities, leading to an implementation deficit" (p. 306).

External funding has supported a burgeoning peace industry in NI, yet the socioeconomic conditions of strategically undervalued communities has not much improved. Yet there are many authentic and genuine cross community projects facilitated by local CSOs. The goal of this research is to explore how these CSO peace workers have experienced peacebuilding and facilitating cross community relationships.

Methods

The article empirically assesses interviewees' experiences and perceptions of peacebuilding funding and the progress in transforming the culture surrounding the conflict and promoting a shared future. During the summer of 2010, the third author interviewed 120 individuals including CSO leaders in NI and the BCs of Armagh, Cavan, Derry, Donegal, Fermanagh, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan, and Tyrone receiving funding from the EU PEACE III Fund and/or the IFI in support of peacebuilding. The sample also included senior civil servants responsible for administering the funding, and development officers working for both funding agencies that liaised between the CSOs and funders. These civil servants and officers were able to comment on the bureaucratic nature of these funding programs such as converting currency, and the rules and regulations. Development officers and other middle-tier workers are the key intervention level between CSOs and civil servants as they simplify the policies and support CSOs to apply for funding. Eighty men and forty women were interviewed in the BCs and Derry and consented to participate in the research.

Semi-structured open-ended interviews were conducted in respondents' offices after signing the informed consent forms, lasting between 60 and 120 minutes. The interviews were grounded in their experiences and the respondents were asked ten open-ended questions about the connections between economic assistance in building local peacebuilding and reconciliation

capacities. All transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed, and pseudonyms were assigned to each person to protect their anonymity. We inductively elicited themes from the interviews. The data in this paper focuses on the interviews with development officers and recipients of EU PEACE III funding and not the civil servants administering both funds.

Developing Social Relationships

The impact of the NI conflict continues to influence social relationships. A CSO leader communicated that there is a denial about the conflict along the Border Area even though it permeates everyday conversations, and that stories and experiences not considered acceptable or respectable are more stigmatized and marginalized than others.

> *ANNMARIE:* I mean there are commonalities no matter which perspective, whether it's a Catholic background whether it's a Republican background or a Loyalist background. And the stigma attached to their particular story whether it's the wives of men that served time or whether it's someone who's a member of their family was caught up quite innocently in an explosion.
>
> There's almost a sense that okay while there's sympathy from society in general there is a sense that we need to collectively move on. The community needs to collectively move on. So, and at the same time particularly here in the Border Area there's also the sense that people almost have a denial of the conflict, and yet in the conversations it permeates conversations.

Annmarie noted that some people use stereotypes to frame ex-combatants' experiences and stories as they are not the stories and experiences of respectable members of the local community. There is no real incentive for them to engage with ex-combatants or other people who got caught up in the conflict. Thus, ongoing issues remain, and stories of the conflict

operate in tightly wound political and social spaces that people must navigate when trying to promote reconciliation (Senehi, 2009, 2022).

Alternatively, relationships across different communities need to be facilitated by organizations. This is not always the case, as one CSO leader articulated. Divisions remain even in the infrastructure of buildings. On the other hand, simply getting both sides inside a building is facilitation enough in some cases.

> *NIALL:* The first night I went into the area I knew the IFI had funded a lot of the facility, and I walked into the building. And I walked in through one door and as I walked in through that door, I noticed [another entrance]……Catholic and Protestant could not be seen going out through the same door.
>
> So, that's held up as a leading light in Europe as an example of how to build peace. Whereas I was saying put a door on the side of it, which says we all come in as one, we come from our perspective. But it's the moment we come through there our attitude is as one. We're not about me versus you, we're about the "we."

There have been successes in relationship building, but not without issues. A CSO leader disclosed that several peace projects and partnerships have lasted beyond the PEACE funding, creating partnerships and meaningful ongoing relationships that serve the local community. Roisin reported that there was a saturation of projects in the area, and that in rural areas it was challenging and difficult to get Protestants involved in peacebuilding projects.

> *ROISIN:* …In terms of bringing communities together, I think it's also to recognize that [here] you have different traditions as well so actually within communities based solely [here]. You would sort of have you know one of the success stories of this scheme as well of the PEACE scheme anyway has been that kind of got communities talking to one and

> other [and] at least discussing the issues whether necessarily they agree on the issues or not.
>
> At least they provided a forum for that, an opportunity for that I think that's really important. When the Catholic community uses resource centers and community centers more especially in the more rural area, the Protestants just tend to keep to themselves, and don't want to be involved in those types of projects. So, I don't know how we as a local authority can change that, maybe that's more for the community centers themselves.

The PEACE funding has encouraged members of both communities to begin dialoguing with each other. At the same time, however, some members of the PUL community are afraid to get involved and be seen raising their heads above the parapet. Isolation during the Troubles has solidified an isolationist mindset for many people. Current issues like Brexit, as well as the election of SF as the largest political party in Stormont for the first time have not eased tensions, and young Protestants are caught up in protests and disenfranchisement (Guelke, 2014).

A CSO leader articulated that it is difficult to quantify the projects' successes because their duration is over a short period of time. Groups doing the same activities often work near each other engaging in similar peacebuilding efforts without knowing that they exist. The task is to facilitate their capacity building and networking by providing small grants. He believed a real sustainable peace was not being built on the ground.

> *NIALL:* …And some of the early Protestant communities have done very well…but has it built peace, has it made people feel from the opposite community any better going in there? I'd say probably not…and you look at all the investment there, and the whole development….Is that making the other community feel safer and more able to engage? I'd say no.

> I think…when cross-Border becomes a peacebuilding by proxy that concerns me. When you try and bring a Catholic group together with a Protestant group from the Republic, I've issues with that. For one it's not sustainable, and they're not building relationships with their neighbor….

Niall went on to note that the funders do not understand the challenges faced by many young people and the pressing sectarian issues of the day, unemployment, lack of economic opportunities, and the associated alienation, frustration, isolation, and disconnection from politics and the peace process. Supported by recent literature on these feelings of social relegation and the way these feelings inspire the re-emerging protests, the ability for CSOs to reach youth is an important concern for maintaining the momentum the peace has created and continuing the work of building cross-community relations (Halliday & Ferguson, 2016).

People do not know each other's stories and young people born after 1994 are very vulnerable. Consequently, it is important to engage youth in conversations with the older generations so that they learn from the past and not become easy cannon fodder for dissident Loyalist and Republican groups. This is what a CSO leader had to say on the issue.

> *ANNMARIE:* And we can see here in the town slogans starting to go up again, Republican slogans so we know that…. Just last week or the week before you had a massive bomb scare outside X town as well, and you had one in Y town. So, you know the threat is actually rising…. Look at how that permeated their lives and some of them have a big story to tell.
>
> Like one woman who talks about the biggest tragedy in her life, and how her brother was killed, and the community actually while they were sympathetic… were

> encouraging her to move on.... And no one came to her aside from that first day…. She has been carrying this around for 30 years, and how the priest waited to take her to the hospital but after that nothing, after that nothing.
>
> There are multiple traumatic stories about the Troubles that need to be heard by the younger generation because they affirm the survivors' experiences, and they educate the youth who have limited knowledge and experience about the conflict. They are empowered to visit different areas and speak to different generations to increase their knowledge and awareness.

As can be seen, relationships remain tenuous and peacebuilding, despite successes in NI and the BCs, faces challenges to the deep reconciliation needed to overcome the confrontations and disruptions to peace that occur.

Positive Peacebuilding Experiences

Positive experiences of peacebuilding to date can be built upon moving forward. The brain-drain of young people moving out of the Border Area due to the lack of economic and employment opportunities necessitated intervention by the statutory agencies to facilitate networking, build relationships, and community development between local CNR and PUL communities. A CSO leader highlighted that external funding created opportunities for cross-communal contact that had not occurred in the past.

> *BRONAGH:* Protestants did not get involved in community development much less peacebuilding because … once they would see peace being involved, they didn't want anything to do with it. They probably saw it as a bit of a threat to their culture, which as I said they were strongly trying to protect….

> …So, I have witnessed a lot of things that happened that would never have happened. People sitting down together that we would have never thought would have sat down, a safe space where opinions can be aired….We found that the more difficult work and where the relationship building was really made [is] at a local level.
>
> …Like Protestant people would have thought "well, how much did my Catholic neighbor know about that" or vice versa what was carried out by the other side…. Because that's what's needed you know….There has been a lot of politeness and hopefully now in PEACE III that maybe we'll get to the point where people are ready to get beyond the politeness.
>
> The funding created a safe space for members from both communities to get involved in local community development, and to discuss difficult issues and be heard so that they can move forward together.

In contrast, a CSO leader noted that the five major ex-prisoner paramilitary groups played a key role with former Secretary of State for NI, Mo Molam, in supporting the peace negotiations. They were the key lynchpin between the negotiators and the communities with the EU PEACE Fund, providing the resources for the ex-combatant structure so that it could continue to function.

> *EOGHAN:* But up until now you've had different ex-prisoner groups coming together in different partnerships. A project… [that] brings the five together. The Ulster Defence Association (UDA), the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), and the Official Irish Republican Army (OIRA) that's the five of them. So, they are now working together.
>
> And I think they had a vital role in terms of sustaining the peace and getting it out into the wider community particularly say the Loyalist paramilitaries where there is a big

> sell to be done still to convince people.…And then working with their local community to convince them. And they are both the ex-combatants and ex-prisoners but the wider Loyalist community that this peace process is worth working on and sticking with.
>
> They had the credibility at the local level in their own constituencies. They had the links, and then they were able to act as that channel of communication during the peace process as negotiations unfolded. And I think now they are playing a key role in working at the local level say along interfaces where they are in direct contact with each other to soothe things down during the tension, and when young guys are out fighting and rioting during the [Loyalist] marching season…

When dissident Republicans started to shoot officers from the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and launch some bomb attacks, the Loyalist groups involved in the five major paramilitary negotiation structure went back to their community to say that they were talking to the PIRA, OIRA, and INLA and they were holding the line. They were able to report to their communities that it was just a small number of dissidents that were resorting to violence. Some ex-combatants and ex-prisoners have built relationships and are gatekeepers switching from military control to some sort of community leadership control of their communities so that they still retain some sort of power while others continue racketeering and illicit businesses hiding behind the label of paramilitarism. They were best operating in community development during the early 2000s, and they certainly had a role to play there in terms of reducing tension along the interfaces.

A CSO leader also averred that a social inclusive approach includes the most strategically undervalued groups in society like the very poor and ex-combatants. Peacebuilding work does not lend itself to convenient statistical analysis because intangibles cannot be easily measured. It

is important to advocate for the rights of ex-prisoners to be treated as legitimate visible members of society.

> *RUAIRI:* We have found that we have been able over those years to create certain bridges. We have been able to meet with people that ten, twelve, fifteen years ago we certainly couldn't have met with, and talked with. That there is a certain fluidity and flexibility and engagement now across different sections of society that wouldn't have taken place in the past.…There was no need for [ex-prisoners] to hide, no need for them to disguise that here they were, that a conflict had come to an end and that we were moving to go to resolution.

Although there is work to be done, it is imperative to show how hardworking peacebuilders have facilitated and provided spaces where successes can be claimed. As is articulated in the excerpt above, this must encompass different sections of society. Social justice and bringing to light the issues from all corners of NI are imperative, conversations must be all-embracing. Moving towards this more inclusive environment is part of the way forward discussed by participants in the following section.

Moving Forward Inclusively

Identifying voices that represent strategically undervalued groups and working to change the psychosocial and cultural dynamics of a society can create a new and improved economic and political milieu and transform how ex-combatants see themselves – not as former prisoners but as constructive community activists and leaders. As some participants communicated, that starts with listening deeply to people's stories and developing shared narratives, where both sides are allowed to apportion and explore their stories in entangled, interdependent ways.

> *RUAIRI:* …If you want to make the first step towards addressing conflict you've got to really listen to what the other people are saying. One of the problems that have been identified in NI is that there is not a shared narrative about what happened. So, we can't, each of us have our own political personal outlooks and I have mine.…And we have had on occasion's remarkable success with this where we have brought people to communities, and communities have listened to people that ordinarily they wouldn't.
>
> And what we find is that when people are in a room there is a quality of difference between what human beings understand the other person is saying when they are sitting around the table having a cup of tea as distinct from hearing sound bites on a television interview. So, we've had on many occasions found that Loyalists and identifiable Loyalists have sat around the table with men who I know they're Sinn Fein activists.
>
> Bringing in expert speakers with different experiences to share their own individual stories and journeys and provide their view of their constituency's outlook can bridge gaps in information transforming relationships because the process respects the host community's intelligence, competency, and life experiences. Telling these stories can be difficult at the current juncture because of the challenges posed by cultural and social sticking points. No shared story of the conflict exists, and this tempers what can be discussed and spoken about.

That said, an EU PEACE III development officer noted that the socially inclusive interdependent EU PEACE Program has witnessed the positive distance local communities have travelled in terms of building new relationships and trust.

EOIN: You need a good formal base line analysis around attitudes, around perspectives, around where people are at in terms of that. From that then you see where the issues are, from that there you design as a community a direction forward. From that there you build in the policies and procedures, and from that there you start being proactive and knocking on doors.

Because that is the only way you get people in. And from that there, the listening, the talking, the storytelling, the different perspectives, and the analysis. But you build up relationships, you build trust, you build up a vision, you build up a strategic approach. You start then having the confidence to reach out there to others doing the same, to local government.

Local community groups are brave and comfortable enough to develop their own vision, and they are also in the central place of devising their own evaluations of their projects. Building upon the analysis of these local evaluations and the perspectives and experiences of participants to peacebuilding develops starting points for engaging community and developing practice and policy.

That said, a CSO leader stated that peacebuilding is relationship-building that takes place in a safe environment where project participants from both communities on their healing journeys can talk freely about very personal and painful issues and be listened to by the other participants.

OONAGH: We have a different take on peacebuilding, and we don't see it as an event. We don't see peacebuilding as something that you do at the weekends. We very much see peacebuilding as being about a journey. And we see it about bringing people with us on a journey that enables them to discover what peace means to them, and how they live with it in the community….

> …We take a long-term approach. It's all about building relationships. It's all about building an environment that people want to come to, and feel safe and nurtured, and [are] content to be there. And it enables them then to start a journey in that environment reaching out and re-establishing or creating relationships that have a level of tolerance and understanding within it.

Listening to these stories within the group is incredibly therapeutic and profound as the project participants can say what is really hurting and frustrating them in a milieu where nobody is going to make a judgment over what they are saying, and where they can have difficult and important conversations. Ways forward begin by listening deeply to the people who inhabit the everyday spaces of violent conflict and peacebuilding, those who experienced the violence, and those working towards reconciliation and peace. It also involves creating inclusive spaces, where marginalized stories and voices can be heard and given the space to be included in developing shared narratives about the conflict.

Discussion

There is broad recognition of the importance of international economic assistance to peacebuilding (Doyle & Sambanis, 2006; Jeong, 2005). In the end, in most cases, the aftermath of wars includes the destruction of many economic activities and assets, so the beginning of a peacebuilding process demands the infusion of external economic assistance to rebuild the economy and must be a priority. Moreover, in parallel to the recovery of the economy, the need to recover or develop new institutional settings designed for a new stable social and political order after the end of military confrontation crucially depends also on economic and financial aid (Boyce, 1995; Collier, 2003). However, critical views on the role of international economic assistance for peacebuilding have been raised. In aiming to inform policies promoting peace

between PUL and CNR through IFI and the PEACE Fund, we offer, in this paper, some insights arising from the NI peacebuilding experience.

What has been presented here through analysis of interview responses are a thread of collective consciousness from CSO workers and both funder's development officers in NI that articulate the issues as they see them, on the ground. These individuals have insight into the world of peacebuilding, and their opinions and views must be recorded and valued to improve peacebuilding and refrain from similar mistakes elsewhere, as well as improving current practices in NI and the BCs. What can be learnt at this moment, as the future of the island is enmeshed in the politics of Brexit and Trumpism, and the economic and political insecurity that risk further deteriorating social relations on and between both islands? What is next for most people in NI who simply want to move past the Troubles, have economic opportunities and get on with their everyday lives? Although violence remains liminal, it is slowly creeping back into the social sphere and people's consciousness.

Mechanisms linking grassroots-oriented financial investment into NI and the BCs to reduce structural economic inequalities between CNR and PUL communities can empower local communities. To be concrete, one key peacebuilding mechanism is the economic empowerment of funded cross-community projects that promote the social inclusion of previously strategically undervalued social groups. A second mechanism is promoting trust and hope for a better future within subsequent generations. The third is providing public support for peacebuilding and inducing a political transformation that might change the opportunistic political behavior of politicians at different levels.

First, while international economic assistance is including some strategically undervalued communities, other working-class communities continue to suffer from deprivation,

unemployment, and limited access to economic resources that are crucial in supporting peacebuilding in NI and the BCs of the RoI. Working with overlooked communities that suffered the greatest economic and social deprivation during the Troubles would generate an atmosphere of goodwill and trust, strengthening a sense of community and providing incentives for cross-community initiatives for people to know each other better (Byrne et al., 2010). Further, thanks to their economic empowerment, these civil society leaders have envisioned a more tolerant and inclusive society, profiting from the inclusion of other minority groups that have emigrated to NI, with a greater connection with the European and world communities, an inclusive educational system, and greater safety for freedom of movement (Byrne et al., 2010). However, more needs to be done to include the most deprived communities and youth so that they enjoy the fruits of the peace dividend (Coulter, 2014, 2019; Hughes, 2019; Knox & Quirk, 2016).

Second, improving excluded populations' material living conditions and providing opportunities for new cross-community projects to develop also builds trust and brings hope and emotional support for the future and meaning to the present (Hallman, 2017). In fact, the rise of stronger cross-community ties may increase levels of trust that positively influence civil society's hopes for the future betterment of the society (Byrne et al., 2010). Thanks to the external aid, CNR and PUL communities can work on the co-construction of a grassroots-based shared homeland for both communities as new cross-community initiatives were funded and were able to emerge (Byrne et al., 2009b).

Projects like the reopening of roads, the elimination of neighborhood boundaries, the reduction of communication barriers, and supporting networking economic and business initiatives have contributed to increasing opportunities for dialogue, collaboration, and building

trustworthy relationships between civil society groups from both communities (Byrne et al., 2009c).

Peacebuilding must also address the underlying causes of conflict, including structural and cultural violence, in nurturing the ground for positive peace to emerge (Galtung, 1998, 2007), while building trustworthy relationships for reconciliation between members of communities previously engaged in conflict that contributes to social justice (Lederach, 1997). Economic assistance becomes an integral component of multi-track peacebuilding by funding local grassroots projects to empower local communities and support cross-community networks (Diamond & MacDonald, 1996). More must be done to provide direct investment to provide educational and economic opportunities for working class communities in north, east, and west Belfast and the Bogside, Creggan, Shantallow, the Fountain, and the Waterside in Derry

Third, the increasing control of transformative processes by grassroots communities' builds political support and challenges rival politicians interested in maintaining social divisions in NI (Byrne et al., 2022). By empowering civil society, the grassroots have increased their political power to make politicians accountable to the electorate and the government's upper echelons even as the voluntary community sector has been coopted by government and the external funders have cozied up to government (Knox et al., 2023; Lagana, 2016).

Improving the living conditions of excluded groups, reducing economic inequalities and economic development as well as addressing other essential non-tangible needs for peace and reconciliation are essential for increasing public support and making peace sustainable in the long run (Hallman, 2017). The hope of a better future for the next generations will encourage people with genuine commitments in favor of peacebuilding, and pressure politicians to cease playing sectarian politics and instead create a new inclusive political culture.

According to NI's grassroots community leaders, a complex administrative process for accessing economic aid caused distrust among CNR and PUL communities and allowed politicians to affect the distribution of resources (Byrne, 2023). There are also many critiques of the liberal peacebuilding package that includes international aid in ignoring and circumventing the local (Mac Ginty, 2006, 2011; Thiessen, 2011).

As one interviewee stated, "we don't want to transport this around the world." This fear is a reality, NI is held up as one of, if not the most successful international peacebuilding project – such as influencing Juan Manuel Santos and his negotiations with the revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC) (Geoghegan, 2016). Further, the Fact Sheet on PEACE funding boasts its applicability across Europe and to other local contexts (Kolodziejski, 2022). A further issue is that peace projects may be reduced in favour of strategies linked to counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism (PVE). Dealing with violence that is rooted in historical ethno-centered divisions and poverty only through counterterrorism and PVE strategies would risk generating further violence, extremism, and terrorism by deepening and entrenching fundamental issues and inequalities that lead to conflict in the first place.

The principles of (neo)liberalism also remain central, and the needs of everyday citizens dissipate for international and domestic political interests (Thiessen, 2019). The burden of peace remains upon individuals and community organizations, whether that is in NI or abroad. How can we challenge these shifts within international peacebuilding and responses to violence?

Tensions old and new exist and can resurface, and communities continue to deal with elements of deeply rooted segregation (Guelke, 2014). This is not to say there are not improvements, benefits, or a sizeable body of hard, quality work that has established a level of peace not seen over the 30 years of the Troubles – or indeed the years preceding the Troubles

and the historical legacy of conflicts that have occurred on the island. It is to say that if peace-oriented programs and funding and government do not take seriously the social, economic, and cultural aspects of violence and continue to simply treat them as political issues, and people as numbers and statistics, submerged tensions will continue to re-emerge (Holland, 2022). Peace, negative or positive, is a fickle thing and requires a continuous mindset of reconciliation over profit-making and political power.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper described how the peace process in NI and the BCs is bedeviled by ongoing cultural identity conflict and the marginalization of working-class communities as the voluntary community sector has become coopted by government. The paper overviewed the advancement of critical emancipatory peacebuilding. It proceeded to show how, despite issues within relationship-building being ongoing within NI peace work, successes with building connections across PUL and CNR communities are evident, and ways forward have been articulated based on the narratives of interviewees. The findings herein highlight how residents must push back against the foundational issue that plagues peacebuilding: the (neo)liberal status quo that utilizes and expresses its power to continually push the concerns of everyday citizens aside for elite-level economic and political interests. Ultimately these issues limit the capability and capacity of people in NI to live peacefully, truly move beyond the Troubles, and lead everyday-lives free from the shadows of violent conflict. In NI, the Troubles are often avoided and neglected because, when discussed, they either bring up unresolved trauma or unresolved tensions that lead people down a path they no longer want to take. The strategically undervalued and deprived must be included in the economic benefits of the peace dividend. New paths must continually be forged to move the needle of peace forward, giving people new avenues to pursue

peace in their everyday lives. This does not mean dwelling on the past – but investing in people who wish to re-construct narratives of violence into stories that can be interwoven and understood together, generating compassion for the shared suffering, and building true, deep reconciliation that is sustainable.

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Researching Inequality and Violence: Qualitative and Indigenous Methodologies and Economic Justice

Paul N. Cormier and Sean Byrne

Introduction

Is economic inequality a significant causal factor for political violence and civil war? A substantial body of research has emerged which investigates the economic inequality-political conflict (EI-PC) nexus.[1] With only a very few exceptions, large-N statistical studies have dominated the EI-PC literature (Sriskandarajah, 2005; Ukiwo, 2009). However, quantitative research methodologies have been shown wanting in the investigation of economic causes to violent conflict and have served up competing observations, contending arguments, and indeterminate conclusions. There are several areas of struggle: (1) a robust relationship between the two variables has been elusive; (2) there has been little agreement on how variables are to be defined and operationalized; (3) the dominant cross-national research structures increasingly struggle to represent a globalised world; and (4) researchers have struggled with poor quality and incomplete data sets (Besançon, 2005; Cramer, 2003; Lichbach, 1989). After thoroughly surveying the debate, Lichbach (1989), perhaps disparagingly, concludes, "not a single puzzle has been solved, nor do the puzzles seem closer to solution now than a decade ago" (pp. 469-470). We would not dismiss the debate quite so emphatically, but Lichbach does point to the

need for methodological innovation inside EI-PC research something this article explores with a consideration of Indigenous methods.

Specifically, we explore the widely ignored potential of qualitative and Indigenous methodologies in clarifying, expanding, and grounding the EI-PC debate both conceptually and empirically. While perhaps struggling to measure the magnitude and scope of the EI-PC problematic, qualitative and Indigenous methodologies may in fact prove itself capable of effectively exploring the deep-rooted factors that generate the discontents that occasionally turn violent (Autesserre, 2021). Indigenous methodologies are research "by and for Indigenous peoples, using techniques and methods drawn from the traditions and knowledge of those peoples" (Evans et al., 2009, p. 894). By exploring strategically undervalued Indigenous voices and methodologies within the EI-PC debate, we might discover innovating ways for thinking to evolve in relation to the causal factors between economic inequality, political violence, and civil war. In response to these limitations, we propose the integration of Indigenous methodologies to reframe the EI-PC debate around relational, lived experiences of inequality, particularly among communities historically excluded.

To contextualize the argument of this article, it is useful to briefly survey the struggle of Indigenous peoples known collectively as the fourth world for economic justice (Manuel & Posluns, 2019). Indigenous peoples make up as much as five percent of the world's population, embody 80 percent of the world's cultural diversity, occupy 20 percent of the land surface, are stewards of 80 percent of the world's biodiversity, and represent over 5,000 languages and cultures in more than 70 countries on six continents (Henderson, 2008). Nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples have primary attachments to land and culture, and lasting connections to ways of life that have survived from time immemorial (Warry, 2007). Tuhiwai Smith (2021) notes that

the term Indigenous peoples "internationalizes the experiences, the issues and the struggles of some of the world's colonized peoples" that have "been subjected to the colonization of their lands and cultures, and the denial of their sovereignty, by a colonizing society that has come to dominate and determine the shape and quality of their lives" (p. 7). Similarly, Kovach (2021) articulates that "colonial history and contemporary racism persist in disrupting the ability of Indigenous peoples to uphold knowledges by cultural methodologies" (p. 11).

The term "Indigenous" reflects diverse humanities, independent of race, science and biological concepts, which comprise many overlapping and shifting categories in traditional knowledge and legal systems. Indigenous peoples across the globe share concerns about the territorial appropriations of their homelands, about cultural and cognitive imperialism, and exploitation by colonial and decolonized Eurocentric states (Cormier, 2017, p. 42; Henderson, 2008, pp. 10-11). Also described as "communal groups" (Gurr, 2007), they define themselves using ethnic, national, or religious criteria and make claims against the state or other political actors. The current world nation-state system evolved around Indigenous peoples, and many Indigenous groups transcend the (sometimes) artificially placed borders of countries around the world.

According to the United Nations (2009), Indigenous peoples are among the most impoverished groups in their respective countries and continue to be over-represented among the poor, the illiterate, and the unemployed. While they constitute approximately 5 percent of the world's population, they make-up 15 percent of the world's poor and about one-third of the world's 900 million extremely poor rural people (United Nations, 2009, p. 21). Indigenous people's traditional ecological knowledge, numerous successes, survival of and thriving despite settler colonial genocide (Liboiron, 2021; Tuck, 2009) means that their inclusion, axiologies,

cosmologies, epistemologies, and ontologies would contribute to the study of inequality across the globe.

Evidence suggests most contemporary world conflicts occur in weak or failing states (Ayoob, 2008) or states struggling with post-colonial realities (Levy, 2007). Despite wars between states being far less common and civil wars consistently declining in recent years, there remains cycles of repeated violence, weak governance, and instability affecting one in four people on the planet who "live in fragile and conflict affected states or in countries with very high levels of criminal violence" (World Bank, 2011, p. 2). If we assume that some of these conflicts are the result of post-colonial realities, then we must assume that Indigenous peoples are heavily involved and implicated in these contemporary world conflicts. Indigenous-settler conflict is also embedded within industrialized countries as the intersection of direct, cultural and structural violence continue to exclude, marginalize, and kill them (Cormier, 2017; Te Maihāroa et al., 2022).

The colonial objective is to separate Indigenous peoples from their ancient rights to land and its resources transferring wealth and productivity to the colonists and mother country (Henderson, 2009, p. 64; Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 3). This created a dichotomy of inequity between Indigenous peoples and European settlers remaining embedded in the economic structures of the world (Wolfe, 2006, p. 389). As a totalizing force, "capitalism ultimately attacks all social forms that impede its progress and oppose or do not accord with its order" (Kulchyski, 1992, p. 174). Indigenous peoples become foreign agents in the national body and are dispossessed through the systematic destruction of social relations and cultures (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 25; Wolfe, 2006, p. 402). This dynamic is especially noticeable in industrialized countries "where advancing colonial powers had oppressed and impoverished Indigenous

peoples to the point of extinction" (Henderson, 2009, p. 16). Some authors have estimated that, "from the time of contact, 80 percent of the Indigenous others have been annihilated as the result of development or utilitarian genocide by the meta-narratives of modernity and postmodernism" (Henderson, 2009, p. 17). Thus, there is a need to consider Indigenous methodologies and voices in the study of economic inequality and political violence.

We will now briefly overview both quantitative, qualitative and Indigenous philosophical assumptions, paradigms, and methods, before we summarise the underlying social theories on which the EI-PC debate rests and review aspects to the debate. Next, we critique the methodological weaknesses of the predominant statistical methodology and discuss a potential way forward involving the supplementation and increased utilisation of qualitative data through the presentation of what academic literature describes as Indigenous methodologies.

Quantitative, Qualitative, and Indigenous Methodologies: An Ongoing Debate

The quantitative paradigm within the social sciences is usually associated with a *positivist* philosophical stance toward science. Positivist research relies on quantitative data generated through experiments, surveys, and inferential statistics, and aims for rigour, exactness, and objectiveness. Positivism contends that science, i.e., the scientific method, will allow the researcher to discover truths about the social world and in particular, social meanings and intentions (Gliner & Morgan, 2000, p. 17).

The underlying axioms of positivist quantitative methodology embrace the realist perspective, which asserts that "there is a reality out there that awaits our discovery" (Palys & Atchison, 2008, p. 4). Positivists aim to reveal the facts, realize the theory and principles underlying the facts, and develop the techniques appropriate for measuring and testing these facts (Palys & Atchinson, 2008). Positivism is preoccupied with causes and effects in the physical

observable world (Neuman, 1997, p. 64). Thus, only the external and observable "actions" of social beings are considered, while inner forces and processes such as thoughts and motives as well as chaos in the empirical world are carefully avoided (Palys & Atchinson, 2008, p. 5). Positivists also believe that a high level of objectivity is possible by establishing a strict social distance between the researcher and the observed. And finally, positivist scientific explations are nomothetic in nature as they are based on a system of general laws (Neuman, 1997, p. 65). Thus, positivists claim that a deductive approach produces conclusions that reflect the general social trends or patterns evident for people in general and are, thus, universally valid across time and culture (Neuman, 1997, p. 65; Palys & Atchinson, 2008, pp. 6-7). In contrast to these positivist methods, qualitative approaches like Indigenous methodologies and methods are embedded in cultures, stories, relationships, the land, practices, and communities. Indigenous research includes "claiming rights, testimonies, storytelling, celebrating survival, remembering, indigenizing, intervening to create change, revitalizing, connecting, theory making, representing, gendering, envisioning, reframing, restoring, returning, democratizing, networking, naming, protecting, creating, negotiating, discovering, knowledge making, and sharing" (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021, pp. 164-183).

Qualitative social researchers also adopt a "human-centered" approach. Humans are viewed as thinking and motivated actors, and thus are inherently different from the objects of traditional natural scientific research (Palys & Atchinson, 2008, p. 7). A human-centred approach necessitates a phenomenological approach, one that highlights human agency in perceiving and making sense of one's world, giving meaning to one's perceptions, and identifying the effects of those meanings (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Thus, qualitative resesarchers believe it is fundamental

to their project to "get into people's heads" and stories, and seek directly the participants' experiences and perceptions of their world (Senehi, 2009b, 2022).

Qualitative researchers are *inductive* as they allow their explanatory categories and theoretical perspectives to emerge from the data analysis. They also aim to be *interpretive*. The analysis of socially meaningful action is fed by direct observation of participants in their natural settings (Neuman, 1997, p. 68). This will often affect research proximity as effective researchers must "get close" to participants in order to access experiences, perceptions, motivations, or feelings regarding the topic at hand (Palys & Atchinson, 2008, p. 10). Further, qualitative researchers adopt a *social constructivist* worldview as the phenomena under investigation cannot be fully understood without looking into why, how, and to whom the phenomena applies (Charmaz, 2014). Thus, the research relies upon the participants' ability to make meaning of and understand the world in which they happen to exist (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). These meanings are complex, varied, and often forged in interactions with other people so that the investigation moves beyond the individual, and takes into account the wider social community and the communal meanings that are produced (Creswell, 2009, p. 8).

Qualitative researchers operate within various (and often overlaping) interpretive communities, each with its own body of literature, and pervasive lens or perspectives on the overal research project (Creswell, 2007, p. 23). Four examples include critical theory, postmodernism, poststructuralism, and feminism. In contrast to positivism, critical theory embraces a dialectical imagination, suggesting that the world can be changed, holding potential for an improved future making acquiescence to the status quo unnecessary. Thus, in scientific inquiry, a critical theory stance will push the researcher to dig beneath the objective appearance of "truth" as a way of transforming class power differentials, heterosexism, patriarchy, racism,

the domination of nature, and other dominations (Agger, 1991, p. 116). Postmodernism reacts to "grand meta narratives" that "attempt to explain the world in terms of patterned interrelationships" (Agger, 1991, p. 116) cautioning against the "iron cage" nature and "totalizing tendencies" of modernisation (Bloland, 1995, p. 524). Scientific inquiry must examine the world from multiple intersectional perspectives (e.g., age, class, ethnicity, gender, race) interrogating the underlying presuppositions of the positivist scientific method (Bloland, 1995).

For example, Doucet and Mauthner (2008) describe several aspects of the methodological contribution of feminist researchers: (1) they have insisted that feminist research should be "not just *on* women, but *for* women"; (2) they have advocated for research to be increasingly concerned with intersectionality, social justice and change; (3) they have consistently challenged the dominant mainstream research methodologies particularly positivist quantitative methodologies; and (4) they have raised awareness of the inherent power differentials seperating the researcher and the researched, and how to work with those differentials (p. 328). Finally, post-structuralist theory and Jacques Derrida's deconstructionism reveal that research methodology contains certain assumptions and values, and that science has hidden interests beneath its surface. Deconstruction invites readers to question scientific claims as hidden assumptions are brought to the surface, i.e., science cannot attain absolute truth since researchers struggle to reflect the world "out there" (Agger, 1991, pp. 112-115).

Each of these interpretive lens critiques and refutes positivism by "interrogating taken-for-granted assumptions about the ways in which people read and write science" (Agger, 1991, p. 116). Every knowledge is historically and culturally contextualized, which places doubt on the

universal claims of positivist research, and rather attempts to explain a social phenomenon for a particular group at a particular time and their individual stories (Agger, 1991, p. 117).

Uniquely placed within qualitative approaches and within a similar interpretative lens, Indigenous methodologies approach the issue of decolonialization through critiquing hegemonic research paradigms that continue to serve colonialist and imperialist ideals and challenging the homogenization of Indigenous intellectual traditions and expression (Johnston et al., 2018, p. x). The pedagogical implication of this access to alternative knowledge is that they form the basis of ways of doing things like coming to know the past, holding alternative histories and thus, alternative knowledge (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021). Indigenous methods demonstrate a concern for decolonization, working against imperialism, includes disempowered voices, and places the centrality of relationships, the land, narrative, stories, and Indigenous epistemologies at the centre (Kovach, 2021; Q'um Q'um Archibald et al., 2021).

According to recent literature, "Indigenous research methodologies reflect how knowledge is understood and sought in the context of the worldviews, ontologies, and epistemologies of diverse Indigenous nations" (Johnston et al., 2018, p. 4). This enables interactions, engagement, and reciprocity in knowledge exchange with the natural world suggesting that land, place, and non-humans generate knowledge (Hernandez, 2022; TallBear, 2023). Thus, Indigenous methods are relational (Wilson, 2009; Wilson et al., 2019), and can be traced to community, ancestral, and sacred sources of knowledge derived from land and place (Andersen, & O'Brien, 2017).

Fundamental to understanding the efficacy of Indigenous methods to research is a fuller understanding of Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous epistemologies are a complex yet common-sense localized understanding of culture and individual agency in the world that is embedded in

worldviews, belief systems and values that is (often) transmitted through stories by elders to youth (Sefa Dei et al., 2002). For example, in Australia Aboriginal people see a clear connection between the Creator spirit, the land, and way of being and acting in a cosmology that incorporates story, song, art, land, language, law, the bush university, stars, and birds into a relational worldview and belief system that has existed for millennia (Taylor, 2014). Taylor (2014) points out that "Indigenous knowledge refers to traditional norms and social values, as well as to mental constructs that guide, organize, and regulate the people's way of living and making sense of their world. It is the sum of the experience and knowledge of a given social group and forms the basis of decision-making in the face of challenges both familiar and unfamiliar."

The processes of globalization and global inequality continue to disorient and challenge the way of being and knowing of Indigenous peoples and their ways of living (Kovach, 2021). For example, the disappearance of the rainforest in Brazil due to the greed of multinational corporations for land is decimating the natural hinterlands of Indigenous peoples forcing them to migrate to urban settings that, in turn, threatens to overwhelm their Indigenous cultures (Adebayo et al., 2014). In Canada, the legacy of colonization oppresses First Nations Indigenous peoples who continue to suffer trauma from the experience of residential schools, racism, poverty and inequality, and missing and murdered Indigenous women (Battiste, 2000; Wallace, 2013).

In what is today upstate New York, the Peacemaker brought the great way of restorative peace and reconciliation to the people of the Longhouse or the *Rotinonshonni* who were at war with each other (Bedford & Workman, 1997; Rice, 2013). The Six Nations created a governing peaceful structure that both empowers and heals its peoples and influenced and shaped the

development of the present-day U.S. constitutional and political system (Rice, 2013; Wallace, 1994). In the *Haudenosaunee* matriarchal society power ultimately rests with the clan mothers who appoint and remove chiefs who don't follow the people's will and decide if the men are to go to war, and they deal with pressing socio-economic issues like poverty and inequality (Rice, 2013).

These examples speak to the totalizing forces of the global economic system where "poverty is perceived to be the central enemy, for which development is the antidote" (Sefa Dei, 2002, p. 9). Described as the "third world inside North America," these are the places "where the Aboriginal peoples of Canada and the United States live, the rural and urban ghettos of hard-core poverty that trap racial and ethnic minorities, female heads of households and poor whites" (Sefa Dei et al, 2002, p. 9).

Economic Inequality and Political Violence

We briefly overview both the underlying theories of, and research in economic inequality and its effect on levels of violent conflict before overlaying the quantitative/qualitative/Indigenous debate with the EI-PC debate as part of a decolonial theoretical lens.

Underlying Theories

Three classical and one recent theoretical perspective have shaped current understanding of inequality. Perhaps the best known is the Marxist underscoring of the concept of class as a research category, and its related critique of capitalism. Marx (1964) states, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (p. 108). Marx focused intensely on class struggle since he believed that it would prove to shape the dominant structure and form of society. Max Weber (1958) expands on the views of Marx and adds several layers of complexity by: (1) looking into the value system undergirding capitalism like connecting ascetic

Protestantism and the capitalist order; and (2) investigating the presence of other dimensions of social stratification that moved beyond the economic such as political parties, cultural interest groups, and different types of classes (cited in Kerbo, 2006, p. 96). (3) Émile Durkheim believed that the problems he observed in society did not stem from material sources as Marx proposed but rather were moral in nature. Further, Durkheim viewed society as a biological organism, having various parts (organs), with each serving different functions towards the maintenance of health in the societal system thus showing how inequality is not only inevitable, but desired (Kerbo, 2006, p. 104).

Ted Robert Gurr (1970) also lays the basis for the deprived actor-rational actor debate which continues today in Collier's (2007) greed-grievance discussion. Gurr (1970) argued that as economic inequality increases, relative deprivation increases, which causes some actors to become angry and rebel as rising expectations do not meet people's reality. Relative poverty increases dissent, and dissent sometimes turns violent (Lichbach, 1989, p. 459). At the other end of the spectrum, the "rational actor" theory proposes that inequality will not lead the poor to rebel, but rather, rational actors care only for their personal income, and if the personal returns from rebellion outdo the returns from not-rebelling, rebellion will occur (Lichbach, 1989, p. 460).

A Summary of the Inequality-Conflict Debate

The research on the role of economic inequality in the political economy of violent conflict has produced decidedly ambiguous results (Cramer, 2003, p. 397). Several studies have attempted to put the debate to rest by providing strong evidence for the theory that inequality does not cause violent conflict (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Fearon & Laitin, 2003). However, these findings have run contrary to a bulk of empirical, and theoretical evidence which proposes a significant

relationship between the two variables. As evidenced in recent studies, this has forced the current debate down new paths, with a narrowing of definitions, the reconceptualization of variables, and the disaggregation of variables. In this section we summarise the current research speaking to this debate starting with research that suggests a null relationship between inequality and violent conflict.

The Naysayers. Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler (2004) analysed a large dataset on civil wars spanning the years 1960-1999 and found that inequality had no systematic effect on the outbreak of civil war. In contrast, countries where rebel groups have access to financing from the export of primary commodities, where there are widespread low earnings, and where there exists a dispersed population in mountainous terrain, seemed to face an increased probability of rebellion (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004, p. 588).

With similar results, Fearon and Laitin (2003) also cast doubt on economic inequality's ability to escalate conflict into civil war. They state that, "The conditions that favor insurgency in particular, state weakness marked by poverty, a large population, and instability are better predictors of which countries are at risk for civil war than are indicators of ethnic and religious diversity or measures of grievances such as economic inequality, lack of democracy or civil liberties, or state discrimination against minority religions or languages" (p. 88). They note that it often takes only 500 to 2,000 guerrillas to sustain a long-lasting insurgency, thus calling into question whether widespread grievances are responsible for mobilising a population towards violence. Rather, grievances are created by civil war, often as a central part of rebel strategy.

Gudrun Østby (2008), following Stewart's (2009) lead, differentiates between horizontal and vertical inequality. Horizontal inequalities occur between culturally defined identity groups (ethnicity, religion, region, etc.), while vertical inequalities are between individuals and are

described in terms of class and the Gini coefficient (Stewart, 2009, p. 12). Østby (2008) finds no evidence in statistical analysis that vertical social or economic inequalities are causing internal armed conflict. Østby notes that both Collier and Hoeffler (2004) and Fearon and Laitin (2003) are also testing the effects of vertical inequality. Østby (2008) finds this approach inadequate and thus includes models in the analysis that are sensitive to horizontal inequalities that produce significantly different results summarised in the next section.

The Yea-sayers. Most research studies, however, seem to find a significant relationship between inequality (social and/or economic) and violent conflict. For example, Nafziger and Auvinen (2002), using the same dataset as Fearon and Laitin, find that "objective grievances of poverty and inequality contribute to war and humanitarian emergencies" (p. 156). However, the convincing "naysayer" project summarised above has caused the competing theoretical and empirical project to rework its research design and focus on several ways. First, studies are noticing a significant connection between inequality and violent conflict when one considers moderating intermediate factors/variables. For example, Schock (1996) puts forward the idea that while inequality is significantly related to political violence, political opportunity structures moderate the relationship (p. 128). Thus, inequalities must be considered in combination with the prevailing political context in explaining violent political conflict. Schock states that, "All forms of discontent that are translated into collective action confront a political context that may influence the form and level of political conflict to a much greater extent than the type or level of discontent" (p. 105). Using a similar argument, Caprioli (2005) argues that gender inequality and discrimination is a significant factor that pushes contexts experiencing economic inequality towards violence (p. 174).

Second, other scholars are reconceptualising and refining their definitions of inequality. Østby (2008) differentiates between the traditionally studied "vertical inequality" and rather focuses on purportedly more explanatory horizontal inequalities. Østby is also much more inclusive of social inequality as an explanatory variable alongside economic inequality. Østby argues that the EI-PC debate so far has primarily focused on individual (class based) vertical inequality. Østby's (2008) research reveals that when group mobilization around horizontal inequalities is considered, there appears to be a significant relationship between social inequality and conflict.

Third, others have addressed the ambiguous and imprecise nature of the "political conflict" variable and have disaggregated it into sub-categories. For instance, Besançon (2005) disaggregates political conflict into ethnic conflicts, revolutions, and genocides in the research design. Besançon's results show that inequality seems to be a causal factor in ethnic wars and revolutions, but not in genocides (p. 393).

A Critique of the Research

Perhaps what is most noticeable (and perplexing) in this debate is that both sides can produce statistical evidence in support of their views. This points to instability in the empirical foundations of the current research and calls into question the reliability of inferences made from the EI-PC research and the policy prescriptions they inform. There are at least three broad areas of concern with statistical inquiry in this area – problems related to the operationalization and definition of variables, problems with the data itself, and problems with the quantitative "perspective." Further, current research and theorizing does not consider the status of Indigenous peoples around the globe.

Definitional Confusion

The EI-PC debate reveals significant methodological confusion and disagreement in terms of key measurements and definitions of variables. Babones (2007) describes a lack of consensus amongst "globalization" researchers in regards to operational definitions of concepts, measurement choices, and data types (p. 144). Readers of inequality research face a similar predicament. Operational definitions should noticeably reflect theoretical definitions of relevant variables (in this case *inequality* and *conflict*), but because there exists significant disagreement regarding theoretical definitions of both inequality and conflict, operational definitions vary widely, perhaps precariously so (Babones, 2007, p. 144). This will affect measurement choices, leading to widely divergent and often contradicting results. Thus, research has been driven by empiricism, where concepts are defined to match the data that happens to be conveniently available at the time as conflict and inequality variables are operationalized as the researchers see fit.

"Conflict" has proven difficult to define by EI-PC researchers. For example, how is war defined? How is peace defined? How many people must perish in battle to label conflict a war? Is the number of deaths recorded for each year, or over the entire course of the conflict? Are there varying kinds of wars that are caused by varying types of economic causes who differentiates between civil conflict, revolution, and genocide? (Besançon, 2005). Are other forms of civil violence related to inequality? For example, Cramer (2003) notes that Brazil, while not experiencing civil war, encounters high incidences of violence with homicide rates of some 20 per 100,000 people (p. 403). These questions just scratch the surface of this definitional challenge. Operationalising "inequality" has also been difficult. A significant challenge faced by researchers is deciding on the appropriate scope or level of analysis for inequality. For example,

Ulrich Beck (2007) believes that a fundamental reorientation of social research from a nationalistic viewpoint to a global (cosmopolitan) perspective is necessary to adequately address current global crises such as widespread poverty and inequality. Beck (2007) suggests that the national perspective is only able to investigate and research "small" inequalities (intrastate inequalities) and is blind to "large" inequalities on the supranational scale (p. 168). This can explain why global inequalities have risen dramatically in the last 50 years with virtually no widespread attention (or resistance) from the research community. A nation-state perspective serves to disintegrate any accountability for global inequalities and hinders the formation of transnational global accountability structures and reporting procedures. However, things may be changing. Stewart (2009), for example, argues that the global component of horizontal inequalities are generally neglected. In response, Stewart's research finds that Muslims are systematically disadvantaged across the Muslim/non-Muslim divide, both within developed and developing countries, and between Muslim and non-Muslim countries.

Poor Quality Data

Fearon and Laitin (2003) state that, "The poor quality of the inequality data, available for only 108 countries, does not allow us to go beyond the claim that there appears to be no powerful cross-national relationship between inequality and [civil war] onset" (p. 85). Cramer's (2003) summary of the EI-PC debate notes significant criticisms made of distributional data and the inferences drawn from them (p. 400). Moll (1992) is also concerned by the inappropriate use of statistics by economists in the inequality debate. Moll notes that, "Many of the official statistical aggregates used by economists are not reliable, lack rigorous theoretical backing and are not compatible over time and space" (p. 689). Moll's survey of the inequality literature concludes

that economists are "slothful," and are often ignorant of the methodological bases of their statistics and rely on convenient (and sometimes inappropriate) data available to them (p. 690).

These statistical woes are partly a result of problems faced in data generation. Generating reliable data in times of war or in post-war periods (upon which the EI-PC debate is reliant) would seem to be extremely difficult. Researchers face significant security concerns, have very limited access to conflict-affected regions, and can face uncooperative and misleading participants in the socially turbulent post-war milieu.

Coming from a different angle, Wade (2005) addresses the political economy of statistics, specifically regarding the World Bank's virtual monopoly on data generation in inequality and poverty. Wade describes the tension faced by World Bank statisticians whereby they become prone to not identifying biases and instead may manipulate statistics to "advance the tactical goals of the organization" (p. 14).

Statistical Blindness

A more philosophical critique of quantitative methodology in inequality is emerging from within the constructivist camp of inequality researchers (Berard, 2006; Harris, 2003, 2006). Their basic argument is that significant aspects to inequality "remain something of a black box, only obliquely accessible" in quantitative analysis (Harris, 2003, p. 230). The purported reason for this is current quantitative and naturalist research views inequality as an ostensibly objective social problem, and largely ignores the fact that inequality, as a meaning, is *socially constructed* (Berard, 2006, p. 236; Harris, 2006, p. 223). In other words, positivist and structuralist approaches tend to reify the problem of inequality and assume it means one thing or another without considering the social meaning given it by participants, with project-design failing to reveal what individuals or groups think about, and experience with inequality (Berard, 2006, p.

239). They are not arguing that inequality is merely a subjective judgement, but that researchers must be wary of reifying inequality "as existing prior to and independent of social understandings and judgments" (Berard, 2006, p. 238). Even though inequality does objectively exist in every society, inequality exists as a *social* fact. This does not make it unreal or untrue, but rejects its universality, and explores how and why individuals and groups choose to, or not to invoke inequality in describing a social phenomenon (Berard, 2006, p. 240). Quantitative methodology will inherently struggle to explore the social construction of inequality.

Ignorance of Indigenous Inequality

The available data on inequality is mostly blind to the status of Indigenous peoples in relation to Indigenous-settler, and emancipatory issues (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021). Inequalities in health care in Canada between Indigenous peoples and settlers are connected to structural inequalities that disadvantage Indigenous communities (Wilk et al., 2018). Similarly, a quantitative study exploring educational attainment, median income, and unemployment levels between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand found that it may take decades for Indigenous communities to achieve equity and close the equity gap with non-Indigenous people (Mitrou et al., 2014).

Particularly as it affects Indigenous communities, it is essential to recognize that these countries have implemented a range of policy frameworks, legal reforms, and community-based approaches, but with varying degrees of effectiveness and ongoing criticism as they relate to policy changes to address economic inequality with an emphasis on Indigenous-focused efforts regarding land claims, economic inclusion, TRCs, and Indigenous entrepreneurship. Indigenous peoples' living within continuing colonial societies have many diverse needs, interests, and worldviews that cannot be encapsulated within Western quantitative research designs focusing

on inequality and other issues that leave the human out that is central to the very core of Indigenous peoples' cultures (Crosby & Monaghan, 2016).

These limitations reveal the need that the quantitative research methodology must be decolonized and emancipated from its positivist roots by deconstructing powerful narratives, including participants knowledge, creating reciprocal relationships, ensuring researcher accountability, and ensuring their standpoints that are centered in social justice outcomes (Andersen, & O'Brien, 2017; Walter & Anderson, 2013). As Coburn (2015) notes, "It seems to me that what is needed is not so much Indigenous quantitative methodologies, but critical Indigenous statistics practiced by Indigenous researchers unafraid to 'unmask' the dangers of statistical fetishization, even as they strategically use quantitative data as a way of knowing and of persuading" (p. 132). In contrast to the neocolonial use of statistics to objectify and disempower Indigenous peoples, quantitative Indigenous methodologies map the ontological landscape of Indigenous paradigms (Walter & Anderson, 2013).

A Way Forward? Qualitative and Indigenous Methodologies

Qualitative and Indigenous methodologies have been almost completely cut out of, or avoided in the EI-PC debate, albeit qualitative versions have been used sparingly in such areas as health and education inequality. The few qualitative studies that do exist like Chua (2003) and Ukiwo (2013), moreover, are framed in different ways and have diverse levels of analysis, thus making amalgamation into a coherent whole, and the building up of a coherent picture of inequality's role in conflict across the globe not possible (Ukiwo, 2013). Qualitative and Indigenous methodologies, however, hold significant potential to further and expand the debate regarding the relationship of inequality to violent conflict.

At a basic level, qualitative and Indigenous methodologies are better suited for "writing people into" the debate. They speak directly to "questions about location, politics, identity, and culture" (Sefa Dei et al., 2002, p. 4). Thus, Indigenous research reflects diverse humanities that prioritize the aspirations, needs, and values of Indigenous peoples and their knowledge (Ray et al., 2019; Wilson, 2009). "Indigenous knowledge originates in oral sources (conversations, stories, traditional teachings) in the day-to-day practices of Indigenous peoples (researchers and non-researchers alike) according to Indigenous worldviews and including insights from the spirit world" (Johnston et al., 2018, p. 4) that deconstructs "colonialism and its historical effects on the colonized" (Getty, 2010, p. 7).

According to Mac Ginty and Williams (2009), several factors have served to write people out of many research projects dealing with conflict and its economic causes. Research has often tended to adopt a technocratic stance preferring manageable number manipulation and graphing as opposed to the complex and messy world of human perception and agency. Peacebuilding towards economic justice is untidy, chaotic, and messy (Mac Ginty, 2016; Mac Ginty et al., 2020). Thus, it is critical to situate Indigenous methods at the location most relevant to Indigenous experience (Evans et al., 2009). Defining methodologies in this way eliminates the issue of research becoming "programmatic" expecting certain outputs given set inputs or becoming "solution-based" in many cases undertaking a problem-solving role and, to maintain simplicity, ignoring local people's ideas, inclusion, and practices (Mac Ginty & Williams, 2009).

Conducting effective qualitative and Indigenous research which considers local conceptions of inequality in conflict-affected contexts will require researchers to abandon their distanced and objectivised role, venture out from the safety and predictability of statistical computer software, and position themselves as closely as possible to where the action is (Strega

& Brown, 2015).[2] For example, Pouligny (2002) argues for the adoption of a research stance that will access the manner in which individuals and groups have understood events in violence-affected social contexts. The researcher can listen to and value the research participants stories of the conflict and its causes, and account for their experienced reality (Lambert, 2014; Patomäki, 2001; Porsanger, 2004; Pouligny, 2002, p. 206). By understanding that inquiry is both political and moral, we can use methods critically for explicit social justice purposes valuing the transformative power of Indigenous subjugated knowledges', pedagogical practices that produce knowledge, and seek forms of praxis that are emancipatory and empowering (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Researchers must consider the informants capable of affirming and asserting themselves as an authentic actor, who holds significant knowledge about their personal and contextual experience, and are able to comment on it (Pouligny, 2002, p. 204).

Maintaining a closely positioned stance is rooted in Indigenous methodologies as well as constructivist methodologies and strategies. Social constructionism holds a central belief that meaning is not inherent and thus constructionist research aims to investigate what participants "know," how they create this knowledge, and how they act with this knowledge (Harris, 2006, p. 225). A constructionist approach to EI-PC research will thus avoid assuming that inequality is an obvious, objective fact. Researchers will be careful to not pre-define their variables, avoid making claims about the experienced reality of inequality and conflict, and rather defer to the interpretations of their participants. In the EI-PC debate, researchers tend to not assume that violence is the effect of inequality but instead explore the participants' assertions regarding its effects (Harris, 2006, pp. 225-226).

While unable to correlate between variables and generalise between cases like quantitative approaches, Indigenous designs can investigate inequality with greater precision and

rigour and enter the black box of both local level and state level processes to decipher linkages between the variables of inequality and conflict in specific contexts (Kovach, 2021; Ripsman & Blanchard, 2003). Scholarship on Indigenous processes of peacemaking (Tuso & Flaherty, 2016), conceptions of justice as healing (Ross 2006a, 2006b), and Indigenous research (Johnston et al., 2018) suggest that when viewed through an Indigenous cultural lens, the themes of economic inequality, political conflict, and research can be better considered in relation to one another. Indigenous peacemaking and peacebuilding processes, like Indigenous research, are shaped by their respective cultural norms. In an Indigenous worldview, conflict and social change occur naturally as well as comprehending the change cycles relating to the effects on the conflicts causes (Groh, 2018) is the goal. Given the objective of colonial governments to access and exploit natural resources for economic purposes, and the link between "living on the land and with the land, that brings meaning to Aboriginal people," (Kuokkanen, 2011, p. 215) the interface between economy, land, and people provides the pattern, or cycle of change, for critical reflection and analysis (Q'um Q'um Archibald et al., 2022; Reder, 2022). Thus, an Indigenous research methodology is ethical, inclusive, reciprocal, and respectful as well as relevant and responsible to the community grounded in reciprocity, relevance, respect, and responsibility and includes ecological knowledge and the interconnectedness of all living organisms (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Hernandez, 2022; TallBear, 2023; Wall Kimmerer, 2020). Indigenous methodologies include these elements.

Consequently, like Indigenous viewpoints of peace and economic justice, Indigenous methodologies have deep cultural underpinnings (Ray et al., 2020; Strega & Brown, 2015). Indigenous methodologies are intimately connected to local contexts and each group's principles and traditions related to ensuring peace and local justice (Tuso, 2016, p. 509) through fair

economic participation. Like participatory action research frameworks, Indigenous methods and methodologies reflect a commitment to social transformation, to honouring the lived experiences and knowledge of Indigenous peoples, and collaboration and powersharing in the research that must also account for the relationship of Indigenous peoples to the global hierarchy of power, and settlers among other issues (Wilson et al., 2019).

Indigenous research methods reflect approaches within the posthumanist qualitative tradition that lend themselves as appropriate for EI-PC research. For example, participatory action research, storytelling, photovoice, arts based, and critical narrative research approaches which focus on the shared and learned values, behaviours, and beliefs of an entire cultural group (Creswell, 2007, p. 68), allows the conflict researcher to access local perceptions of how inequality is creating conflict, including for Indigenous populations (Millar, 2014). Relatedly, the case study approach, which investigates a particular issue across one or more cases, is being increasingly recognised as a necessary complement to quantitative EI-PC research (Ripsman & Blanchard, 2003) and is useful for considering the broader plight of Indigenous peoples across the globe. Phenomenology, which describes the meaning given to lived experiences by a group of individuals (Creswell, 2007, p. 57), can explore the motivations behind the utilisation of "inequality" as a justification for violence, and the way that Indigenous peoples conceive of their economic relationships within a settler-colonial society and the global hierarchy of power.

That said, grounded theory seems to hold significant potential in furthering the EI-PC debate. Grounded theory aims to move beyond mere description of a phenomenon to generate a theory regarding the experiences of participants (Creswell, 2007, pp. 62-63). Kathy Charmaz (2014), for example, argues that constructivist versions of grounded theory offer a suitable structure in which to integrate critical theory methodologies in the study of social justice issues

such as the EI-PC nexus. A "critical" grounded theory approach can "anchor agendas for future action, practice, and policies in the analysis by making explicit connections between the theorized antecedents, current conditions, and consequences of major processes" (Charmaz, 2005, p. 512). In other words, the approach provides a path to change through critical investigation. In contexts concerned with the inequality of Indigenous peoples, critical investigations of economic structural change are vital for shaping local Indigenous conceptions of peace and economic justice, and should motivate culturally-based learning processes that are designed with and, ideally, led by local Indigenous partners.

It should be noted, however, that Charmaz (2005) believes we should not abandon the traditional positivist quest for empirical detail, but rather we advance it, albeit with its biases and values exposed. Contentious studies regarding inequalty from an Indigenous viewpoint will likely challenge the status quo, and thus must be backed by thorough data generation and interpretation to be credible and instigate needed social change.

Indigenous Perspectives of Peace and Economic Justice

Indigenous approaches to peace and economic justice are mostly left out of the dominant liberal peacebuilding process in societies transitioning out of violent conflict often into a liminal peace. Given the pervasive poverty among Indigenous peoples, how can this inequality debate be conducted without consideration for these groups in relation to settler-colonial societies? How might Indigenous methodologies and methods as well as Indigenous conceptions of peace and economic justice inform the EI-PC debate? What can the larger PACS field learn from considering this perspective in the EI-PC debate?

For example, Kuokkanen (2011) suggests the need to more closely examine the effects of the global market economy on Indigenous communities. Kuokkanen contends that, "If

Indigenous economies are not taken into account, there is a serious danger of losing the very identities that constitute Indigenous peoples" (p. 217). Kuokkanen's arguments are based on the colonial belief that Indigenous methods of production are considered inefficient and backward by the global economic market economy, and economies like "subsistence" carry "negative connotations of primitive ways of life, a low standard, or 'eking out' a wretched existence in conditions of poverty" (p. 218). However, subsistence in Indigenous contexts is "both an economic and a social system, encompassing various spheres of life that often are inseparable from one another" (Kuokkanen, 2011, p. 218).

Everyday approaches to peace and economic justice exist in traditional Indigenous societies whether it is in poor urban and rural settings in Brazil (Linstroth, 2016), in intragroup and regional conflict settings in the Philippines (Barnes & Magdalena, 2016) or in local disputes in Northern Ireland (Mac Ginty, 2016; Rahman et al., 2017). Indigenous justice systems have been employed in a multiplicity of Indigenous societies for millennia. However, there may be complexities, tensions, and contradictions within the power structures of Indigenous communities when dealing with inequality. For example, in some contexts, patriarchal power structures often work to the benefit of men and to the detriment of women, youth, disabled people, LGBTQ+ citizens, newcomers, ex-combatants, and the very poor (Byrne et al., 2022; Engle-Merry, 2005; Mac Ginty, 2008), and in other communities' women have a prominent role in decision-making and were/are leaders of their communities (Rice, 2010).

There is a need to recognize Indigenous peacebuilding and research methods and the role of traditional approaches to resolving conflict and economic justice in our contemporary global civic society when designing studies to understand Indigenous realities (Wilson, 2009) especially when addressing poverty and inequality. We must remember that research is a political

endeavour and the processes we choose to conduct research reflect a worldview, way of doing and being based on non-Indigenous approaches (Thiessen & Byrne, 2017). This constitutes nothing more than ontological violence, epistemological tyranny or cognitive imperialism, and to eliminate that violence, researchers need to decolonize methodologies (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021) by considering approaches more in-line with Indigenous ways of knowing, doing and being. For this article we highlight the roles of culture, rituals, "constructive transcultural storytelling" (Senehi, 2009a), Indigenous knowledge and peacemaking systems, and the external challenges Indigenous justice systems face.

Culture and Conceiving of Indigenous Economic Justice

Separate cultures are attuned differently to inequality, economic power relationships, and economic justice. Indigenous people cope with inequalities foisted on them by an unjust structure embedded in racist practices, beliefs and processes (Ross, 2006b). Indigenous methodologies embedded within Indigenous cultural practices are necessary in researching inequality and injustice within Indigenous communities (Strega & Brown, 2015). "Indigenous methodologies are not only socially and political productive, but they also likewise challenge colonial methodologies that erase colonial power and violence and that deny the ongoing existence of distinct Indigenous peoples, whether through (more or less deliberate) omission or through failures to appreciate distinct Indigenous national histories and peoplehood" (Coburn, 2015, p. 127).

Indigenous rituals and epistemologies are best connected with the issue of understanding and better researching inequality and economic justice within Indigenous communities. Rituals like *Potlatch* assist Indigenous people in situating themselves in their cultures and ground them

in cocreating resilient local development systems and in their resistance to dominant economic structures (Ross, 2006a).

Storytelling is one important aspect of building peace through social inclusion and economic justice (Senehi, 2002). Indigenous researchers are "transcultural storytellers" (Senehi, 2009a) who are a vital bridge between Indigenous cultures and settler cultures and who can determine which research methods are used to address social justice issues. They can highlight colonial assumptions about research. "Indigenous quantitative methodologies may valuably unmask the routine ways that white racialized power is reproduced, including through scholarship" (Coburn, 2015, p. 129).

It might also be more appropriate in some instances to hybridize Indigenous cultural approaches with liberal cultural approaches when Indigenous communities encounter external researchers so that they can "resist, subvert, and exploit" them (Mac Ginty, 2011, p. 3). "International (neo)liberal peacebuilding has begun to expose its inherent contradictions and struggles. As a technology of the global liberal politico-economic system, it is certainly creating conflict and dependency. Thus, it appears necessary to critically transcend current peacebuilding practice and strive for more emancipatory and culturally empowering methodologies" (Thiessen, 2011, p. 131).

Consequently, mainstream researchers need to make a "paradigm shift" (Kuhn, 1996) and incorporate critical and Indigenous methodologies into their research that take into consideration the role of Indigenous knowledge with regards to social injustices and economic inequality (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021). It is critical to bring Indigenous communities and their unique and respectful ways of doing peace in from the margins if we are to truly include and empower all the citizens on our planet (Wallace, 2013).

Conclusions

Statistical measurements of inequality and economic injustice are certainly informative. Widely accepted research shows that pro-capitalist policies have enriched those at the top of the global economy, but have immiserated most of the world's population, including large Indigenous populations under settler colonialism and neocolonial rule (Wade, 2004). However, despite the recognition of increasing global inequality, the research community has been generally unwilling and/or unable to challenge the expansionist global capitalist status quo and adopt a critical social justice lens. Because of this, the research enterprise must undergo fundamental transformations in strategy, focus, and values. To this end, this article has explored several paths forward in better attuning academic research to the negative effects of a socially unjust world in particular, inequality-induced destructive political violence.

Joe Feagin (2001) argued for reclaiming and adopting a "countersystem" approach to social research eschewing the detached-science approach with its emphasis on securing grants from corporations or states, and its heavy investment in quantitative approaches. Feagin believes the goals of social, and sociological, research have "long reflected a dialectical tension between a commitment to remedy social injustice and the desire to be accepted as a fully legitimate discipline in the larger society, especially by the powerful elites" (p. 6). Rather, social research must commit itself to social justice in its ideals, and re-establish the centrality of differences, oppression, and inequality in practice. Further, by adopting a "countersystem" approach, research becomes deeply concerned about social and economic inequality, and actively investigates alternative social systems, which might replace current free-market models (p. 11). This approach requires the researcher to step down from the ivory tower, reject requirements of scientific "neutrality," and engage politically and as an advocate for the disadvantaged in many

ways embedding the premises of the "critical" social perspectives of Indigenous groups and worldviews; critical theorists; feminist, LGBTQI+, BIPOC, and disability scholars; postmodernists; and neo-Marxist researchers. The social research enterprise thus gains a comfortableness with constant and penetrating self-reflection, emancipatory action, and an expanded knowledge base as once-ignored perspectives are embraced (p. 13). In this article we propose that Indigenous methodologies and methods contribute to a critical and important turn to such emancipatory approaches.

Similarly, in PACS, research has often strayed from its critical and emancipatory Galtungian roots and has become an uncritical positivist science whose researchers have become "servants of Western foreign ministries" (Patomäki, 2001, p. 734). PACS has evolved into a "normal" science in line with other mainstream disciplines such as International Relations or Sociology. There must be a more critical turn in PS research, adopting a much more emancipatory ontology and methodology (Jutila et al., 2008).

Further, a critical research turn will require a broadening of an "acceptable" research strategy to include qualitative and mixed methodologies, embracing an inter/transdisciplinary approach, and submerging inquiry down to the level of the "local." The resulting research environment will be increasingly open to alternative Indigenous perspectives. Jettisoning the quantitative EI-PC research project seems unhelpful and counter-productive. Thus, when considering the significant potential of qualitative and Indigenous research methods to carry the debate down more fruitful paths, it seems logical to increasingly adopt mixed and/or other pragmatic research approaches that can consider a wide variety of voices regarding economic justice and equality.

Moving beyond design choices, we have pointed to alternative ways of thinking about economic justice, including Indigenous viewpoints. This requires a multi and trans/interdisciplinary and strategically integrative approach to investigation in the EI-PC debate and in other areas of social justice inquiry (Galtung, 2010). For example, there needs to be a unification of approaches that moves well beyond the narrow and misleading over-reliance on statistical modelling but rather incorporates the wisdom of theory builders and other qualitative sources including Indigenous peoples (Lichbach, 1989, p. 466). Feagin (2001) concurs and proposes that the complex social justice crises facing our world such as inequality will require a trans/interdisciplinary approach being both intellectual and methodologically pluralistic (p. 6). Agger (1991) views critical theory, poststructuralism, and postmodernism as accusing the traditional professional/amateur separation as positivist, and suggestive of the rigorous, disciplined, and professional nature of more "unofficial" knowledge.

In addition, there is other "valid ways of 'seeing' and understanding the world besides those of the dominant west" and that "local peoples must be seen as key in the construction of knowledge about their societies" (Sefa Dei et al., 2002, p. 16). If we consider this stance emphasizing that Indigenous knowledge plays a central role in this decolonization and transformation of research, like the growing body of literature related to Indigenous research methodologies suggests, (Hernandez, 2022; Johnston et al., 2018; Kovach, 2021; Lambert, 2014; Liboiron, 2021; Q'um Q'um Archibald et al., 2022; Ray et al. 2020; Strega & Brown, 2015; TallBear, 2022; Wall Kimmerer, 2020; Wilson et al., 2019), can we open new avenues for understanding the impact of economic inequality within our discipline? Can including strategically undervalued voices in PACS research debates like the roles of culture, rituals, constructive transcultural storytelling, Indigenous knowledge and peacemaking systems, and the

external challenges Indigenous justice systems face help inform complex debates like EI-PC? We believe they can.

EI-PC research must both transcend current levels of analysis by broadening its overall scope, and auger down to the grassroots local level to investigate the effects of inequality in the close quarters of individual relationships. Concurrently, definitions of research variables must allow significant relationships including those relevant to Indigenous peoples to become visible in data analysis. Is it possible that data generated locally, at the relational level, can be integrated together with "local" data from other contexts to produce a bird's-eye view of the effects of inequality for Indigenous peoples?

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Notes

[1] See Besançon, 2005; Caprioli, 2005; Collier, 2003; Cramer, 2003; Nfziger & Auvinen, 2002; Østby, 2008; Schock, 1996; Spoor, 2004; Stewart, 2008; Thiessen & Byrne, 2017; Thorbecke & Charumilind, 2002.

[2] This brings into question whether non-Indigenous researchers should study Indigenous communities, whether researchers should not be outsiders to the local communities they research and work in (Vine Deloria, 1988), or whether local and Indigenous researchers can partner in hybrid research teams with external researchers.

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OOCHINEHWIN: Assessing Indigenous Peacebuilding Around the Keeyask Hydroelectric Project Through the Lens of Aboriginal Rights and Community Member Concerns

Peter Kulchyski

Introduction

> *I wish they didn't start it, let's put it that way. They didn't, they don't need it, ok? There's no need for Keeyask Dam. [Another dam] is already producing the power that they need, Kelsey's already producing the power, Long Spruce. Why do they need these dams in the first place?* (Tommy Nepetaypo, Former Chief of Fox Lake Cree Nation)

Northern Manitoba, part of the Canadian subarctic, has a long and storied history (in Eurocentric historical terms) through its central involvement in the fur trade. But over the last 150 years it has largely dropped off the map and become something of a colonial backwater. Since the early seventies, when the province and its Crown utility Manitoba Hydro began a major reconfiguration of the hydrology in northern Manitoba to build and operate a series of hydropower generating stations, it has played a critical role in the provincial economy. This reconfiguration involved rerouting one river (the Churchill) into another (the Nelson) in order to increase the flow on the latter and then building a series of dams, first in the seventies and eighties, and then in a second wave in the last

two decades. These developments have had an enormous, largely negative, impact on the Indigenous communities – mostly *Inninewak* (Cree) – along all the bodies of water involved. The following article was originally written in 2014 as a presentation to the Manitoba Clean Environment Commission as part of its assessment process on the environmental and social/cultural impacts of the proposed Keeyask generating station, which has since been built. The author worked with members of the Concerned Grassroots Citizens of Fox Lake (a Cree Nation, itself called the *Makeso Sahahikan Inninuwak*) located in Gillam, Manitoba near the site of the then proposed, now completed, dam. The statements from community members – all of whom were speaking for the public record and wanted their names attributed – were gathered as part of formal CGCFL presentations opposed to the project.

The Concerned Fox Lake Grassroots Citizens[1] (CFLGC), a local Indigenous people's advocacy group based in Gillam, Manitoba maintained that the power produced by the Keeyask Project was not needed by Manitobans; export markets may not need the power it will produce for some very long time, if ever; the value of Indigenous culture has long been underestimated by non-Aboriginal peoples and hence the value of the

[1] What follows is (as noted) adapted from a report written by the author and submitted to the Manitoba Clean Environment Commission about the environmental and social impacts of the proposed Keeyask Project. In the spring of 2013 an elder and traditional harvester from Gillam, Noah Massan, decided that his views were not being accurately represented through the consultation processes established by Manitoba Hydro and his band, the Fox Lake Cree Nation. Working with Agnes Pawlowska, then a graduate student who had met him during her work for a brief period with the Fox Lake negotiations secretariat, he established the CFLGC group, consisting of himself and a small group of elders, harvesters and knowledgeable band members.

impact of the project has been likewise underestimated; other models of economic sharing are available and look far more promising than the partnership model being advanced; the Keeyask Project has significant local environmental impacts of a nature that severely reduce local harvesting opportunities; and, a cumulative assessment of all the many past projects is needed before the impact of this one could be properly assessed; such a cumulative assessment remains urgent.

To better understand these objections to the Project, this article examines the role and value of traditional harvesters and hunting in remote northern Indigenous community life, explores the place of Indigenous traditional knowledge in assessing such projects and in its own right; discusses the ethical relations that underscore the impact communities like the Fox Lake Cree Nation or Tataskweyak Cree Nation are now experiencing in relation to the Project; looks at issues around governance and local decision-making; and raises a few other issues that have emerged from local voices critical of the Project. Meaningful peacebuilding in this context would involve a process that takes the aforesaid factors into account to genuinely accommodate the concerns of local Indigenous peoples. But it also means drawing from peacebuilding concepts that emerge from the rich Indigenous, in this case *Inninuwak* (Cree), ethical and philosophical worldview. The accumulated weight of this examination supports the conclusion advocated by the Concerned Fox Lake Grassroots Citizen's that the Keeyask Project should not have been built. Sadly, the CFLGC's warnings to the Manitoba Clean Environment Commission have not been heard and already many of the predictable negative outcomes on the economic, social and environmental level have occurred.

The Integral Nature of Hunting

If an Aboriginal right is a "practice, custom, or tradition integral to the distinctive culture" (Van der Peet, 1996) of the particular Aboriginal group, a compelling case can be made that, regarding *Makeso Sahahikan Inninuwak*, the most integral practices are those associated with hunting, trapping, fishing and other forms of traditional harvesting. Scholars have long characterized northern Indigenous peoples as "hunting peoples" (Brody, 2000). Hunting (and here the term is used to imply hunting, trapping, fishing, berry and root gathering, and other forms of harvesting) was and is the generative activity that was and is the foundation for the culture, and from hunting other distinctive elements of the culture developed. While hunting has evolved and changed, Indigenous hunters are still very much a part of the contemporary economies, using new technologies and integrating their activities where possible with market demands for fur or meat.

For many years hunting cultures were stereotyped as "primitive" or "savage" and thought to represent an early, outdated form of society that did not deserve to be called "civilized." However, in the last half of the twentieth century a reappraisal of hunters, lead internationally by now renowned anthropologists like Marshall Sahlins (1972), Richard Lee and Eleanor Leacock (1992), among others, took place. Hunters were seen to have created their own form of an "affluent society," appreciated for the degree to which it was sustainable and generally egalitarian. This, of course, accords with what *Makeso Sahahikan Inninuwak* and other *Inninuwak* have called *mino-pimatisiwin* or the good life,

a life in balance, a life in which ethical goodness is conjoined with pleasure and contentment. These views influenced a generation of anthropologists and other scholars in Canada, who began to advocate for the ethical, ecological and legal rights of hunters as hunters (Asch, 1997; Brody, 2000; Feit, 2013; Mills, 1994; Usher, 1982 etc.). Their views -- that northern hunters were not a vestige of some forgotten past to be modernized out of existence, but rather that hunting had far more to offer as a way of life than had been previously recognized -- have come to be accepted as the scholarly consensus.

Hence, when there is discussion of Aboriginal rights in the context of *Makeso Sahahikan Inninuwak* one of the meanings at its core is the protection of hunting and related activities. Hunting was not a "sideshow" to the discussion of the Keeyask project; rather, it was or should have been seen as critical. It is noteworthy that as well as being protected as an Aboriginal right, hunting is also specifically protected as a treaty right (see the promise in Treaty Five that the Indigenous signatories could continue their "avocations" of hunting). This does not exhaust Aboriginal rights -- Aboriginal languages and Aboriginal spirituality deserve particular mention as other features that would have to be seen as integral -- but certainly belongs near the centre of such discussions. And hunting should have been a critical element in the assessment of the impacts of the Keeyask Project on *Makeso Sahahikan Inninuwak* and on their Aboriginal and treaty rights. The legal doctrine of Aboriginal rights should serve as itself a peacebuilding mechanism because it ensures legal respect for Indigenous views; but too often, as in the case of the Keeyask project, it remains a secondary concern in which the "game" of a public hearing process is "rigged" in favour of the proponent.

Among the many hunting and fishing stories that was gathered by the CFLGC research team, Thomas Nepetaypo's story is interesting for its stress on what is now called by the United Nations "intangible cultural heritage," the knowledge or practices or language/symbols that are not objects but are critical to a way of life:

> It was interesting what, how grandpa handled the water and the river and all that. You learn from this. My dad was like that too, he could read the river, like the palm of his hand, and how to stay safe. So, we were doing that a few times. And then I crossed that river, I don't know how many times, and I walked with an old guy named Judah Frank, was a trapper, towards Gull Rapids, towards Butnoe but we had to walk further to the Gull Rapids, where the trapline was. And I stayed with him a few times in this cabin out in the bush. And all that is gone.
>
> He had to move his, his cabins are gone, they weren't, they were flooded. They didn't, Hydro never really cared, when they build the roads, they bulldoze everything down, with no compensation. The old man never got a cent for what he lost out there. In fact, his son just died not too long ago. He was the only son he had too. But that's where my mother sent me to learn to live off the land. You see, I lived with old Judah Frank. And I remember him taking me across the tracks to Kettle River to go check the nets....
>
> We didn't, Gull Rapids was too far back then. And we had five sacks of fish, man that was the hardest work I ever did, pulling it up the hill. And I had to tell him, "well push it, I can't do this by myself!" (laugh). He had a pole (laugh). It was fun, it was a learning experience for me. The only way I got away from the

> old man was sneaking away. I went back home (laugh). I asked my mother, "will you let me back in? I can't do it anymore, I think I've learned enough for now!" (laugh). Cuz that's where I was most of the time. That's how I got to learn what value I had in my mind and what we were losing.[2]

Another elder, Noah Massan emphasized that trap lines were family affairs, not merely the activities involving a single individual:

> That's another thing too, back in '60s if a guy had that trapline, everybody trapped there like a happy family. Happy family. You know everybody, cuz everybody lived off the land….They asked each other, these old people, "I'm gonna go catch something", you know. She was like "go ahead," you know, everybody was just like a big happy family in the trapline.

This was also eloquently emphasized by Nancy Beardy:

> My dad was a hunter for our family, whoever wanted things, eh? That's the kinda life we had, we lived off the land. And whoever came and got something it's, if they wanted something, like if we were short of lard or something, whatever, you know. Whatever. If we had fish, they'd come and ask if we had fish. They killed a sturgeon one time. Got a big sturgeon, holy, was he long.

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[2] This was one of eight interviews conducted with Fox Lake Cree Nation members on behalf of CFLGC: varying from intensive, four or five hours per day discussions over two weeks, to one or two hour-long interviews. As well, research for this article involves observation and informal discussion with community members in other northern Manitoba hydro affected communities, especially Tataskweyak, by Kulchyski, over a period of more than ten years. All interview subjects agreed to allow their names to be used, and their comments are on the public record.

> Oh, and we saw, I seen the movie and it was those sharks. I said, "Dad, how come you're killing those sharks?" And the thing that I miss too is when we used to go pick berries, like it was a family thing. And my late mum, and my grandma and all like the family would take pans and stuff with them to make bannock out in the bush and uh make tea and we'd pick berries, and we'd make the jam outside and it was like a family picnic thing. That's what I miss too.

The traditional value of sharing, so key to the worldview of hunting cultures, is highlighted here and is one of the intangible cultural features that each new wave of development modernism erodes (Kulchyski, 2005).

The language of the Joint Keeyask Development Agreement (JKDA) says very little about Aboriginal or treaty rights such as hunting rights, though buried far into the document is a clause that indicates that the JKDA is not intended to "alter" "Aboriginal or treaty rights" as "Nothing in this JKDA is intended to alter aboriginal or treaty rights of any of the Keeyask Cree Nations or other Aboriginal peoples recognized and affirmed under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 (Canada)" (Joint Keeyask Development Agreement, 24.3.1)[3]

The language of the clause is worded in this manner – not "intended to alter" – so as to protect Manitoba Hydro's interest, rather than "not intended to diminish," which

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[3] We will not follow Manitoba Hydro in calling these communities Keeyask First Nations but will respect their self-designations. There is no such thing as a Keeyask First Nation, but rather an agreement that four First Nations have each independently signed with Manitoba Hydro; that agreement does not merge these distinct Nations into a single unit and should never be taken to do so. This is a widely held view even of the First Nation's leaders who supported the Project.

would protect the First Nation's interest. This is because, by not "altering" treaty rights, there is no way that the JKDA will be taken, understood or classified as a treaty in the manner, for example, of the Northern Flood Agreement that was negotiated during the first wave of hydro power developments in the seventies. If the language instead were "will not be taken to 'diminish' treaties," it leaves open the possibility that the positive elements of the JKDA could be interpreted to add to the treaties and could thereby be constitutionally protected. The language is also an absurdity. The JKDA cannot but alter Aboriginal and treaty rights since it has an impact on the cultures of the signatory communities.

The Value of a Trap Line

A trap line is a defined region in which a trapping family harvests for subsistence and for the market. In Manitoba, these are often specific areas within a First Nation's Resource Management Area. While at one time *Inninuwak* were dispersed in large family groups across their whole traditional territory, today they are concentrated in geographically and numerically small communities, travelling out to their trap lines. The development and adoption of motorized transportation has somewhat offset the concentration of people - by using snowmobiles, motor boats and pick-up trucks they can access hunting grounds and trap lines on daily or weekly rhythms of hunting life. While at one time children and young adults were able to walk from their cabins in the early morning to check and set snares and small traps at quite early ages exposing them to the trapping lifestyle, now as a result of previous hydro development related impacts, it is more the case that some faster form of transportation is needed to cover the longer

distances trapping families need to traverse in order to access traplines. Yet adult hunters can still regularly go out, do a circuit of trap checking and setting, and return home the same day or with a single overnight stay.

Often it is the case in remote northern Indigenous communities that the trapping families are the local social bedrock of community life (Kulchyski, 2005), offering safe spaces as they tend to have more stable families, and people knowledgeable about the language, culture and land base so central to community self perception. They are the traditional knowledge holders, but they are also so much more - the healers, the moral compass, the strong voices, and the source of pride in community life. This in some ways parallels the value of farming families to southern rural communities, though farmers get far more respect from policymakers than hunters do (and even that is inadequate when compared to agribusiness operations). Unfortunately, policy frameworks in many fields – health, education, social assistance, and especially resource development – work very much directly against the interests of hunters (Kulchyski, 2005). The twentieth century has in its marrow a hidden story about the survival of hunting peoples against extraordinary odds, and systemic ignorance of and bias against Indigenous hunters and against Indigenous culture itself. Despite this, Indigenous hunters have taken the tools of modernity and used them to support their craft; they have made a virtue of remoteness and isolation; they have in many places -- the Mackenzie Valley in the seventies, the Big Trout Lake people in 2009 -- successfully defied huge governments and corporations that find their continued existence inconvenient.

However, we cannot be sanguine about their continued survival. The Fox Lake Cree Nation at Gillam (and Bird)[4], is a case in point. Up to a mere few decades ago they were a remote community using occasional wage work with the Canadian National Railway Company (CN) to supplement subsistence hunting and gathering and commercial trapping and fishing. Slowly, with the construction of the Kelsey Dam to support the Thompson mine, then the Kettle Dam, then the Long Spruce Dam, then the Limestone Dam – all part of the original Churchill River Diversion project -- with all the transmission lines, worker camps, roads, access roads, quarries, dikes, transformer stations and the concomitant influx of non-natives, the *Kitchi Sipi* / Nelson River became polluted with silt, unpredictable and damaged beyond recognition. The territory was and is a damaged land, which in turn affected the fish and animals that hunters rely on.

And yet, some hunters and trappers continued making their patient rounds, continued to engage in modern forms of the "practices, customs and traditions" of their parents and grandparents and great grandparents by maintaining a direct link to the land as a source of sustenance. The traplines endangered by the Keeyask and Conawapa projects are among the last of the traplines in close proximity to the communities of Bird and Gillam that most Fox Lake Cree Nation citizens call home. It is precisely, as the trap lines are reduced in number to a very few, and the very last vital bases of a culture are

[4] There are two separate locations where most First Nations' members live, in a former construction camp at a place called Bird (about a half hour drive from Gillam) and in Gillam itself, as well as of course in Thompson, Winnipeg and elsewhere.

now threatened, that their value increases exponentially – a phenomenon that is not captured or reflected in the Keeyask environmental assessment process.

When the late Noah Massan's trap line, Jack and Christine Massan's trap line, and the late Frank Beardy's trap line are made unusable by these projects including Keeyask, the province of Manitoba and the world will have lost something irreplaceable. Flying hunters out to wherever the moose go, flying trappers out to some area they have little direct knowledge of, setting up culture camps in the bush for the young people, while worthwhile ventures, will not and can never mitigate that loss. Traditional trappers will not thrive in the temporality of institutionally organized bush planes. Intergenerational knowledge of these specific pieces of land will be lost. While culture camps and bush camps are useful devices to pass some traditional cultural learning and healing on to children, they do not replace being at the side of a parent and learning the old way, by watching and doing, by being bored or tired enough to listen to stories, by establishing their own embodied connection to their land.

A trap line that can continue to be passed on from one generation to the next into the future indefinitely is a sustainable base for Indigenous cultural survival. A hydro dam that may, with luck, in a future generation or two, generate some profits to be managed by a small local elite, is not. A hydro dam that, again with luck (and assuming current economic trends do not hold, a very questionable assumption) may generate windfall profits that can be thrust into the winds of a barely functioning international capital market has a certain value to the people of Manitoba. But so does the survival of *Makeso Sahahikan Inninuwak* culture. The latter is constitutionally protected. The former, and

there is no kind way to articulate this, is part and parcel of one dominant but largely undesirable human attribute, rapaciousness. Once these trap lines are lost, they will be gone forever.

Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Research

It is notable that the three community partners each prepared their own traditional knowledge studies separately from each other for the Manitoba Clean Environment Commission. They vary remarkably in quality. The reports produced by Fox Lake and York Landing are very strong documents that deserve a wide audience. They relate in some detail the impacts of past Manitoba Hydro actions on their lands and their communities, frequently using quotations from community members; they also honestly convey a sense of how agonizing the decision to work with the partnership must have been. The voices of the people from these communities do appear in direct quotations in these reports, those voices give them a strong value for this process and beyond. However, it should be noted that the elders and knowledge holders connected to the CFLGC from Fox Lake felt strongly that what they were saying was being filtered, that their views were not being reflected in these reports. The report conducted on behalf of the Cree Nation Partners (the Partners were the communities of Tataskweyak and War Lake; the report was prepared by outside consultants) does not reach the standard produced by the other communities and will hardly sustain the attention of those who are

paid to read it; it is a bureaucratically structured and oriented document and there are no community voices to be found anywhere in the report.[5]

Although the proponents insist that the traditional knowledge they extracted inflected all elements of their research and project design, it is hard to see substantive evidence that such is the case. The studies regarding animal and fish populations do not show any strong use of elders' knowledge. Paul Nadasty's (2004) book *Hunters and Bureaucrats* demonstrate the way relations between scientists and Indigenous elders often do not in practice reflect the broader social value placed on Aboriginal traditional knowledge; it is in fact the rare scientist who can retrain her or himself in the protocols of this form of research. Hence, while traditional knowledge studies were developed there seems to have been little meaningful use of them through the Environmental Impact Statement produced by Manitoba Hydro. During the hearings, when asked about his community's study, George Neepin of the Fox Lake Cree Nation, who as formal partners supported the project, stated that the knowledge was not used in any extensive way by Manitoba Hydro in designing the project. This bodes ill for the prospects of seeing

[5] The one representative Indigenous voice directly quoted is that of Joseph Keeper, a very respected -- indeed legendary for his earlier strong opposition to Manitoba Hydro -- elder from the community of Norway House. Although Mr. Keeper certainly deserves our respect and attention, it is unfortunate that we do not hear voices from Tataskweyak or War Lake because elders like Michael Garson Sr. and Christine Garson, and traditional harvesters including Mr. Spence, Ms. McIvor and Ms. Mazurat among others who presented to the Clean Environment Commission (see November 14), have a great deal of traditional knowledge to communicate. If it was communicated, such knowledge cannot be found in the official report that was produced on behalf of the Project proponents.

traditional knowledge used in an active and affirmative manner in monitoring and managing the overall project.

Today's Communities Are a Result of Yesterday's Actions

Through both research and observation, and a study of work completed by both the proponents and some of the interveners, it is possible to say a few things with certainty about current social conditions. Based on both observation and discussion with many community members in both places, Tataskweyak at nearby Split Lake and Fox Lake Cree Nation at Gillam are troubled communities, evidencing very dire social and economic circumstances. Community members who have lived through the post dam decades directly tie these circumstances to the variety of negative impacts of previous Manitoba Hydro projects.

To illustrate this, I will draw from my own observations. In the spring of 2012, I made two visits to Tataskweyak at the invitation of a coalition of community members who had engaged in an uprising that temporarily shut down the band office and the Keeyask negotiations office. I found that the existing shortage of housing was exacerbated by the very poor, low cost housing that had been built in the recent past to meet the overwhelming demand, houses (actually trailers though Manitoba Hydro likes to refer to them as "mobile modular units," a veritable model for how bureaucrats place layers of language over poverty) were built on foundations of plywood. Eight homes were found to have e-coli in the tanks that supplied them with water; this was the spark that led to the uprising. An additional home was so infested with cockroaches that it was a danger to public health and had to be destroyed. Several homes were being used despite

the extensive presence of black mold. Children were playing with mouse droppings in the temporary classrooms being used (also trailers) because the school had been damaged in a fire. In early spring, there were homeless people gathered around the fire that had been built and sustained by the local protesters. A palpable sense of impoverishment and of frustration pervaded my conversations with local people. Although these conditions are confirmed by quantitative research it is very difficult to convey the overall sense of despair with numerical data. On the ground Tataskweyak felt like a hopeless and devastated place. The hopelessness was only aggravated, according to many local people I talked with, by the fact that elected leaders' time was taken up with endless negotiation sessions on the Keeyask Project being held in Winnipeg, while little direct attention was being given to a series of local social crises.

While the Fox Lake Cree Nation citizens at Gillam have also experienced severe impoverishment due to the impacts of Manitoba Hydro, the community does not appear to be in as dire straits as its neighbor. However, the circumstances of Gillam create in some ways an even more socially debilitating impact. First Nations residents live side by side with a large permanent community of well-off Manitoba Hydro workers, who reside in large suburban style homes, landscaped neighborhoods and give the appearance of any relatively affluent southern suburban social landscape. The *Makeso Sahahikan Inninuwak* at Gillam invariably live in substandard trailers, often immediately adjacent to affluent houses of Hydro employees. Johnny Beardy explains what life is like in his home:

> And uh, today this is how I live, I got a burnt element there [on the stove top], and uh, burnt knobs, and I don't know, 20- or 15-year-old of dirt there. And I got no

> water tap, can you look at this: see. I got cold water, but I don't have no hot water. See no hot, I don't shower or anything. This is where I get my hot water. See? I'm, I'm heating it up, I got stove on every morning. I wash like this. I heat up, I put in the tub, and I sponge bath every morning. For two years, nobody wants to help me in my home. And I ask, when I ask help in the band office, "you're on your own." How can you say that when my name is on the roster and money goes in there for me too?

Conditions in the community of Bird are arguably as bad or worse; in 2012 a band office in the community was so infested with mouse droppings that it was considered a health hazard and many people refused to enter. The Manitoba Hydro employees enjoy subsidized electrical rates, while local Indigenous people pay higher rates than even borne by Winnipeg ratepayers. The same employees often enjoy the use of company vehicles and other company equipment. The (by northern standards excellent) public facilities of Gillam are designed to service their needs; often for example local Indigenous children cannot pay swimming pool fees. In every element of its social fiber, the community of Gillam treats its First Nations residents as second-class citizens, and this is immediately visible to anyone who drives through the two adjacent communities. In many ways, poverty located immediately next to affluence is even more socially debilitating than a poverty that only experiences itself (Fanon, 1996; Sahlins, 1972). The story of Gillam in this regard is an echo of the story of another Cree community, Grand Rapids, where a dam was built in the sixties: Hydro wealth set against a backdrop of Aboriginal poverty.

While the most common refrain in response to this circumstance is, as for example enunciated by Manitoba Hydro spokesperson Glenn Schneider in the film *Green Green Waters*, to the effect that "all Aboriginal communities are poor, its just a sad fact," experienced researchers know that the north contains two distinct kinds of poverty. One is the sort described by Johnny Beardy. The other is a poverty vis-à-vis western living standards that is alleviated by a strong connection to the land and traditions of the Indigenous Nation. This is a modern form of the "affluence" found in traditional hunting cultures. I have an Inuit friend from Nunavut who is a respected artist. He lives in a house that is crowded and substandard, with older furniture and few amenities. But he is one of the wealthiest people I know; he eats organic meat he has procured for himself; he drinks pure water that runs directly from glaciers, he is his own boss, he is respected in his community. He is a hunter and an artist, and the intellectual demands of hunting are such that this confluence is not unusual. In the eyes of many non-Indigenous Westerners, he is perhaps poor. From an Indigenous perspective, his wealth does not take the form of excessive cash, bling, the latest technological wonders, a large house and such. It takes the form of time, quality of life, of community ties and of a rich cultural heritage. There are many communities across the mid- and far-north which statistically look somewhat better than, say, Split Lake, but still appear as poor (Kulchyski, 2016). And while there is material poverty there, there also exist in these places – Poplar River in northeastern Manitoba is a good example – a form of wealth that western society has not fully learned to acknowledge, appreciate, or measure.

The poverty that exists in Split Lake and Gillam is not solely the result of systematic federal underfunding that can be found across most Aboriginal communities. Manitoba Hydro's war on the *Kitchi Sipi* / Nelson River has reduced the opportunities for well-being in these communities. Ironically, the Keeyask Project in effect proposes to destroy the last vestiges of the community's own strength, the last pockets of well-being that still circulate among the remaining land-based people, to "alleviate" the very poverty its previous actions created. There is little reason to suspect its current approach will have any more positive impact than its previous approaches.

Ivan Moose discusses the initial attraction of Manitoba Hydro's activities to the Fox Lake Cree Nation:

> Then that explosion came. Man, they set up a camp, then, and more booze started coming, even though the bar wasn't very big at the time. Booze started coming, people bringing in booze, and our boys starting to quit school at 16, just to go to work on short-term jobs. Things changed drastically around '70, '71 things really changed. My friends started quitting school to go to work. And then you got introduced to the camp, because the hotel there, the big bars.
>
> Alcohol, they all went crazy. Ain't nobody's fault, I guess, I guess we had a choice, we could've made a choice back then, but I guess the excitement and the thrill of everything that hit you. It was all that money you never had, you didn't know what to do with it. We had to spend it somewhere, and there was a bar there and there was other stuff, whatever drugs were back then.

Another seemingly small but momentous example might be useful to demonstrate the particular way hydroelectric development has impacted Indigenous communities. For an Indigenous northern child, one of the compensations for not having the latest iPad or other consumer gadget in the summer is instead having a glorious place to go swimming in the nearby pristine lake or river. There, other children laugh and swim, families gather for picnics, and anyone can go swimming as the fancy takes them, even while still wearing your pants if you do not have a swim suit. This element of childhood has been stolen from the children of the communities along the *Kitchi Sipi* / Nelson River. For Fox Lake citizens, the swimming place was at nearby Landing Lake, eventually so damaged by the increased float plane air traffic that it became too polluted to use. Mitigation of this situation, for example in Nelson House, involves taking a bus to the Thompson swimming pool, or in Gillam using the local pool, which is too expensive for many First Nations citizens to afford. In a swimming pool, the richness of the experience is lost; one abides by the rules and hours, class differences appear among the children and much of the joy that was attributed to being in the bush, and among community, is obviously leeched out of the experience. This is not a result of the so-called "normal" poverty in Aboriginal communities; it is a direct result of Manitoba Hydro's actions. It is impossible to mitigate a stolen childhood.

The stories of Manitoba Hydro's impacts can be found throughout *Ninan*, and the studies conducted by Fox Lake in relation to the impacts of previous projects and in relation to the Keeyask project, though Jack Massan also spoke to CFLGC researchers about the subject:

> My deal with Manitoba Hydro, it was the construction workers that were doing most of the, all the, all the stuff. But it was Hydro that hired all these people to come here, eh. Yeah, most all the construction workers that were doing all the, all the abuse and everything. But I guess it was Manitoba Hydro's fault cuz they were the one's that hired them and brought them over here and paid them to do this…

Christine Massan provides a description of overall treatment of local people by Hydro's workers:

> I want to, uh, talk about, a little bit, until very recently, how badly treated Fox Lake members and, uh, the Métis that worked with Manitoba Hydro [were]. It was not easy, I mean they were called out and made fun of, a lot of racist jokes and pictures and that would be put up on the job site. And, uh, Manitoba Hydro had their own, uh, what do you call them, sort of like a counsellor.
>
> He would come in from Winnipeg and work with some of them. And then, uh, I was hired as a Community Liaison Officer, so I did a lot of, uh, the work with trying to make things better for everybody. And I heard some pretty horror stories about things, jokes, pictures, uh, people putting things in a coffee room, say with a sticking a feather in a little doll or something.

The most horrifying story we heard, in a litany of horror stories, was told to us by Nancy Beardy, who specifically said that she wanted people to hear about this, to know what happened to her, in the hopes it would not happen again. Indigenous women were

subjected to racial and sexualized degradation. They were targeted and sexually exploited and assaulted.

> I was 14 by this time, eh. And that following year we came to visit and that's what happened to me when those guys attacked me. I was 13 when we came back and then that was my birthday that year and then that happened. I was 14 that year and that happened. There was three of them in that vehicle. Sometimes I think that I can see them. That's why I turned to drinking so much at such a young age. Cuz I feel so much hurt went by.
>
> It's just amazing I went, that I'm still here sometimes because of what I did after, trying to commit suicide so many times. And um what really hurts me was when those guys grabbed me and beat me up, they raped me and must have knocked me out, I don't know cuz I was fighting back. And um. For them to, like not even to acknowledge it, like not even to let people know what happened out of, um, out of this community and like higher, higher states of Hydro I mean. They, they covered it up, they seem like they did cover it up.

The issue of sexual assault has gained attention over the course of 2018 as very damaging reports from the Keeyask Camp emerged in the news media. Nancy Beardy, who specifically wanted to use her story as a warning to others, was not heard.

Another small but telling point in this regard that emerged from the interviews of the CFLGC researchers came from the fact that Manitoba Hydro was not the first non-Native institution to affect the people of Fox Lake. For many years before Manitoba Hydro's presence, the dominant company in the region was CN (Canadian National, a

railway). The community of Gillam owes its presence at the current location in large measure because of being a railway stop on the rail line to Churchill. Aboriginal workers found employment with CN over many years and adapted their seasonal rounds to the wage work they could regularly acquire. The town they established, "on the other side of the tracks," was actually on CN land. It is very striking that no one who spoke about the CN experience harbors the kind of deep and lasting angry feelings that are often directed towards Manitoba Hydro; CN did not build a legacy of hatred in its relations with the local people in the manner that Manitoba Hydro quickly established and continues to maintain.

Every community has its own story and its own specific reasons when the cycle of real poverty takes over. In Canada, for many Indigenous communities, decades of federal government perfidy have been a key causal factor in reducing communities from traditional forms of wealth to real poverty; the other key driver of such a transition has been resource development. Resource development everywhere in the north comes with heralds of modernism and bright promises of well-being, and almost invariably leads to impoverishment, an impoverishment that can no longer be leavened with glorious moments out on the land following the footsteps of one's ancestors. The continuing story of Manitoba Hydro does not deviate from this latter pattern.

Governance From the Outside In

It is very rare in this day and era to find anyone from outside Indigenous communities who is prepared to criticize the elected leadership of an Indigenous Nation. This itself has in general been a positive historical development and is a result of the

years of struggle of many First Nations to assert their capacity and their right to make decisions for themselves. In the contemporary moment Aboriginal self-government is rightly seen as a desirable and critical goal among First Nations in Canada, and in the years that First Nations will transition towards forms that reflect that goal, elected community leaders must be respected as legitimate representatives of their people. The CFLGC, of course, is a local based organization and is free in a democratic context to air grievances and opposed views, which the Fox Lake Cree Nation to their credit fairly acknowledged. Further, where the consultants, lawyers and advisors to a Nation's leadership have misled them or not adequately provided them with the broad information base required to make decisions, there is room for criticism aimed at promoting discussion.

In fact, although it is now an "era of self-government" as a desirable paradigm, local government decision-making powers are frequently over-ridden by outside interests. Most commonly and frequently, the federal government has responded to its systematic underfunding of First Nations by putting those that find themselves in financial difficulties into receivership. Federally appointed auditors have become the new Indian agents exercising outside control of communities. However, there are several ways in which the historic and contemporary interests of Manitoba Hydro have also led to interference in local governance.

Most prominently and specifically related to the Fox Lake Cree Nation, the creation of the municipality of Gillam has historically and continues to mark an extraordinary intrusion into the abilities of the Fox Lake Cree Nation to build and govern

a community. Gillam was created as a local government district in the mid 1960s specifically to facilitate hydro development; it was one of the largest such districts in Canada. Before and after the creation of Gillam a small vibrant community of Indigenous people lived across the tracks and in houses scattered through the present core of the municipality. Although in the 1950s an Indian Agent walked with the Chief from the railroad to the river, then along its shore and finally back to the railroad, effectively promising that the enclosed area would be classified as a reserve (so I was told separately by Tommy Nepetaypo, Ivan Moose and Noah Masson), this never happened. Many of the original homes around the tracks were destroyed to suit the needs of Hydro and its non-Indigenous workforce. As well, a new governance structure gained control of the whole local area, passing zoning laws and establishing restrictions that made it difficult for the *Makeso Sahahikan Inninuwak* to construct the community they desired. Yet, whenever Manitoba Hydro wanted or wants a zoning law changed, an area of land to build a suburb on, or any other regulatory allowance, the municipality with alacrity acts in their interest. Jack Masson referred to this noting, "That's another thing is Manitoba Hydro can build houses wherever they want, and us, living in trailers like this, and we can't build no houses. Manitoba Hydro got everything that they want, they just build."

While relations may have improved in more recent decades, the creation of the municipality was part and parcel of Manitoba Hydro's involvement in the region, as with Grand Rapids creating a comfortable living zone for its workers, and from the First Nations perspective, was no more or less than a "land grab" that took place on traditional territory. It is still the case that local Indigenous leaders struggle with the municipality,

which does not want to allow lands to be granted reserve status within the boundaries it claims control of. A community divided by class status (house or trailer, Hydro employee or First Nation's citizen) finds that division articulated in the presence of two governance structures, the municipality and the First Nation. While there are benefits to the Hydro-municipality presence – paved roads, a swimming pool, excellent quality local public facilities – this continues to severely restrict the Fox Lake Cree Nation's ability to improve the well being of those of its people who live within municipal boundaries. In the earlier era, for example, the school that was built expected it would only enroll non-Indigenous students. The local First Nations children were still expected to attend distant residential schools, and it was only the determination of parents that forced the issue. Local amenities were designed for Manitoba Hydro employees, with Indigenous peoples only reluctantly "allowed."

In the process that has led to the current agreements on the Keeyask Project, Manitoba Hydro has established another intrusion in local government through the widespread use of confidentiality clauses (24.2.1 of the JKDA). While confidentiality clauses may be required for a select group of leaders on a narrow range of financial issues, local transparency and accountability have been negatively impacted in a manner that must be of serious concern. For example, in 2015 there was an elected band councilor from Tataskweyak, Solange Garson, who could not serve on her Band Council because she steadfastly refused to sign a confidentiality agreement with Manitoba Hydro regarding the KCN Partnership. Interestingly, the creation of the Cree Nations Partners (the distinct First Nations of War Lake and Tataskweyak negotiate together as part of the

Keeyask Partnership Agreement) itself has a significant impact on Tataskweyak citizens to monitor spending by their governments. Previous to the Cree Nations Partners, reports on spending funds acquired through compensation and implementation agreements were a mandated element of local governance. By creating the Cree Nation Partners under a regime of confidentiality, this degree of local reporting ceased, and much less transparent management of funds in part leading to the uprising of 2012 became the norm. Finally, among the Fox Lake Cree Nation, research reports into the social impacts of Manitoba Hydro have been so constrained by confidentiality agreements that in one case a university-based researcher cannot publish or use the data she gathered and community members, news media, the general public, and even members of the First Nation cannot see the draft report.

An additional issue of some concern surrounds the levels of voter participation required allowing the partnership agreement to proceed. While historically a majority of voters were required to engage in any major land related project developments among a First Nation, and while the standard deployed during the nearby Wuskwatim project required a majority of voters to participate (meaning that not voting counted effectively as a no), the standard used during the Keeyask project was much lower, a simple majority of voters. One wonders how low the voter turnout would have had to have been before the process lost all legitimacy, but it is clear that compelling questions can be raised about the level of support for this project based on the relatively low standard the Fox Lake Cree Nation imposed upon itself to determine community support and agreement for their approach.

Some Other Local Concerns

Four specific and distinct issues around the Keeyask project often mentioned by local Fox Lake Cree Nation members deserve at least some comment here. The first regards training issues. It is interesting that under questioning senior Manitoba Hydro spokespeople showed no familiarity with the concept of a "racially stratified work force," given that the issue so named has a strong bearing on the success of their efforts to incorporate *Inniniwak* workers. A racial division of labour or racially stratified work force can be used to describe a workforce that reflects and helps entrench social hierarchy based on race often found in society at large. It is a common feature of structural racism, the mainstream individuals gain all the high-status positions while the racially marginalized are employed at the bottom of the work hierarchy. Although the term "racism" has been bandied about in the Clean Environment Commission hearings we have no intention of participating in mere name-calling. It is important to recognize that Manitoba Hydro's workforces have been and remain racially divided. Indigenous workers are employed in the greatest numbers in the most menial work. The major construction supervisory positions, the long-term high-status engineering positions, will continue to go to non-Natives unless affirmative measures are taken. This racial division of labour is structured into Manitoba Hydro itself as an organization and is reflected as well in the construction camps and workforces that exist to build the Keeyask dam. It is distinct from the views of individuals working for and representing Manitoba Hydro, who may and often do hold honorable views and make strong efforts to combat this deeply socially undesirable behavior and ideology.

In the context of a racially stratified work force, Indigenous workers will not be retained – will quit after a short engagement – because the work environment is "toxic;" if Indigenous workers are primarily engaged in low status and demeaning work, the informal mechanisms of insult and abuse can circulate easily despite official policies and cultural awareness training. Ivan Moose was among those who spoke about this issue:

> Maybe make the work site better. If you talk to the current ones that work there,they don't say very much because they're scared of repercussions, what might happen to them at work. They just, a lot of unfair treatment at work but nobody there's nobody there to talk for them. We do have sometimes, where remember that [unintelligible] liaisons, but the liaisons were just seemed to be talking like they're friends to these people.
>
> They need somebody in there that's hardcore, that can say "wait a minute, wait a minute, this is enough! You can't be treating our First Nations people like this!" They got to be treated with respect. Of course, they're going to ask that question, our simple answer is why [don't] you start treating our people with respect when they're on the job site.

Hence, bringing Indigenous workers for a brief time onto a project before they feel compelled to leave is not a standard of success. The numbers provided by Manitoba Hydro as well as evidence from Nisichawayasihk indicate that this pattern appears to have been in place during the construction of the Wuskwatim dam and appears to be continuing with the construction of the Keeyask Project.

An additional issue that is serious enough to discuss here has to do with protections for First Nations' women. The experience of Nancy Beardy, who was sexually assaulted by visiting Hydro workers, should both horrify while not be surprising to us. Aboriginal women remain among the most vulnerable population groups in Canada, and the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women is the most egregious exemplar of their status and struggles. Non-Indigenous workers a long way from home will take opportunities to "cruise" nearby communities and the worst of them may prey on any single female Indigenous persons they find in Thompson or in Tataskweyak or in Gillam. Women in Fox Lake are concerned as well about the many children of consensual relations who will be abandoned by fathers when the camp boom ends, also clearly an aspect of the previous history. The warnings that were made during the CEC hearings were not attended to. In the early fall of 2018, a CEC report on previous construction camps noted a remarkable prevalence of sexual violence directed against Indigenous women; the report created an extensive media stir. In early winter, 2019, the RCMP reported an increase of sexual assaults apparently directly tied to the Keeyask Project, creating another series of news-media stories. There are local women whose lives are undergoing deeply traumatic experiences because of the Keeyask Project. Manitoba Hydro's response amounts to "wait until the storm clouds clear and carry on with business as usual."

Sacred boulders are a key part of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of *Inninuwak*. They are "tangible," but the knowledge of them as sacred sites is intangible. Dr. Virginia Petch alluded in her testimony to an archival reference to a sacred boulder

near the site of the Keeyask rapids but could not find it, "There was one site in the historical record that Peter Fidler identifies as an offering stone at the rapids. We searched for that stone and could not find it. And I believe that it probably ended up in the river, very unstable bank at that particular area. That was the only one we were aware of" (November 6, p 2247). There was also reference to a sacred boulder on the Butnau River in the hearings, and our interview participants made mention of a healing ceremony conducted "far off in the bush" at a sacred boulder. These places will become more important to an emerging generation of young *Inninuwak*, particularly as their opportunities to connect with their heritage through traditional harvesting activities become eroded. In contexts where hunting is no longer viable, spirituality in its traditional forms becomes of increasing importance in cultural retention. Dr. Petch does not discuss how intensive her search for the offering boulder mentioned by Peter Fidler was or whether she coordinated her efforts with local elders; and the other sacred boulders alluded to do not seem to have been mapped or otherwise documented. Before the dam and attendant activities, it would have been salutary if some urgent effort had been made to do so. Two great spiritual landmarks, the "footprints" and "*weesakijak*'s seat," were effectively destroyed by the Churchill River Diversion. So, Manitoba Hydro's record in this respect is weak at best, perhaps actually nothing short of appalling.

Finally, the risk of mercury contamination has been seriously underestimated. Minimata disease is a horrendous and debilitating illness and should not be treated cavalierly. Judy DaSilva, who spoke eloquently at the Keeyask hearings of her experience with the disease because of the effluent dumping in Drydon, Ontario, suggests

that the issue is not so far from home as has been suggested. As importantly, and even though the different types of mercury exposure pose different though interrelated public health problems, too little is still known not to treat the issue with enormous caution. As there remains an international scholarly debate about how many parts per million exposure levels are safe, and how long mercury will remain in contaminated areas, a much more purposive undertaking should be engaged to monitor the issue, and human testing must be a component of such monitoring. The precautionary principle would ideally inform our actions – not undertaking an action until we know it is safe – but in its absence a much more robust monitoring regime around mercury contamination must be engaged, rather than a simple public awareness ("don't eat fish") campaign, which is the least expensive and generally ineffective response. One of the elders active in the CFLGC, Noah Massan, ate local fish all of this life. In the public hearings he used a walker, because he suffers from a degenerative nerve disease. It has been diagnosed as Kennedy's disease, which Japanese researchers assure me is often a misdiagnosis for Minimata disease or mercury poisoning. This misdiagnosis is especially common in Canada, where Minimata is not officially recognized. Water quality concerns appear to be an issue all along the *Kitchee Sipi* /Nelson River, and although other pollutant sources have affected the river, most point to concerns around Mercury contamination because of Hydro flooding as a particular source of dread.

Conclusion

As stated at the outset, it is very likely that the Keeyask dam will prove detrimental to *Makeso Sahahikan Inninuwak.* Although a whole host of experts working

with the proponents have testified that the environmental impacts, when balanced by mitigation efforts, will be neutral, this defies common sense and past experience (which Fox Lake Cree have too much of). The combination of dams, roads, dikes, quarries, bipole lines, transformer stations, camps, newcomers, on top of past cumulative effects, can simply not be adequately mitigated. The lands and waters of this region are being irrevocably altered for the worse and this is affecting the lives of local hunting families and therefore their Aboriginal rights. This point was made repeatedly by Fox Lake Cree Nation citizens:

> See, that's another thing, what we're saying. What are we gonna do to help the animals? Like, gotta help the Caribou. How can we help them? Well the best way to help them is, don't do anymore damage to the bush… You know, just, justleave everything, what's, how it looked before, eh. You can't, that's the best wayo help the animals. Yeah, you don't, uh, just forget about all the construction that's doing, that's going on in the bush. (Jack Massan)

The gains to be made through a risk-investment in the dam will be long delayed for the communities who are even now in urgent need of social support, and it is entirely possible that the communities will not gain anything but increased debt from the project, while having invested significant financial resources in it.

Oochinehwin: what is done will return, past actions will affect present actors, you will reap what you sow; a form of *karma* perhaps in a Bhuddist or Hindu epistemology, or the return of the repressed in a Freudian framework. But the *Inniniwak* version does not need buttressing: "the belief that a negative action against an animal, a person or the

land could negatively impact the fate of a person, family members, or the next generation." So it is, so it will be with the Keeyask Project. The fear of the Concerned Fox Lake Grassroots Citizens is that the profit that results, if any, will go to benefit very few people. The jobs, such as they are, will soon be gone. The misery, however, will be widespread. And it will echo down the generations who follow *Oochinehwin*. In the spring of 2023 Noah Massan passed away in the hospital in Thompson, Manitoba. The next week, a huge section of swamp land separated from the banks of the Gitchee Sipi and floated down the river until it struck the Keeyask Dam, blocking some of the generators. Local people and hydro employees were drafted to use motorboats to pull the floating debris off the dam, but as they were doing so the wind changed direction and the debris floated back. The river knew how to mourn for Noah. *Oochinehwin*.

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The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: A Social Cubism Analysis

Lucie Besken and Sean Byrne

Introduction

A myriad of wars and protracted conflicts where two or more groups defining themselves along ethnic lines struggle over territory, resources, identity, and power continue to destroy lives and land around the world and threaten international and human security. Yet it remains unclear what role ethnicity plays in the formation and escalation of these conflicts. Ethiopia, Myanmar, Sudan, and Yemen are just some examples where intra-state violence and civil war between ethnic groups has cost thousands of lives (Uppsala Universitet, n.d.). Tensions in Northern Ireland have risen again after Brexit, and recent developments in the Balkans, are also reason for concern (Bechev, 2023). A wealth of research has been conducted on various causes of ethnic conflict in general and on concrete situations of conflict in particular (Horowitz, 1985; Senehi et al., 2022; Taras & Ganguly, 2016). The focus of this article is the decades-old conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K) region in the southern Caucasus that on September 19, 2023, took a rather abrupt violent turn which led some journalists to assume that it was over (Zeit Online, 2023).

The roots of this conflict go back to when the Armenian and Azeri ethnic groups, or Azerbaijanis, shared a territory within one state, the Soviet Union (USSR). Today it shares similarities with the Cyprus and Northern Ireland conflicts: two ethnic groups backed by "external

ethno-guarantors," (EEGs) or regional actors with shared cultural, economic, and historical ties that are connected to respective internal ethnic groups' interests and are in conflict over a territory (Byrne, 2007; Ohanyan, 2020).

The EEGs model was applied to the Northern Ireland and Cyprus conflicts, where regionally powerful states (Britian and Ireland, and Greece and Turkey) were drawn into both conflicts in support of respective internal ethnic group allies. Cultural, economic, historical, and political ties and shared interests led to a dependent relationship between the EEGs and their conflicting co-nationals (Byrne 2000). These regional EEGs' involvement can, as Byrne (2007) noted, be both beneficial and detrimental to peaceful conflict resolution, depending on whether they are willing to cooperate with a shared interest in bringing conflicting ethnic parties to an agreement, or whether they escalate the conflict and prevent resolution by engaging in hostilities with each other by supporting nationalist and radical factions among the conflicting co-nationals. In this case, Armenia and Azerbaijan are the EEGs with close ties to the Armenians and Azeris of N-K, and they had not cooperated to resolve the conflict until they signed a peace agreement on August 8, 2025 to end the 37 years of protracted conflict. Both states' governments had fanned its flames by engaging militarily and using irreconcilable nationalist language toward the other. Russia was the regional "higher mediator" (Byrne, 2007) that had in the past intervened to end immediate warfare, while Moscow's interest in permanently resolving the conflict remained questionable (Ohanyan, 2020; Schumacher, 2016). Russian was recently replaced by the U.S. government as higher mediator as Presdient Trump facilitated the 2025 Track-one peace accord between Armenia and Azerbaijan, while Turkey has also begun to engage with both governments.

Scholars date the beginning of the N-K conflict back to 1988, although its roots were arguably laid much earlier within the Russian empire (Hasanli, 2023; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022).

Consequently, conceptual frameworks must pay tribute to the complexities, dynamics, and interrelations of this intractable ethnoterritorial conflict. Several frameworks to analyze ethnic conflicts do exist. Rothman's ARIA model highlights the fluidity of conflicts, structuring especially identity-based conflicts into four stages from Antagonism to Resolution (Rothman, 2012). In addition, Dugan's Nested-Foci-Model is often applied to issue-based conflicts by situating them in a larger systemic picture and highlighting interrelationships between different levels of analysis (Dugan, 1996). Lederach's understanding of conflict as originating in and being transformed through relationships is reflected in his inquiry model. It understands conflict through the lens of patterns and relationships across three components, from the presenting situation over imagining a desired future to a development of change process, where conflict parties transform their conflict from being destructive to informing constructive change (Lederach, 2003). That said, the analytical framework chosen here is Byrne and Carter's Social Cubism model (Byrne & Carter, 1996), extended with the ideas of Russ-Trent's Integrative-Inductive Social Cubism model (Russ-Trent, 2003). Social Cubism was first applied to the conflicts in Northern Ireland and Quebec. The model was explicitly designed to highlight the interconnectedness and multi-facetedness of longstanding conflicts involving ethnic groups. By providing a framework exploring different aspects and levels of conflicting societies over periods of time, Social Cubism is a useful analytical method that can shed new light on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Within this framework, analysis focuses on different facets of contributing factors, their interrelationships and the way those shape a conflict over time (Byrne, Carter, & Senehi, 2003). The six factors included by Byrne and Carter (1996, 2003) are demographics, economics, history, religion, political, and psychocultural factors. This analytical framework lends its structure to this article.

The first part explores the Social Cubism model and its implications, followed by an analysis relating the six factors to the N-K conflict. Limited extensive literature examining this specific conflict from different perspectives exists. Thomas DeWaal's (2013) and Yavuz and Gunther's (2022, 2023) work were mainly relied on for writing this paper, and other voices from the region were also included (Askerov & Ibadoghlu, 2023; Cheterian et al, 2023; Geukjian, 2012). To our knowledge, there has been no analysis of the conflict that considers the continuing interrelationship of the six dimensions of conflict addressed in this article. This analysis, therefore, allows a new holistic analytical perspective to emerge on the conflict that is essential in imagining a more inclusive approach for a lasting justpeace for the region and its people. Applying Social Cubism and the EEG third-party intervention model to the N-K conflict places it within a wider context of ethnic conflicts that share some similar characteristics, while also highlighting its unique trajectory and evolution.

The Social Cube Model

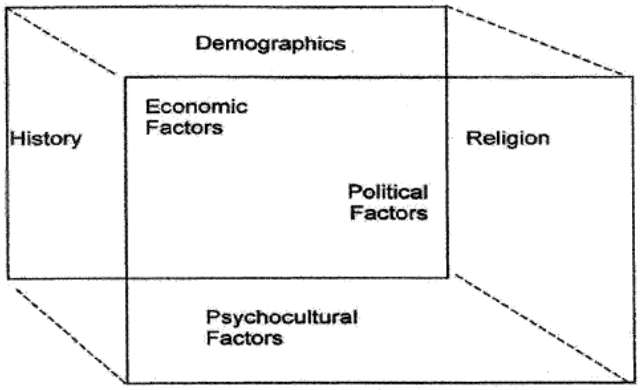
Labelling a conflict as "ethnic," "ethnoterritorial," "ethnoreligious," or "ethnopolitical" (Gurr, 1994) can be misleading as it implies that conflict is caused by ethnic differences. Although from the outside this is the form many of these conflicts take, focusing on ethnicity alone cannot sufficiently explain the genesis and development of a conflict. As Mac Ginty (2008) argues, ethnicity is more likely to be an instrument of conflict rather than its actual cause or content. Scholars also disagree on the nature of ethnicity (Gurr, 1994). Primordialists perceive ethnicity as a genetically based group identity underlying all other social identities, (Geertz, 1973; Shils, 1957; Van den Berghe, 1981) while instrumentalists contend that ethnicity only becomes salient when identity is instrumentalized by group leaders or "ethnic entrepreneurs" (Brass, 1979). Constructivists see identity as socially constructed and used by ethnic elites to mobilize

constituents (Anderson, 1983; Gurr, 1994). This article notes that it is important to blend an instrumentalist and constructivist understanding of ethnicity and its role in protracted conflicts (Clammer, 2017).

The Social Cube model highlights that both material and psychocultural factors cause and influence conflicts between ethnic groups, and that it is helpful to focus on how these factors relate to and interact with each other over time to create "patterns of intergroup behaviour" (Byrne & Carter, 1996, 2003). A protracted conflict can be understood through the prism of a Rubik's Cube® where each side of the cube symbolizes a factor and changing one side can change the other sides as well (Byrne, Carter, & Senehi, 2003). Only together and in interaction with each other does a holistic picture become possible (see Figure 1 below). This analytical framework provides a way of looking at a specific conflict from multiple perspectives at the same time, including both the interactions and simultaneity of the issues considered (Byrne, Carter, & Senehi, 2003; Byrne & Keashly, 2000). Such a deep and complexified understanding of a conflict is necessary if local and external peacebuilding intervention is to contribute to building positive peace and to avoid unintended adverse effects (Autesserre, 2021; Galtung, 1996; Lederach, 1997; Mac Ginty, 2008). Before applying the analytical Social Cube framework to the N-K conflict, the Cube's six sides are now explained in more detail. While each of the Cube's sides have their own focus and characteristics, no definitive lines can be drawn between them as all these dimensions relate to and overlap with each other. The clear distinctions drawn for the sake of this model need to be seen as to some extent artificial and permeable **(**Byrne & Carter, 1996).

Figure 1:

The Social Cube (Byrne & Carter, 2003, p. 765)



The **History** facet of the Social Cube considers which events led up to and have since shaped a conflict. It focuses on how each side interprets past events, and how the past is used to justify current claims to territory, to strengthen cohesion within one's own group while fostering fear, hostility, and mistrust towards other groups, and how (perceived) past victimization and suffering is used to justify future violence (Byrne & Nadan, 2011). Byrne and Nadan (2011) note that each group in a conflict typically recounts its own history as a "golden past" (Smith, 2009) by mythologizing the group's origins with national heroes and past events that become stylized as "chosen glories" or "chosen traumas" (Volkan, 1997) and are passed on intergenerationally via folklore, stories, and school textbooks (Senehi, 2002). The golden past narratives usually exclude the other group and its perspectives of the past, while at the same time the "transgenerational transmission of trauma" (Volkan, 1997) ensures continued feelings of victimization and threat, which in turn are used to justify and legitimize present and future violence (Byrne & Nadan, 2011, p. 64). The greater the disparity between interpretations of the past by the conflict groups, the more likely it is for these histories to increase hostility between these groups (Byrne & Keashly, 2000).

Religion as another side of the Social Cube explores how in the context of intergroup (ethnic) conflict, religion can become an instrument used as a clear marker of identity and culture, contributing to differentiation and segregation between conflict groups, both ideologically and materially (Byrne & Nadan, 2011). Byrne and Nadan (2011) show how the belief of being "God's Chosen People" (Smith, 2004) can entitle an ethnic group to control a certain territory. Having extremist notions of good and evil based on religious categories can reduce the chances for compromise between groups regarding sharing territory and peaceful co-existence, while differences between religious moderates and extremists often lead to intra-group conflict.

Demographics pays attention to how the tyranny of numbers can influence the trajectory of a conflict. In many conflicts considered ethnic, rival groups perceive themselves to be a minority, either in the specific territory contested or in the wider region. They often feel existentially threatened of being dominated and oppressed, if not annihilated by the majority; a phenomenon referred to as "double minority and double majority" (Byrne & Carter, 1996; Byrne & Nadan, 2011). Changes in population growth relative to the other group are often perceived as either a threat or an opportunity thereby influencing a group's perception of the conflict (Byrne & Keashly, 2000). Given that minority and majority groups might consider themselves a minority at risk and recall past traumatic events of violence, these groups tend to develop a "siege mentality," leading to a lack of security and trust and a reduced preparedness to compromise on issues perceived as existential (Bar-Tal, 2011). Further, the drawing of clear political and geographical boundaries between groups reduces opportunities for constructive encounters (Byrne & Carter, 1996; Byrne & Senehi, 2012).

The **Political** dimension considers how the exclusion from and unequal distribution of power between one group and another through "direct, cultural, and structural" or hidden violence

(Galtung, 1996) increases the potential for open conflict and exclusive nationalist ideologies to thrive (Byrne & Nadan, 2011). Often, a minority group in a territory is largely excluded from decision-making processes, as well as heavily policed by the state over which they have little control, often leading to their establishment of a parallel political structure and greatly diverging visions of political futures (Byrne & Nadan, 2011; Byrne & Senehi, 2012). The minority's lack of access to power combined with "structural violence" (Galtung, 1996) embedded in societal structures and institutions that divide people can contribute to the formation of violent extremist groups, claiming to protect their own group while also exercising violence against other groups, using an ethnonationalist ideology to foster in-group unity (Byrne & Keashly, 2000; Byrne & Nadan, 2011).

The **Economic** factors side of the Social Cube refers to unequal access to opportunities and discriminatory policies towards a minority group, leading to exclusion and poverty often forcing people to migrate (Byrne & Keashly, 2000; Byrne & Senehi, 2012). Political leaders often use economic discrimination by the dominant group to ensure the loyalty of the working class of their own group, while poverty and a lack of opportunities and perspective might encourage young men on both sides to join violent extremist groups (Byrne & Nadan, 2011). The dominant group's economic interests are often justified and protected via racist or sectarian institutions relying on force, in a dependent relationship like that of the colonizer and colonized (Byrne & Nadan, 2011). Diasporas can often play an important role in providing both financial resources and weapons to their kin groups or they can also play a deescalating role by providing valuable peacebuilding resources (Byrne & Nadan, 2011).

Finally, **Psychocultural** factors refer to the cultural symbols tied to cognitive and emotional nuances that shape a given conflict and become a central concern in many conflicts

whereby ethnic groups feel their identities are threatened (Byrne & Keashly, 2000). In the context of fear, insecurity, and trauma, individuals often tend to identify strongly with their group and see its interests as their own, while other groups are perceived as homogenous and depicted through stereotypes where the individual is no longer humanized (Byrne & Nadan, 2011; Byrne & Senehi, 2012). Combined with a "siege mentality" and the often-spatial segregation of both groups' members, this makes identification with and understanding of the other unequally harder, contributing further to dehumanization, misperceptions, and stereotyping of the other's actions and intentions (Byrne & Nadan, 2011). National symbols play an important role in strengthening in-group cohesion while marking clear boundaries and hierarchies towards the out-group (Smith, 2009).

These interrelated facets of the Social Cube are applied to the N-K conflict in the next section. Figure 1 illustrates the Social Cube model including the six key dimensions relating to the N-K conflict. Within these facets, it is important to pay attention to the different levels of analysis (structural, agent-structure, and individual), as Russ-Trent has demonstrated in the Integrative-Inductive model (Russ-Trent, 2003). That said, our focus remains with the six macro-level factors (Byrne & Carter, 1996, 2003) while keeping in mind the way different levels of analysis reciprocally influence each other (Russ-Trent, 2003). Given the limited scope of this article, we consider some of the central dimensions of each of the six factors that have remained influential during different stages of the N-K conflict and how they relate to other factors.

Two Histories of Nagorno-Karabakh

The region's history is complicated, a fact reflected in its changing name Nagorno or Nagorny-Karabakh, as the region was called during the Soviet era, Artsakh as it is called by Armenians, or just Karabakh, the name used by Azerbaijanis especially after their recent conquest of the

territory, to emphasize that N-K is now part of the wider Azerbaijani region of Karabakh (Aljazeera 2023; deWaal, 2013; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K) is the name most widely used to refer to this mountainous region of Upper Karabakh and is used here because it connects to the more neutral historical Soviet name for the region, and replicates neither of the names used by the conflicting parties themselves (Artsakh and Karabakh). The history of the wider region and of N-K has been used by both sides to justify their exclusive claims to the territory (deWaal, 2013; Geukjian, 2012; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). It is this mutually exclusive definition of ethnic identity closely tied to a territory that can be observed in many ethnic conflicts that contributes to their intractability by making concessions or compromise appear impossible, as territory is tied to identity and becomes non-negotiable (Agnew, 1989; Northrup; 1989). Essentially, N-K has two histories, each bending facts to support the given narrative or interpreting events differently, highlighting only those fitting into their own ethnonational narrative and ignoring suffering inflicted on others (deWaal, 2013; Geukjian, 2012; Hasanli, 2023; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). Each side has its "chosen traumas" and "chosen glories" (Volkan, 1997). To use Senehi's (2002) idea of "destructive stories," both Armenians and Azerbaijanis have over time created destructive national narratives of competitive suffering that are mutually exclusive and fail to recognize the other group and prevent an identification with and sympathy for the humanity and suffering of its members.

Ancient history is much referred to and manipulated by both groups yet proving who "was there first" is an almost impossible task due to a lack of reliable sources. For all that is known, the region has had an ethnically mixed population that over the centuries was ruled by diverse empires such as Arabs, Armenians, Mongols, Persians, Turks, and Russians (Geukjian, 2012; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). Demographic, economic, and geographic changes led to the first ethnic tensions

that ended in the 1905 Armeno-Tartar war. Some scholars question whether these changes and ensuing tensions were part of an intentional Russian and later Soviet policy of "divide and rule" in the region, or rather the result of less coordinated, opportunistic policy decisions that fueled an already existing conflict (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). Ethnic clashes continued during a short period of independence of both Republics between 1918 and 1920, fueled since the Armenian genocide committed by the Ottomans in 1915 by renewed Armenian fears of their Azerbaijani neighbors, who were perceived by Armenians as 'Turks'. Both Republics were conquered by the Bolsheviks in 1920 and became Soviet Socialist Republics (SSR) within the USSR. The status of N-K, located within Azerbaijan with a majority ethnic Armenian population, remained contested until 1921, when Moscow decided that N-K should be part of the Azerbaijani SSR and it was granted the status of autonomous oblast (province or region). Both parties' central arguments – territorial integrity on the side of Azerbaijan and self-determination on the side of the Armenians – were supposed to be reflected in this decision (Geukjian, 2012; Hasanli, 2023). The N-K Autonomous Oblast was officially declared in 1923, and many see the seeds for future conflict beginning here (Geukjian, 2012; Hasanli, 2023; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). The Armenians of N-K never fully accepted this decision, as can be observed in the numerous letters sent over the decades to petition Moscow to join N-K with Armenia that were ignored by Moscow (DeWaal, 2013). The granting of autonomy arguably allowed for institutions and structures to be built that would eventually turn against Azerbaijan and aim for what the Karabakh Armenians saw as true self-determination by joining N-K with Armenia (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). The situation remained relatively peaceful until the 1980s, and with the weakening of the Soviet state, Armenians began to intensify demands for N-K's union with Armenia that were met with counter-protests by local Azerbaijanis. On February 20, 1988, the local N-K Soviet finally declared its will to join N-K with Armenia. Ethnic

violence at that point had forced the first Azerbaijanis from their homes in N-K and Armenian border regions. It appears to have been some of these displaced people who organized protests in the poor Azerbaijani town of Sumgait on February 26, 1988, which soon erupted into an anti-Armenian pogrom killing at least 26 Armenians and six Azerbaijanis (deWaal, 2013, Yavuz & Gunter, 2022).

The Sumgait riots substantiated an Armenian fear of a second genocide, and it was evoked as proof that the Azerbaijani state cannot be trusted with protecting its Armenian population (Cheterian et al., 2023; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). The Soviet Union's last years were marked by intercommunal violence, insecurity, and pogroms on both sides of the border between both Soviet Republics, forcing almost all of Armenia's Azerbaijani population to flee to Azerbaijan and vice versa in what can be described as ethnic cleansing (Broers & Yemelinova, 2020; deWaal, 2013; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022).

When the USSR eventually dissolved in 1991 and both Armenia and Azerbaijan declared their independence, a full-out war erupted over N-K between Armenia-backed Armenians of N-K and Azerbaijan that lasted until 1994. During the First Karabakh war in February 1992, Azerbaijan experienced its Sumgait when Armenian fighters shot dead 485 unarmed Azeri civilians fleeing from the village of Khojaly (deWaal, 2013). The war ended with Armenia winning N-K, and occupying seven surrounding Azerbaijani districts, amounting to roughly 20 percent of all Azerbaijani territory and displacing all its Azerbaijani population (Broers & Yemelianova, 2020; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). This outcome of the war was perceived as a major humiliation in Azerbaijan and led to the young nation state finding itself enmeshed in a narrative of humiliation, victimhood, and the need for revenge (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). N-K was not recognized as a state

even by Armenia, yet between 1994 and 2020 it operated as a *de-facto* state connected to its EEG kinstate of Armenia via the Lachin-corridor leading through Azerbaijani territory (Broers, 2020).

The conflict continued to influence politics and relations in and between both states, and all attempts at a negotiated settlement failed (Askerov & Ibadoghlu, 2023; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). In September 2020, Azerbaijan started a military offensive against Armenian N-K and by November, when a ceasefire was brokered by Russia, it had retaken almost all its occupied territories, yet N-K itself remained largely under local Armenian control (Askerov & Ibadoghlu, 2023; Yavuz & Gunther, 2022). Border skirmishes continued, and Azerbaijan started blocking the Lachin corridor in 2022, leading to a worsening humanitarian situation for N-K's Armenian civilian population. Azerbaijan launched another attack on N-K on September 19, 2023, taking control of the whole region and causing virtually all its population to flee to Armenia within just a few days (United Nations, 2023).

In all this turbulent and often violent history, the role of past events being evoked to justify further violence and to seek revenge is striking. David Rieff highlights the role societies' collective memories, particularly those who perceive themselves as under existential threat, can play in understanding and shaping present-day politics and actions, especially when they are abused by leaders that use historical half-truths to justify their often-violent actions (Rieff, 2016). Armenian and Azerbaijani societies both embedded their memories of violence in their national history, creating sites of commemoration and national holidays like "Genocide Day" while never acknowledging the suffering of the other side (deWaal, 2013). The traumas remembered serve to justify revenge and violence today - as has been seen in Sumgait, Khojaly, and the second Karabakh war. It remained to be seen, until the recent 2025 peace accord was signed, how long Armenia would have accepted this most recent loss of N-K (Askerov & Ibadoghlu, 2023).

Reporters quoted an Armenian refugee from N-K saying, “We were there first, Karabakh is ours, we will take it back – and if I don’t live anymore then, it will be my grandsons going to the front” (Jeska, 2023).

Demographics

One aspect of this history of intercommunal and inter-ethnic violence is a deep-rooted fear on both sides of being outnumbered and dominated by the other group (deWaal, 2013; Geukjian, 2012; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022) by a “politics of the womb” (Thomas, 2003). Armenians see Azerbaijanis as “Turks” responsible for the 1915 genocide and are fearful of its repetition as confirmed, from their perspective, by the Sumgait riots and the recent attacks on N-K’s Armenian population (deWaal, 2013; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). Armenian scholars called the recent blockade and subsequent conquest of N-K a “second Armenian genocide” (Cheterian et al., 2023), seeing it as a continuation of the events of 1915. In the words of Volkan (1997), this ongoing and authentic fear of Armenians of a renewed genocide can be understood because of the “transgenerational transmission of trauma,” where a collective trauma experienced by a society is not processed by the survivors and is instead passed onto following generations to resolve who themselves did not witness the event itself (Volkan, 1997). The anti-Azerbaijani sentiments resulting from this Armenian fear on the other hand made Azerbaijanis feel insecure and worried of being dominated by Armenians in their own country (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022).

This mutual insecurity and ensuing tensions from changing border demarcations can be understood through the lens of a “double-minority and double majority” constellation (Byrne & Carter 1996, 2003) as Armenians were a majority in N-K but a minority in overall Azerbaijan, whereas Azerbaijanis were a minority in N-K but a majority in overall Azerbaijan. N-K’s Armenians felt culturally and economically disadvantaged in Azerbaijan, and N-K’s Azerbaijanis

felt disadvantaged within N-K (deWaal, 2013). During the Soviet era, the N-K Autonomous Oblast was about 95 percent Armenian, yet with Armenian out-migration, falling birth rates and increasing Azerbaijani birth-rates politics started to shift in favour of Azerbaijanis. This was partly due to an intentional Azerbaijani policy of settling Azerbaijanis in N-K's larger cities, as well as to the outmigration of mostly educated Armenians (deWaal, 2013). As the region's autonomous status was justified with its majority Armenian population, this shifting balance is likely to have contributed to ethnic tensions in the 1980s and the increasing demand of N-K Armenians for union with Armenia (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022).

Demographics, along with history, have been used to justify the claims of both sides over N-K's territory. Yet the region had a mixed population for centuries, and numbers varied greatly over various time periods and even seasonally, as most Turkic peoples were nomads and came to N-K only during the summer (Broers & Yemelinova, 2020; deWaal, 2013; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). Major displacements have taken place in the wake of the violence that emerged from the 1980s onward. Before the first Karabakh war, 120,000 Armenians lived in N-K, and roughly 800,000 Azerbaijanis were forced from their homes in N-K and the occupied regions during and after the war (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). At least for a while, this made Azerbaijan the country with the largest proportion of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) relative to its size (deWaal, 2013). At the same time, 200,000 Armenians were forced out of Azerbaijan in a process that ethnically cleansed each state of the other group (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). And now again, virtually all N-K's Armenian population fled the advance of the Azerbaijani military (Azerbaijan offered to integrate them into Azerbaijan; an offer Armenians said they could not trust) (Mirovalev, 2023), and might soon be replaced with those Azerbaijanis who had to leave the region in 1994 and have since lived as IDPs in Azerbaijan. DeWaal (2013) goes as far as to argue that this "mutual insecurity" caused by a lack

of trust in the other group's willingness to protect them, influenced by shifting demographics and "double minorities and double majorities" within both states and particularly in N-K, was a key factor in leading to violence, war, and intractable conflict (deWaal, 2013). Changing demographics influenced the writing of history on both sides, with each group implementing intentional policies to increase their own population, and the perception of being a minority led each group to turn to nationalist narratives offering them protection and securing their identities.

Religion

Although rarely evoked by either side as being a cause for enmity, religious factors enter the conflict as well. Armenians were portrayed as the first Christian nation located between Christian Europe and the Muslim states of Central Asia (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). This precarious geographical location inspired views of Armenians being at the "gates of protecting Christianity" (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022), a view apparently shared and perpetuated by Christian Russia in 1913, when it settled Armenians into a then majority-Muslim region to manifest its rule. Ronald Suny argues that Christianity is an integral part of Armenian identity because when Armenians embraced a Monophysite Christianity and developed a common language, it made them a distinct people in the fourth century AD (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). The Armenian diaspora sees Armenians in the homeland as "besieged Christians" (deWaal, 2013) constantly under threat by their Shi'a Muslim neighbors in Azerbaijan that they perceive as holding an irreconcilable position towards them. This perception was expressed by Armenia's second president, Robert Kocharian, when he stated that Armenian Christian culture and Azerbaijani Islamic culture and their peoples were incompatible (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). This "siege mentality" was observed in other ethnic conflicts involving majority-minority constellations like the Protestants in Northern Ireland, the Afrikaners in South Africa, and the Israelis in Israel (Bar-Tal, 2011; Byrne & Carter, 2003; Siniver, 2012). Armenian

and many Western and Russian media outlets employ a narrative that the conflict is at its core a confrontation between Islam and Christianity. In contrast, Azeris do not appear to perceive the conflict as containing any significant religious connotation and reject such a narrative as orientalist and often biased towards Christianity (and Armenia) (Shafiyev, 2022; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). Religion does not appear to play a role in dominant framings of the conflict in Azerbaijan. However, the country's internal authoritarian repression in combination with the N-K conflict was used by Azerbaijan's Aliyev-regime to promote a nationalist identification with the state and the regime among Azeris, instead of with Islam, with the aim of strengthening the regime while potentially weakening opposing religious authorities (Altstadt, 2020; Todorova, 2023).

Different groups searching to stabilize their identity often frame and define their group (the in-group) in contrast and even in enmity with another group (the out-group) (Byrne, Carter, & Senehi, 2003; Russ-Trent, 2003). For example, Horowitz (1985) describes how ethnic identity and belonging to an ethnic group is often a more salient and crucial identity category than others as it is perceived as given by birth and therefore it is unchangeable. What further fuels the dichotomous and antagonistic in-group/out-group framing between ethnic groups is they "compete" not only in a certain area of society or at a given time, but in "lifelong games" where losing to the other group would equal "an apparently permanent disability" (Horowitz, 1985, p. 147). While neither side in this conflict makes it their main argument that the other group is trying to convert or assimilate their group to their respective religion, the idea of being "besieged" (deWaal, 2013) reflects an existential fear of losing out to the other group. The fact that Armenians are mostly Christians and Azerbaijanis are mostly Shi'a Muslims is used to highlight that both groups simply are not compatible and cannot share the territory (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). How much religion is tied to group identity, history, and territory further becomes evident in the repurposing or outright

destruction of religious sites in N-K by either side currently controlling the region to deny the other group's connection to the land while manifesting their own group identity (Horák & Hoch, 2023). Religion plays less of a role in the authoritarian state of Azerbaijan (Altstadt, 2020), and Azerbaijan rejects an Armenian narrative often adopted by Western media about the conflict being a standoff between Christianity and Islam (Shafiyev, 2022; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). Yet in Armenia the Armenian church played an influential role in framing Armenian identity around victimization, as being Armenian in the church's reasoning meant being Christian, and Armenians were not safe at the hands of "Muslim Turks" (Yavuz & Gunther, 2022). This essentialist presentation of both cultures as inherently incompatible coupled with the conflict narrative as representing a greater competition between both religions made the possibility for finding common ground rather challenging.

Economic Factors

Economic considerations led the USSR in 1921 to decide that N-K should become an autonomous region within the Azerbaijani SSR as it is separated from Armenia by a stretch of mountains and is economically connected to Azerbaijan (deWaal, 2013; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). Azerbaijanis used those connections as an argument for their claim to control N-K (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). However, during the later years of the Soviet Union, N-K Armenians argued that they were economically neglected and discriminated against by the Azerbaijani government (deWaal, 2013; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). However, the latter fact is debateable as official statistics point out that N-K had a higher standard of living than the rest of Azerbaijan (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). In addition, deWaal (2013) makes the argument that N-K Armenians, due to their overall minority status, were excluded from black market activities in the region so that only Azerbaijanis benefitted from the underground economy. Local disparities between wealthy Armenian families and poor displaced

Azerbaijani workers may also have contributed to the 1988 riots in Sumgait (deWaal, 2013, Yavuz & Gunter, 2022).

It is important to explore economic factors to understand why the resolution of this conflict was so difficult to achieve. Besides internal factors, external actors and interveners in the N-K conflict were, and are, often motivated by economic and geopolitical interests more than by a desire to resolve the conflict. Azerbaijan is rich in oil, and a pipeline via Georgia and Turkey opened in 2006 that transports Central Asian oil to the borders of Europe without going through Russian territory (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). This reality has led Western countries, including Turkey, to keep good relationships with the Azerbaijani government (Altstadt, 2020; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). It was money from an oil-deal with British Petroleum (BP) in 2003 that allowed Azerbaijan to build up its army to eventually control N-K, and it recently benefited from the European Union (EU) turning away from Russian gas, making deals with Azerbaijan instead for access to its oil (Osborn, 2023).

Russia, arguably the most influential actor and third-party intermediary in the whole region, was seen as exploiting the conflict and intentionally "freezing" instead of trying to resolve it so that it can pursue its own economic and geopolitical interests (deWaal, 2013; Geukjian, 2012; Ohanyan, 2020; Schumacher, 2016; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). Russia kept both countries in an insecure limbo by following a geostrategically informed realpolitik and selling weapons to both sides. Russia tried to tie Armenia economically tighter to the Russian state because it does not have the same natural resources and economy that Azerbaijan does as Armenia had closed its borders with neighboring Azerbaijan and Turkey (Schumacher, 2016). This becomes clear as many major and essential Armenian firms are owned by Russia (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). With at least one

higher mediator having an economic and geopolitical stake in keeping the conflict active rather than transforming it, reaching a negotiated agreement became unequally harder.

Finally, the importance of the conflict in both states is reflected in their military spending (deWaal, 2013; Schumacher, 2016; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). Being prepared for war and keeping the "enemy" at bay was more important for the Armenian and Azerbaijan governments than caring for the welfare and development of the population. Azerbaijan's military expenditure relative to its GDP even exceeded that of the United States (US) in 2016, and Armenia has also invested significant resources in its military (Schumacher, 2016). At the same time however, foreign investors in the region were hesitant due to the continued risk of war, while borders between regional neighbors were closed for any (legal) trade, and welfare within both states decreased (deWaal, 2013, Iskandaryan, 2020; Schumacher 2016). Economic considerations influenced the conflict in its emergence, on the intercommunal as well as the international level and were a major hindrance to its constructive resolution.

Political Factors

Many see the fault line in the conflict beginning in 1921, when N-K was created by the USSR as an autonomous region within the Azerbaijani SSR (Geukjian, 2012; Hasanli, 2023; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). In the following years, its boundaries were drawn to include as many Armenian and as little Azerbaijani villages as possible (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). Boundaries are important in segregating communities and fostering hatred instead of reducing sectarian tendencies (Byrne & Carter, 1996, 2003). Autonomy allowed the N-K Armenians to build institutions separate from those of Azerbaijan that later assisted in supporting their claim for self-determination and arguably allowed an underground movement supporting a union with Armenia to form and arm itself (deWaal, 2013). Segregation between both communities became even more entrenched after the

Armenian victory in 1994, and the policies of ethnic cleansing practiced by both sides during the first Karabakh war, that continues today. DeWaal (2013) addresses the dangers of segregation, as younger generations of Armenians and Azerbaijanis have never lived in mixed communities, and all they are exposed to about the other group is a narrative of hatred and incompatibility.

Domestic politics in each state have also heavily influenced the course of the conflict. When both Soviet Republics gained independence in 1991, right at the onset of the first Karabakh war, the foundations of these states were built on the conflict itself – a story of victory for Armenians, and one of loss and humiliation for Azerbaijanis (deWaal, 2013; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). How much the fate of N-K influenced Armenian politics is reflected in the fact that many of its presidents were from Karabakh and were actively involved in the movement to unify N-K with Armenia (Iskandaryan, 2020). Armenian presidents such as Levon Ter-Petrosyan and Robert Kocharian were leaders in the Karabakh movement before entering Armenian politics. Armenia's current prime minister, Nikol Vovayi Pashinyan's public depiction as "traitor" after losing the second Karabakh war in 2020 almost cost him his political position (Iskandaryan, 2020; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). Even though Pashinyan originally claimed he wanted to resolve the conflict, he soon shifted towards a more aggressive rhetoric threatening Azerbaijan and Turkey (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022).

Schumacher (2016) narrates that the N-K conflict has served leaders in both states to hold onto and legitimize their power in times of domestic economic and political tensions. Armenia and Azerbaijan have witnessed their economies decline, especially after 2008, which led to major demonstrations that were repressed by force in Azerbaijan and led to a regime change in Armenia in 2018 (Schumacher, 2016; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). The need to compensate for a lack of "performance legitimacy" (Schumacher, 2016) domestically can be observed as the reason for

Pashinyan's change in rhetoric, and Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev's escalation of the conflict in 2016, 2020, and 2023. On a personal level, Azerbaijan's recent victory was described by the country's ambassador in Britain as "President Aliyev […] deliver[ing] the testament of his father" (Osborn, 2023). Heydar Aliyev, who was Azerbaijan's president until his death in 2003, had promised displaced Azerbaijanis that one day they would be able to return to their homes in N-K.

Finally, next to domestic politics and the personal motivations of leaders, international geopolitics and global events in general influenced the conflict. The state with the greatest geopolitical interests in the region is Russia. The decision to make N-K autonomous within Azerbaijan is interpreted by many analysts as a carefully planned Russian strategy of "divide and rule" to keep both Republics under control (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). Even though there is no evidence that this was indeed part of a larger plan rather than just playing opportunistic politics, Russia, especially after 1991, benefited from the conflict in a geo-strategic sense. Russia signed a bilateral defense treaty with Armenia and has two military bases in Armenia, making the small state relatively dependent on Russian support (Schumacher, 2016; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022).

After border skirmishes in 2016 and 2020 between Armenia and Azerbaijan, it was Russian "peacekeeping" troops that were stationed in N-K (Schumacher 2016, Yavuz & Gunter 2022). As Nerses Kopalyan reveals, Russia did not intervene in the 2020 and 2023 Azerbaijani attacks on N-K because it felt Pashinyan's more pro-Western regime in Yerevan was slipping from its control and it hoped that an Armenian military defeat would lead to a pro-Russian regime change (Cheterian et al., 2023). On a global scale, Russia's distraction in Ukraine was certainly a motivating factor for Azerbaijan to strike in 2023 (Osborn, 2023). Additionally, Turkey's President Erdoğan pledged full support for Azerbaijan, arguably making it more unlikely for Russia or any Western states to intervene on behalf of Armenians and risk conflict with Turkey (Yavuz & Gunter,

2022). Further, Vicken Cheterian articulates that the US, instead of pushing harder for a peaceful resolution, had an interest in letting Azerbaijan take back its territories and N-K to remove the need for Russian peacekeepers in the region and possibly to lead to Armenia closing its Russian military bases, thereby limiting Russia's influence in the region **(**Cheterian et al., 2023). President Trump changed this equation to counter Iranian and Russian influence and to influence trade in the south Caucasus as part of the Trump route for international peace and prosperity (TRIPP).

The involvement of international actors pursuing their own interests in the region was a hindrance to a peaceful resolution to the conflict (Boban & Blažević, 2023; Rossi, 2017). After Azerbaijan's victory in 2023, the leaders of both countries engaged in bilateral negotiations, which in March 2025 led to a draft peace deal (Aljazeera, 2025a). However, the deal was signed in August 2025, as delicate questions like border demarcations as well as President Aliyev's demand for Armenia to amend its constitution were resolved (Aljazeera, 2025a). Given Russia's previous engagement and relatively close relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan, it is noteworthy that its relations with both countries deteriorated over the last few years, and it was entirely left out of current negotiations. Instead, new actors like the United Arab Emirates have stepped up in facilitating meetings between both leaders, while Turkey has further strengthened its ties with Azerbaijan and is looking to improve its relations with neighboring Armenia (Aljazeera, 2025b; Vakulina, 2025). It remains to be seen whether the involvement of new third-party intermediaries can achieve what decades of international diplomacy could not – to implement the signed agreement that can lead to lasting peace and stability in the region.

Psychocultural Factors

The physical separation of Armenians and Azerbaijanis following the ethnic cleansing during the first Karabakh war manifested in one of the world's most militarized border zones that

arguably began in people's minds (Babayev et al., 2020). In times of political insecurity and social upheaval, people tend to look for identity security by creating clear "us" and "them" group boundaries that can be exploited by "ethnic entrepreneurs" (Russ-Trent, 2003; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022) for their own goals. This construction of an "ingroup" and an "outgroup" is generally achieved through intentional rhetoric denigrating each side, using the commemoration of symbolic or mythicized events as cultural symbols to create a homogenous group or national narrative perpetuated through folklore, stories, and myth as well as "chosen trauma" and "time collapse" where the past becomes as important as the present and a past trauma is reinforced through rituals and symbols (Russ-Trent, 2003; Smith, 2009; Volkan, 1997). All these elements can be found in the Armenia and Azerbaijan conflict.

A striking fact deWaal (2013) uncovered in his meetings with people from both sides of the N-K conflict was that hardly any of those who remember living in mixed communities have any personal feelings of hatred against individuals from the other group. He recounts stories of people not shooting an enemy because they recognised a friend or neighbour from childhood days (deWaal, 2013). It is not their personal experience or feelings that perpetuate violence and hatred, but their identification with a group that is constructed as "incompatible" (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022, p. 115) with the other group. This incompatibility highlights the role community (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022) as well as political leaders can play beyond structural elements in fueling conflict as Russ-Trent's (2003) inclusion of the individual level of analysis shows. Both groups' national identities were constructed around the N-K conflict and are in dichotomous antagonism with each other. There is also the symbolic meaning of the region of Karabakh itself. Azerbaijani's see N-K as the "cradle" of their culture and "birthplace" of their national identity (Schumacher, 2016). In contrast, Armenians believe that N-K represents the endurance and ancient origin of the Armenian people

throughout history (Schumacher, 2016). This conception of identity made it hard for either side to make concessions about a region and territory that is perceived as crucial to national identity. Anthony D. Smith (2009) points out the essential role cultural symbols as well as what he labels "mythomoteurs" or myths of common ancestry constitutive of an ethnic group, play in forming and keeping a group's shared ethnic identity over generations. These symbols can be national like flags and national anthems (Smith, 2009) as well as the land itself, rendering it basically non-negotiable for both sides.

Consequently, the Armenian original trauma story lies in the 1915 genocide, an event remembered annually and deeply engrained in Armenian collective memory. The events surrounding N-K have been interpreted in the framework of genocidal intentions against Armenians by "Turks," including Azerbaijanis who were not involved in the 1915 Ottoman massacres, justifying Armenian's hyper vigilance and pro-active measures of self-defence (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). When Russia and the West failed to intervene in 2020 and 2023, many Armenians saw their national identity as that of a chronic victim and "loneliest state" (Jeska, 2023) confirmed, and perceived Azerbaijan's actions as a second Armenian genocide that the international community did not recognize (Cheterian et al., 2023). In contrast, Azerbaijani national identity is often traced back to more recent times and as having been heavily shaped by the loss of N-K and surrounding territories in 1994 and the ensuing humiliation of displacement, the Khojaly massacre, and the N-K border as an ongoing reminder of its defeat (Yavuz & Gunter, 2022).

Azerbaijan has its own "Genocide Day" to remember the suffering of the Azerbaijani people at the hands of Armenians, engraining in people's minds the vulnerability of Azerbaijani independence and sovereignty that is ultimately challenged by Armenia's claims on N-K (deWaal, 2013). By labelling the killings and displacements of Azerbaijanis throughout the 20th century as

genocide, then-president Heydar Aliyev made it clear that "Genocide Day" was at least as much about commemoration as about the conflict with Armenia in a "duel of martyred nations" (deWaal, 2013).

Both nations constructed a national history with N-K as its symbolic origin, based on martyrdom and suffering at the hands of the other (Iskandaryan, 2020). Historians on both sides wrote treatises based on fiction or half-truths intending to prove that their own nation was there first, that Armenians were really Azerbaijanis or that Azerbaijanis were settlers with no right to the region (deWaal, 2013; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022). Even when people had no immediate personal reasons to hate or fear members of the other group, these aggressive narratives of ethnic incompatibility and each group's need for revenge among other factors led to an escalation into intercommunal violence that finally ended in a "war between neighbors" (deWaal, 2013). Framing the conflict as an existential crisis between both groups and not over material issues internalized the belief in each group that they are ancient enemies leaving little space for commonality and a middle ground to emerge on which to build and reach peaceful agreement (Altstadt, 2020; Yavuz & Gunter, 2022).

Conclusion

To conclude, the application of the Social Cubism model indicates that the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over N-K cannot be reduced to questions about territory, regional and economic power, or ancient hatreds and trauma. Instead, the Social Cubism analytical model provides a holistic picture of six continually integrated parts below (see Table 1 below).

Table 1*: Key issues in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict*

Conflict Factor	**The Situation in Nagorno-Karabakh**
Historical Factors	Both Armenia and Azerbaijan have constructed divergent ethnonational narratives, claiming exclusive historical rights to N-K and excluding the other side's perspective. Past suffering is engrained in national memory as "chosen traumas" and used to justify further violence.
Demographic Factors	"Double minority" and "double majority" describes how both groups perceive themselves as a minority under threat of domination and oppressed by the other perceived dominant group. Ethnic cleansing has created clear boundaries between both groups. Population decline increased Armenian fears of domination and genocide. In contrast, Azeris felt threatened in their independence and territorial integrity by the presence of an armed border within their state and the occupation of 20 percent of Azerbaijani territory after 1994 and the resulting displacement and loss of N-K.
Religious Factors	Religion is used by ethnic entrepreneurial leaders as a marker of difference and incompatibility. Armenians perceive themselves as "besieged Christians" surrounded by hostile Muslims, while Azeris largely reject a framing of the conflict in religious Christians-vs-Muslims terms and do not see religion as being a driving factor in the conflict.
Economic Factors	Economic considerations contributed to the Soviet Union's decision to make N-K a part of Azerbaijan. Economic interests of outside powers like Russia and Turkey prevented constructive engagement. Differences in prosperity have contributed to inter-ethnic hostilities and claims of discrimination.
Political Factors	Domestic leaders gained political capital from the conflict and have used it to silence internal criticism. Boundaries contributed to segregation. Geopolitical interests of outside powers prevented constructive

	engagement between the people of N-K until the recent U.S. intervention.
Psychocultural Factors	Ethnonational narratives of incompatible identities, fear and insecurity incited by ethnic leaders, and the construction of clear "us" and "them" boundaries using cultural symbols contributed to a climate of hatred and irreconcilability.

Adopted from Byrne & Carter (2003), p. 766.

These six dimensions figure into the causation and ongoing development of the conflict, yet it is really their interaction and simultaneity across different levels that help us understand the complexity of the conflict. Histories passed on within each group and institutionalized memory shaped psychocultural perceptions of the "other" as an enemy. Demographic fears influenced political decisions and were in turn instrumentalized by leaders. Economic status and prospects became intertwined with demographic and political struggles, as current economic, political, and religious oppression were justified with past inequities.

Applying the Social Cubism analytical model therefore allows a multi-perspective, multi-level, and multi-modal examination of the N-K conflict that highlights the different contributing factors to the conflict, and most importantly their interactions over time. This analysis reveals some striking similarities with other ethnic conflicts like Cyprus, Kashmir, and Northern Ireland (Byrne & Carter, 1996, 2003) and the role of higher mediators and EEG third party intermediaries (Byrne 2000, 2007). This is not to say that one conflict is like the other. However, using this analytical model does highlight certain shared general features like (1) the involvement of a colonial power, (2) two groups defining themselves as nations continually threatened by each other, (3) each group tied to a different neighboring nation state or "EEG," with an external third-party intermediary acting as a "higher mediator" (Byrne, 2000, 2007), (4) an antagonistic ingroup and outgroup, (5) double minorities and double majorities, and (6) the physical, institutional, and economic

separation of people. While context limits direct transferability of peacebuilding practices, lessons from similar conflicts can to a limited degree still inform new peacebuilding approaches, as well as help develop preventative strategies. While the situation in the N-K conflict may have significantly changed with the recent Azerbaijani military intervention and the ethnic cleansing of the region's ethnic Armenian population and the peace accord signed by both state's political leaders in 2025, our analysis shows that none of the underlying issues – distrust, fear, structural separation - have been fully resolved. Using a Social Cubism analysis, allows for a deeper and more nuanced understanding that may guide third party intermediaries (local people, states or internationals) to use more holistic peacebuilding approaches to reach a just resolution.

A thorough analysis of this conflict is not a goal in itself – rather, as recent peacebuilding and conflict transformation literature has argued (Autesserre, 2021; Lederach, 1997; Mac Ginty, 2008), a complexified understanding of a given conflict is necessary to design well-informed multi-dimensional, multi-modal, and multi-level peacebuilding methods and processes that are based on local needs, practices, and perspectives and avoid unintended negative outcomes often caused by applying what Mac Ginty (2008) has called the external one-size-fits-all "IKEA model of peacebuilding." A long history of failed peace negotiations in the N-K conflict has demonstrated that any proposal that ignored any of the factors discussed in this article was likely to fall victim to the interests of internal or external actors or to be rejected by the population (Babayev et al., 2020; deWaal, 2013; Yavuz & Gunter 2022).

The current peace negotiations between the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan, Pashinyan and Aliyev, are once again largely limited at the moment to elite level track one negotiations about the future status of N-K and peaceful relations between both countries. Civil society will need to engage both communities in meaningful peacebuilding ways to address deeper underlying issues

that have fueled the conflict in the past. While a peacebuilding proposal lies beyond the scope of this paper, a complexified understanding as encouraged by this analysis is essential for designing locally grounded, multi-level interventions that avoid the pitfalls of one-size-fits-all solutions and better support durable conflict transformation.

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Minding A Social Distance: A Dialogue About Researching Strategically Undervalued Communities In An Ethnopolitical Conflict During A Global Pandemic

Sean Byrne, Robert C. Mizzi, Nancy E. Hansen, and T. Sheppard-Luangkhot

Introduction

In 1970, C. Wright Mills wrote, "Perhaps the most fruitful distinction with which the sociological imagination works is between the 'personal troubles of milieu' and 'the public issues of social structure.' This distinction is an essential tool of the sociological imagination and a feature of all classic work in social science" (p. 14). As critical qualitative researchers seeking the social emancipation of strategically undervalued communities through research, we found Wright Mills' point relevant when reflecting on our research experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our research intended to explore marginalized perspectives of how peacebuilding impacts lives in Northern Ireland (NI), whether inclusion/exclusion tendencies prior to the conflict carried forth into the peace process, or if there was some form of social change resulting from the conflict. We had planned to conduct interviews with various disability and LGBTQI+ Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Belfast and Derry. This research is a continuation of the partnerships and connections with researchers and CSOs that the researchers have developed over considerable years, a 2017 grant funded research project on marginalized communities as well as Byrne's 30-year research with NI peacebuilding CSOs. While marginality is a broad and interconnected concept, we focused on the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other minoritized sexualities and genders (LGBTQI+) and disabled people in NI after

the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement came into effect. We find these two groups often occupy the periphery both in social research and in social policy, and yet they interact with and support one another. Kimberlé Crenshaw's (2017) concept of intersectionality suggests that individuals can be a part of many communities and have overlapping identities and varying experiences of power, which is a useful concept for our research.

Intersectionality underpins this research, given that there are issues (ableism, ageism, classism, queerphobia, racism, sexism, xenophobia, etc.) that cut across identity differences and restrict access to rights and privileges in civil society. This research aimed to paint a different picture of what it means to reconcile with victims of the conflict and how people integrate and interact with members of their various communities. Our intention was to conduct a series of semi-structured interviews with individuals from both the disability and LGBTQI+ communities in NI, and with those in allyship who facilitate social services that support these communities, to help us reach our research goals. Previous research found that the NI peace process excludes both groups (Byrne et al., 2018).

Blinne (2016) acknowledged that controversial and complex research projects face adversity in academe, such as experiencing strenuous peer review. We extend on this view and suggest that significantly changing research contexts can also challenge critical research. Similar to other researchers across the globe, the height of the COVID-19 pandemic brought our project to a standstill. Lockdowns also meant shutting down research projects that involved people as study participants. In spring 2021, we attempted to resurrect the NI research in an adapted, virtual form. This decision was not taken lightly, as "Zoom fatigue" dominated much of online interaction during the pandemic, which meant that people have inhibited spontaneity, restricted mobility, and awkward conversations, among other tropes (Asgaard, 2022). As researchers based

in Canada, our adaptation meant attempting to conduct online interviews with strategically undervalued communities in an over-researched society, which we found challenging.

The purpose of this article is to discuss, as researchers, why the research was brought to a halt, the difficulty in recruiting participants from strategically undervalued communities that were exasperated by the pandemic to explore their perspectives of Brexit and the 30-year Troubles, the benefits of the interdisciplinary research team, and the challenges of the research process that can inform other researchers studying marginalized people in divided societies. As we demonstrate below, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of intersectional minority and multicultural policies and continuous public dialogue as critical for the inclusion and participation of strategically undervalued communities (Zagar, 2022). We came to a realization that we needed to revisit our goals regarding what research means for the communities we seek information from, and to consider how we can better serve these communities.

Below is a dialogue that the researchers structured to help us organize and analyze the problems we encountered during the pandemic. Our critical, reflexive approach to the dialogue attends to problems within a complex, ever-changing research scenario, which is regulated by university policies, and seeks new ways of improving practice (Frølunde et al., 2017), especially as global uncertainty and instability become more pervasive. By being reflexive, we suggest certain inclusion and exclusion tendencies in "doing" research that are seemingly in flux. We created each discussion question to operationalize the dialogue and used Google Groups to help organize the dialogue. After the dialogue, we offer several findings and conclude the paper.

Dialogue

Question 1: Based on our research experiences thus far, how has the COVID -19 pandemic, peace fatigue, Brexit and the political tension in NI affected our difficulty recruiting participants among the LGBTQI+ and disability community? Why is it difficult to research a society like Northern Ireland with an ongoing protracted conflict?

Sean: The transitional liminal peacebuilding process is complex, emancipatory, uncertain, untidy, and multidimensional (Mac Ginty, 2006). It includes a diversity of local actors and stories as people make meaning of micro and macro events as they unfold on the ground (Mac Ginty, 2006; Marijan, 2017; Senehi, 2022). Local resistance, stories, and experiences are entrenched in everyday networks, practices, relations, and spaces (Scott, 2020). Critical and emancipatory peacebuilding centres on agency, diversity, empowerment, inclusion, recognition, resiliency, and local grassroots approaches to peacebuilding and social justice (Byrne & Thiessen, 2019; Thiessen, 2011). Local people often do not own peacebuilding processes due to the power asymmetry with more powerful state and external actors. Bringing the local back in and including strategically undervalued groups is vital in building sustainable peace in post civil war and protracted ethnic conflict contexts like NI (Byrne et al., 2018). For example, positive social change movements like Cara Friend, TransgenderNI, Queer Space, Disability Action Northern NI, and Disability Sport NI worked toward social justice during Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic while enduring peace fatigue as NI has become an over-researched laboratory. Enlarging and enriching the local in NI entails "broadened universalist" versus "insular particularist mindsets," as well as prior "socialization experiences" and the development of "particular personal traits" that are essential elements in motivating people to engage in either intergroup or "within-group peacebuilding" and civil society activism in NI (Rafferty, 2016). A

"critical education" structure would generate a cosmopolitan and "common humanity mindset" in NI as local context shapes people (Rafferty, 2016). For example, young people attending NI's integrated schools develop a "shared umbrella identity" that transcends the narrow, insular ethnonationalist identities associated with segregated schools (Byrne, 1997).

Consequently, inclusive and decolonial research must reflect the researcher's empathy, insight, and genuine desire to improve the conditions of strategically undervalued communities by deconstructing unjust structures as well as listening to local stories discussing the complexity of conflict and the peacebuilding agency of ordinary people (Thiessen & Byrne, 2017; Tuhiwai Smith, 2021) in societies like NI transitioning out of direct violence and navigating that transition from war to a cold and often liminal frosty peace. One of the authors identifies as disabled, two authors identify as LGBTQI+, and the fourth comes from Ireland. Their experiences, identities, and stories also inform this research. The researchers are also aware of their privileged positions as external researchers and the power dynamic that exists in the interaction with the disabled and LGBTQI+ communities they are researching. Storytelling is, therefore, both an important qualitative research method and intercultural peacebuilding practice (Senehi, 2009, 2022) to use with marginalized groups. Marginalized movements' compelling stories about the legacies of the past and the challenges of the future are a part of their traditional activism and highlight the significance of doing research with strategically undervalued groups whose experiences and ideas about their challenges, sense of community, and everyday living must inform peacebuilding strategies (Senehi, 2019). NI's wisdom keepers are the key "transcultural storytellers" with knowledge about their community's conflicts as well as peacebuilding and reconciliation practices (Senehi, 2009, 2015).

Robert: Sean makes valuable points. Researcher empathy, insight, and desire are practical concepts because they help question what we hope to achieve from conducting research. When I think about this question for our dialogue, the question, *what is research*? comes to mind. Is it about elevating those voices that have harsh life experiences with social and systemic marginalization? Could it also be about the process: designing a research project, strategizing participant recruitment, collaborating with others, meeting new stakeholders, writing grant proposals, among other tasks? This process is just as important as generating data, and there are often stories embedded within each. Facing challenges towards generating data are data too! A multivocal autoethnography (Mizzi, 2010), for example, can elucidate the challenges facing a research project and how we interact with the research project as parents, adult learners, researchers, and as activists. That is important data because we can now unpack what happens when we *do* research and what does research *do* to us.

Not engaging study participants due to a host of challenges is not a setback but perhaps an illumination into the urgent and deeply critical work that needs to happen. Challenges to research cause us to take the standpoint of the "Other": how to understand their settings, how people come to it and live in it, and what may be some of the more pressing difficulties facing the lives of strategically undervalued people (Delamont, 2020). Indeed, there can still be insight even in over researched societies.

Nancy: In Hansen (2020), I discuss the realities of doing field research as a disabled academic. I demonstrate how there is a pervasive and dominant structural ableism in academe in general, which limits how disabled researchers conduct their work. Further, and directly related to our work in NI, for the first time, I was able to work with non-disabled colleagues in the field. I did not have to figure out every element of access in advance. We worked on elements of

accessibility both physical and attitudinal as they arose. This collaboration enabled me/us to access spaces and places we would not have gone before noting invisibility and absence; thereby making the research that much richer and wiser.

T: Sean has made some important points. I also wonder about the impact of multiple traumata and how COVID-19 created further trauma, insularity, and mistrust of the "outsider" researcher, particularly for intersectional identities facing a world of extreme inequalities (Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 2017). For disabled people and LGBTQI+ people who have intergenerationally suffered from the Troubles, who have been harmed by structural, cultural, and direct violence (Galtung, 1990), classism, ableism, queerphobia, transphobia, and xenophobia along with Brexit stress, it may be hard to be open and share stories. LGBTQI+ and disabled people in NI are facing barriers due to their intersectional identities and in a new war: facing COVID-19 economic, social, and health stressors, and in too many cases, death.

As crischolars, how can we honour that local people in NI may want to not share stories with foreign researchers as the "other"? Perhaps people, particularly people with marginalized identities, may want to focus on their localized, grassroots needs (Thiessen, 2011) to cope with their multiple layers of inequities and traumata. When trying to recruit participants, I noticed at least two responses from agencies who preferred to engage with local researchers who likely feel familiar and more trustworthy during this prolonged collective trauma that was the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, it is important to empathize with their standpoint, silence, and the need for the local, pressing issues as a decolonized, qualitative approach to our research and peacebuilding efforts (Fontan 2012).

Nancy Hansen's (2020) book chapter, “The continuing adventures of a four-legged female academic researcher,” refers to changing the research landscape, and reconstructing

ableist, business-oriented research models. This invitation to flexibility and allowing time and space for research to be accessible, is perhaps not only for researchers, funders, and the academy, but also for participants themselves.

Nancy: Exactly! Disabled people paid a very high price amid COVID-19 on both sides of the ocean. Ableism and ageism is endemic and ugly these days (Burke, 2021). This is what is happening in NI (Disability Action, 2020). Certain groups of people are deemed disposable, particularly amid a pandemic (Meredith, 2021). Many people are literally having to justify their existence on a regular basis. Most deaths associated with COVID-19 in the United Kingdom (UK) had underlying conditions relating to disability (Burke, 2020).

Question 2: What would need to shift in NI for people to able to participate again in international research that seeks to gather trans/queer and disabled peoples' perspectives on Brexit, the Troubles, and the post-peace accord milieu in NI?

Sean: Critical methodologies must link theory to practice that explores diversity, inclusion, knowledge, power, and "reflective praxis" (Lederach et al., 2007). Trans/interdisciplinary research challenges coloniality, the grand narrative, and the exclusionary power structure by creating new knowledge and practice spaces that open new possibilities for nonviolent action by including everyday peacemakers' alternative stories ensuring that researchers are not "reproducing othering and marginalizing practices in terms of the methods used" (Motzkau & Jefferson, 2009, p. 6). Researchers must include the marginalized and invisibilized in the research design that meet local people's basic human needs (Kulchyski, 2005; Robins & Wilson, 2015). Researchers must explore intersectionally the relationship between the marginalized and the researcher in terms of white privilege, cultural, gender, political, social, and class backgrounds (Holland, 2022; Redman-McLaren & Mills, 2015). Researchers and

strategically undervalued communities working together must coproduce valuable and relevant data combining insider's emic views and wisdom with the external researcher's etic and technical knowledge (Carlane, 1997). Thus, meaningful change in NI can emerge from critical research that encourages necessary new policies (Thiessen & Byrne, 2017).

The research should also inform policymakers and donors and raise local people's consciousness and mobilize them to pursue social justice (Byrne & Thiessen, 2019). "Post-qualitative research," therefore, decolonizes Western research methodologies refocusing knowledge while arrogating the interconnections between ethics, knowledge, and local wisdom within a rich local context (Le Grange, 2018). A bricolage mixed interdisciplinary method must include a culturally sensitive and gender-inclusive narrative storytelling method that empowers local people to articulate the axiologies, cosmologies, epistemologies, and ontologies embedded in their stories (Kincheloe, 2001; Mac Ginty, 2020; Senehi, 2019). Strategically undervalued peoples' informative and vibrant stories and social memory are included through a creative, inclusive, and innovative local or/and Indigenous research paradigm that focuses on their empowerment, recognition, and resilience and that is committed to social justice, a trauma informed inquiry, and research to help transform relationships and structures (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021; Wilson, 2009).

In post peace accord societies like NI, the re-traumatization of the local people and local security concerns often fuel the fear of outside researchers (Robins & Wilson, 2015). Researchers may also experience trauma when completing research on traumatic events in NI with traumatized survivors of the 30-year conflict. This raises a key concern for the well-being of researchers dealing with traumatic experiences encountered when researching people in protracted ethnopolitical conflicts and civil war zones (Millar, 2020). Researchers must be

encouraged to access counselling services to cope with the possible stress resulting from the trauma experienced while conducting field research in violently divided societies.

Robert: As a queer person, I appreciated this question and Sean's initial response. There is much to gain by including trans/queer and disabled people's perspectives in NI. We, as those with insider/outsider positionalities, can offer fresh perspectives around privilege and normative behaviours that stifle integration and participation suggesting ways forward. So often, I see tokenistic voices around the table: *the* disabled voice, *the* queer voice*, the* racialized voice, and so forth (Mizzi et al., 2016). This is dangerous because it assumes all voices are homogenized and funneled into one person. What needs to happen is the inclusion of a plethora of voices and engagements to achieve a more nuanced understanding.

What needs to shift are the traditions around doing research and to centralize principles of collaboration, reciprocity, and connectedness. For example, we now can explore social media and virtual sites as platforms to conduct research. We can also research spaces that have been unconventional or unpopular, such as museums, cafes, or streets. We need to meet participants where they are at so that they can participate in the research and work collaboratively to benefit their communities through research (Lambert, 2014). When we begin to "queer" research and the borders delineate what and where research is possible, we can connect with people and better understand their realities, and they can understand ours. For example, insider/outsider research status is a form of boundary-making, which emphasizes power relations between the researched and the researcher (Nash, 2010).

I agree with Sean that researchers may need counselling to work through their experiences of conducting research. So often, we are expected as researchers to identify counselling services for participants due to possibly re-living past harms out of conducting their

research. Ethics boards do not consider the emotional and psychological difficulties associated with conducting research. Perhaps if we approached research with greater sensitivity and openness, we would allow for various kinds of dialogue to surface and the necessary supports to be accessible.

Nancy: This all rings so true with disability issues. In many cases, the academy is afraid of difference; however, it is understood or framed. At present, there is toleration presented as inclusion. The academy's comfort level is sorely tested when dealing with anything beyond superficial, simplistic understandings of so-called difficult subject areas. The majority (whomever they are) established privilege and comfort zones are disturbed. Perhaps the most problematic barrier is endemic systemic ableism and homophobia cloaked in established practice. Failing to shift outdated practice dutifully maintains the status quo under the guise of progress. What is said about voices is right on the mark—again displaying a colonial simplification. Many community members refuse to participate in established practices. Not wanting to lend legitimacy to outdated understandings. Not to mention the great importance of intersectionality. Our research is so important because we are trying to shift research on so many levels simultaneously.

T: It is a great question, and full of hope to consider what would need to shift to engage disabled and trans/queer voices in international research. During COVID-19, there was a loss of hope in living a "normal" life. For people who are disabled and LGBTQI+, they are already living outside of the "majority" performance of normal (Foucault, 2010) that privileges ableist, ageist, heterocentric, classist, cisnormative, and white colonial performances.

As a trans person, I agree with Robert that we are not homogenous. I tend to engage with online and face-to-face research as a participant when I have time, psychological room, and

when researchers have found me, usually through social media and email, especially social media as it is more "fun" than my email and I am usually more open when engaged with it. With the onslaught of COVID-19, I had less psychological room and felt physically unsafe at the idea of in-person research, but if an accessible, trauma-informed questionnaire takes no more than ten minutes, I will engage with it. As Sean says, people need trauma-informed support to share stories, especially with the history of colonial trauma and war in NI and the fragile process of post peace accord reconciliation (Mac Ginty, 2006).

Nancy makes a good point about thinking flexibly beyond dominant research practice and working intersectionally (Crenshaw, 2017). Let's, as international researchers, be intersectional, and make it physically and psychologically safe and accessible, brief, and convenient through online engagement. We may be able to engage with disabled and queer participants in NI to gather their important perspectives on the Troubles, Brexit, and the post-peace accord milieu.

Snowball sampling is a critical recruitment tool to connect to participants when direct appeals are not working (Naderifar et al., 2017). Snowball sampling has been difficult when we have tried to employ it through email. I wonder whether we may reach people better through an online questionnaire like Survey Monkey and gather a "snow" of participants with the help of CSOs' social media accounts. In these social media savvy times, many research participants are often reached through colourful posters, quick read memes, and the ease of online questionnaires. Perhaps people needed to be invited through social media posters, memes, and a brief online questionnaire, especially during the increased online time of the pandemic. Ensuring our questionnaire and social media posts can reach disabled people is critical otherwise, we are performing ableism. Technology matters a lot in qualitative research (Seymour, 2008) and a

great deal during the pandemic as people relied heavily on their online time to get through the isolation of the pandemic. Participants may be more ready to share stories if we snowball recruit with platforms and invitations that stand out to them online.

Question 3: One noticeable element is that we are a small contingent of researchers working towards LGBTQI+ and disabled peoples' inclusion in NI. What may be a benefit and a challenge of our size for research collaboration?

Sean: In recent years, Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) scholarship on LGBTQI+ individuals and disabled people in civil wars and protracted ethnopolitical conflicts has broadened our vistas and understanding of the complexity of roles adopted by strategically undervalued people as activists, peacebuilders, and survivors often interchangeably throughout a conflict's life span (Byrne et al., 2018; Hanes et al., 2020). In the past, LGBTQI+ people, disabled people, ex-combatants, newcomers, youth, and women affected by political violence were invisibilized in research in intrastate conflicts like NI (Byrne et al., 2022; Shea-Irvine & Hansen, 2019). War and political violence seriously impact strategically undervalued people as their communities are destroyed or as they actively participate as peacebuilders in protracted conflict milieus (Leatherman, 2011). Research is now examining the intersection of age, class, and genderqueer identity in the peace narrative in contrast with the war narrative when researching strategically undervalued people's resiliency and resistance (Yavuz & Byrne, 2021). This research has implications for using peacebuilding practices to fully include strategically undervalued people in sustainable peace processes like in NI. External researchers must also be sensitive and aware of cultural nuances in how they reach out and interact with potential participants (Mizzi et al., 2023).

Often the human rights and media frame a universal ableist and cissexist discourse and narrative around strategically undervalued people in NI as apolitical survivors needing therapy and to be "saved" (Shea-Irvine & Hansen, 2019). Ableism, ageism, heterosexism, transmisogyny, and heteronormative attitudes dehumanize strategically undervalued people while also not privileging pansexual and polyamory relationships (Mizzi & Byrne, 2015). Instead, this universal "bafflegab" (Dingwall, 2021) focuses on strategically undervalued people's internalized oppression rather than their agency, choices, resilience, and peacebuilding practices. In NI, strategically undervalued people's roles and choices are complex and are not connected to their supposed vulnerability (Hill & Hansen, 2011). Ableist, heterosexist, and transphobic stereotypes "thingify" (Cesaire, 2001) and objectify, ignoring the rich and heterogenous cultural, economic, historical, political, and social contexts of strategically undervalued people as civil wars and complex protracted ethnopolitical conflicts like NI are framed in an ethnonationalist and war discourse by policymakers and nationalists as multiple ethnic groups with separate ethnonationalist ideologies compete for power while ignoring heterogeneous differences (Agathangelou & Ling, 2004; Ashe, 2019). Universal neoliberal peacebuilding intervention is also gendered and ableist, failing to address the deep structural roots of conflicts to promote social justice by including strategically undervalued groups in the peacebuilding process (Byrne & Thiessen, 2019).

Robert: Excellent points, Sean! I also appreciate learning Dingwall's (2021) word "bafflegab!" The more we learn about disabled people and LGBTQI+ people, the more we realize that we are just scratching the surface as to their lives, how they identify, and the nature of their relationships with each other and the broader social and educational systems. We may be a small group of peace researchers, but we are also open and collaborative, hopefully making for

a productive and positive experience. We seem to be continually learning from one another. I particularly appreciate Sean's deep knowledge of the Troubles in NI, Nancy's activism and scholarship for disabled peoples, and T's trans and social justice perspectives. Interdisciplinary research provides new terrain for PACS. As Makhanya (2020) explained, interdisciplinary research "forms a departure from the more traditional understandings of practices of research to pave the way for new knowledges, understanding, and practices that have particular relevance and application for the societies and countries in which they are found and from which they emanate" (p. 187). Interdisciplinary research is vital for integrating knowledge, techniques, perspectives, and theories and breaks down boundaries historically constructed by educational organizations to contain and categorize disciplines.

There are several challenges that nuance this research. First, since we are so small, we are easily identifiable despite anonymizing ourselves for peer review, we have a harder time developing a network of like-minded researchers. We find communicating the urgent nature of this research difficult for some people, such as policymakers. Having a larger research strategy in place will help articulate and justify our concerns. Further, we are researching a niche topic with a lengthy history of social and systemic marginalization. This history adds another barrier to the research.

Nancy: I always find it interesting that what seems natural to us is so different to most other researchers.

T: As cisgender and LGBTQI+ allies, Sean and Nancy are crucial to our small team because you can use your straight privilege and power for queer researchers like Robert and me and queer participants to allow them to become visible. You all are great cisgender allies to me and my trans, genderqueer identity.

Sean, Robert, and I can be allies to make space for Nancy's voice and gender and disabled research participants' identities and needs to be fully seen in the research process.

Neither Nancy, Robert, nor I know what it is like being raised in NI as Sean has. On this team, only Sean can offer the insider perspective as the Irish research voice and he understands participants with more nuance than the rest of our team.

I think the plurality of this team is that we can gently but firmly catch each other on the things we cannot see due to our standpoint (Strega & Brown, 2015). Our research process is all the richer for it. It also serves to help protect participants and the research process from researcher bias.

We may not see the intersectionality of race, as all of us have white racial privilege. Hopefully, we can catch each other on any "white fragility" (Di'Angelo, 2018) and avoid excluding racialized disabled and LGBTQI+ participants in NI who also deserve to be visibilized when discussing Brexit, the Troubles, and their post peace accord lived experiences.

Nancy: Great points here, T. There are some interesting reflexive parallels here. Just as I have the privilege of being straight and cisgendered. Similarly, as visibly non-disabled allies, your knowledge is more valued because in many instances (present company accepted of course!), I often get dismissed though it's not articulated as such as a "crip with a chip on her shoulder." Things cannot be that bad, etc. It is so great to be part of an interdisciplinary research team that sees value in disability rather than defective weakness. It is so natural to me that it all works together (Ebersold, 1998).

Question 4: Are there any other possible barriers to the research process that may assist others in conducting interdisciplinary, international research, especially during challenging times in protracted ethnic conflicts or/and societies transitioning out of a violent past?

Sean: The "hierarchization of knowledge and power" through scientific practices and the "grand narrative" or discourse is used by a plethora of societal institutions to exert power using "panopticon" surveillance systems to control, oversee, and manage people's behaviour (Foucault, 1995). The "knowledge-power" malady (Foucault, 1995) is both contested and resisted in hierarchical bureaucracies in Weber's "iron cage" of rational societal institutions. That said, democratic bureaucratic institutions today are under attack by the rejuvenation of alt-right, racist, ultra-nationalist ableist and homophobic ideologies creating the conditions for minority groups to be treated as adversaries because some strategically undervalued groups live and others die as social death is imposed on them by the state's "necropolitics" (Mbembe, 2019). Strategically undervalued groups are exposed to deadly violence due to structural power asymmetries or "precarity vulnerability" (McClean, 2019). Consequently, a critical heterogeneous resistance micro politics must focus on otherness, queerness, and difference, and be comfortable with chaos, complexity, and heterogeneity (Butler, 2016).

At the same time, however, gendered politics depends on a militarized interlocking relationship between gender identity, public policy, security, and "toxic masculinity" (Enloe, 2007; Tickner, 1992). Patriarchy is enmeshed in unjust cultural, economic, political, religious, and social structures and institutions (Goldstein, 2003) that continue to protect white male privileges and exploit relationships with a divide and rule coercive and hierarchical strategy while strategically undervalued people continue to experience psychological traumas and direct and indirect structural and cultural violence. Women and youth are also oppressed within a capitalist, heterosexist, patriarchal, and racist structure with an amalgamation of oppressive systems of control and punishment locked in a "matrix of domination" (Hill-Collins, 2008). Women, youth, disabled people, LGBTQI+ citizens, Black, Indigenous and People of Color

(BIPOC) peoples, refugees, the elderly, newcomers, the very poor, and ex-combatant's efforts are often devalued, essentialized, and marginalized in peacebuilding processes. Structural violence, therefore, parallels everyday patterns of sexual and interpersonal violence that target women, youth, and trans people (Theidon et al., 2011, p. 22).

Consequently, the "personal is political" as private and public norms and values are interconnected so that a new "gender justice security architecture" is warranted that builds new critical peacebuilding skills and broad-based "alliances and networks" in places like NI to facilitate just "non-hierarchical equal relations" that are not grounded in hegemonic masculinity (Tickner, 1992, 2001). Creating peaceful relations and social justice means deconstructing patriarchal power and shedding unequal gender relations to forge a justpeace for all (Sylvester, 2016; Wilmer, 2022). For example, Peggy Chinn's (2012) peace empowerment methodology can be a useful peacebuilding practice to use in NI as well as Indigenous communities circles and medicine wheels that are a symbol of equity where everyone within the circle is equal in terms of power with its many ties to the animal, spirit, and natural world (for e.g., the earth, moon, stars, sun) (Wilson et al., 2019).

Robert: The personal is political, as Sean explains above, through patriarchy, injustice, and systemic violence. Those are barriers to doing interdisciplinary and international research. We are struggling amidst difficult regimes, locally, nationally, and globally. As I mentioned earlier, interdisciplinary research is about dismantling traditional barriers that contain research, and so this systemization of research makes it painful research and difficult to navigate through. For example, our research design originates in Canada, and our fieldwork is in NI. We are occupying a space on the margins, both in society and in academe, trying to articulate to whoever will listen that this is important work. Some people are not ready to listen and reflect. We run up

against competing needs. People needed to survive COVID-19, realize the impact of Brexit, plan for an economic downturn and still mitigate the harmful effects of the Troubles. For example, one agency told us they were unwilling to support our research since we are internationally based. On the one hand, researching human subjects during intense periods can reveal resilience, insights, and strengths hard to identify during calm periods. On the other hand, we are working with humans who are experiencing stress and hardship. Sometimes research is just too low on the hierarchy of needs, despite its richness in understanding and unravelling complexity.

Where do we go from there? I think of Spivak's (1993) claim that "one must begin somewhere" and that:

> If the "somewhere" that one begins from is the most privileged site of the neocolonial education system, in an Institute for the training of teachers, funded by the state, does that gesture of convenience become the normative point of departure? Does not participation in such a privileged and authoritative apparatus require the greatest vigilance? (p. 58).

Researchers working across borders and boundaries must include their engagement within a more extensive apparatus of oppression and regulation that might have been unimaginable. That means expect delays, high communication, varied forms of outreach and communication, and ongoing commitment to the research. It also means speaking to everyone, not just those identified in a research protocol. Researchers may not be able to change the apparatus (yet), but its consideration during the research design may provoke innovation and vigilance. Mizzi et al. (2016) suggested, based on Spivak's work, "where we begin, indeed who that 'we' is, and where 'they' begin, is always accompanied by a certain form of personal vigilance" (p. 4). One practical example of personal vigilance would be to include a list of contingencies and dependencies necessary for the research to take shape.

T: Research participants give their valuable time when sharing their stories with researchers. It can be vulnerable to share stories with anyone, especially an outsider researcher based in another country. I agree with Robert. There were multiple and competing needs during the protracted social and health conflicts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the protracted ethnic conflicts that afflict societies throughout the Global North and Global South. Sharing stories can feel like surveillance, as Sean suggests, with his reference to Foucault's "panopticon."

To address this, researchers need to be accessible to strategically undervalued participants facing multiple barriers and ensure that people with disabilities are empowered to provide fully informed consent, receive, and share information through communication aids like ASL interpreters, and audiovisual devices. Researchers also should be aware of multiple barriers facing LGBTQI+ participants who due to job loss, queerphobia and/or transphobia and/or ableism, may not have time or resources to engage in the research process, over and above the ongoing vulnerability and stressors of the post COVID-19 pandemic (Taggert et al., 2021).

Researchers could also be both intersectional and trauma-informed in their questions during semi-structured interviews and focus groups, given the power differential between researchers and participants, and the multiple traumas participants experience due to the intersections of their marginalized identities (Cho et al., 2013) with the stressors of protracted ethnic conflict or post-conflict processes (Mac Ginty, 2006). Sumi Cho, Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall (2013) suggest an application of an intersectional framework in academia, and to be cognizant of intersectional dynamics in research design and engagement of research participants. This is so that research participant experiences are understood from their overlapping and diverse locations of power, oppression, and equity such as like a racialized

transgender person with disabilities, facing systemic racism, ableism, and cissexism within a society affected by protracted armed conflict or post-peace accord processes.

Nancy: It is quite common for ethics departments to assume that disabled people are inherently passive and vulnerable simply because of their disability, and this is not the case (endemic ableism). Unfortunately, often, it has worked as a barrier to prevent participation. It is slowly changing; however, ethics departments require further education regarding strategically undervalued populations for all sorts of reasons, disability being only one sort of marginalization. T, you have captured the key elements succinctly.

Question 5: What is one recommendation that you would tell future investigators when they are researching participants impacted by conflict, trauma, peace, or fatigue?

Sean: Culture is politicized and embedded in people's daily lives as the Protestant Unionist Loyalist (PUL) and Catholic Nationalist Republican (CNR) communities in NI appear to be trapped in a permanent "political limbo" (Marijan, 2017). Geographical space is contested, and people live largely segregated and apart so that stereotypes cannot be challenged empirically on a day-to-day basis (Marijan, 2017). Some people especially in some urban areas live under siege, surrounded by perceived enemies, as they defend their territory, and are more predisposed to give "not an inch" to their neighbours in case "they" take it all (Creary & Byrne, 2014). Yet day-to-day interactions continue in NI's marketplaces and at the local fairs or at Pride festivals or music concerts in give-and-take and live-and-let live situations as people retrieve impugned spaces (Marijan, 2017).

Collective memories of ingroup victim narratives can sustain and reinvigorate protracted ethnopolitical conflicts and civil wars like NI (Rafferty, 2016; Rief, 2016). Yet the NI conflict is framed within an ethnonationalist war narrative that marginalizes all other issues (Byrne et al.,

2018). This means that grassroots activists from strategically undervalued groups working to change negative attitudes like anger and distrust are frustrated with recalcitrant sectarian politicians from both communities' efforts to manipulate collective ethnonationalist victim narratives to freeze rather than transform the intergroup conflict (Hyde & Byrne, 2015; Rafferty, 2016). However, the May 5, 2022, Assembly elections witnessed both largest ethnonationalist political parties in NI (Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Fein) challenged by a new burgeoning middle ground of nonpartisan political parties like the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (Byrne, 2023). This means that NI's strategically undervalued communities must heal from the traumatic experiences of the 30-years Troubles and be invited in by the Alliance Party as equal partners to fully engage in the peacebuilding and reconciliation transformative process.

That said, the international community often "romanticizes the locals" wisdom and knowledge without considering that there are many different local actors seeking change and who resist external and internal actors (Mc Ginty, 2015). Everyday local actors use different peace tools to create a "home grown" or "popular peace" resisting external intervention because it disempowers the population and encourages victimhood by reinforcing internal divisions and local hierarchies (Mac Ginty, 2015, p. 833). People's everyday actions "make and remake" territory as they have their own visions and networks and understanding of what the local really means (Mac Ginty, 2015, p. 851). "The local is divided along power, hierarchy, ethnic and gender lines, and [is] capable of displaying radical images and behavior as is the international" (Paffenholtz, 2015, p. 862). Local actors can have pockets of resistance against international power and dominance, and most of the resistance may also be directed against poor or recalcitrant local leaders (Paffenholtz, 2015, p. 865).

Robert: Good question! I recommend not to believe everything reported in the media or official government documentation. Often what is shared in those spaces is based on hetero/cisnormative and ableist foundations, which means that while some people are benefitting from a negative or positive peace environment, some people, such as LGBTQI+ and disabled people, are still struggling for safety, acceptance, and support. These struggles are often unreported unless there are targeted enquiries that hardly anyone reads or considers. In Kosovo, I have researched how international actors have been homophobic in their practice, reifying a (hetero)norm that excludes sexual and gender difference (Mizzi, 2009). People expect their governments to behave inclusively and appropriately through international development or collaboration initiatives. However, if countries still "do inclusion" through hetero/cisnormative, sexist, racist, and ableist ways in their own countries, then how can conceptualizations of a broader inclusion take shape in other countries? Examining the dreadful violence perpetuated by Canadian "peacekeepers" toward Somalians is an example of how safety discourses go awry (Razack, 2004).

Future investigators need to check their biases, practices of marginalization, and positionalities of privilege as they research communities affected by conflict, trauma, peace, or fatigue. These biases, practices, and positionalities cannot be so easily removed from understanding relationships and life experiences. Even highly respected scholar Frantz Fanon wrote a footnote in his infamous text *Black Skin, White Masks* equating homosexuality to prostitution and assuming Martinicans as being "passive" homosexuals (Walcott, 2006). In this regard, I agree with Sean that the international community romanticizes local populations. However, perhaps the Fanon example suggests there is also risk of a *fetishization of locals*, whereby people become objects of desire based on their identities and backgrounds (Said, 1979).

Researchers may wish to keep such biases and assumptions in check, recognize how "research" is rooted in Western traditions, dismantle power dynamics, honour local and Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and work collaboratively to improve human lives (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021).

T: Johan Galtung and Daiseku Ikeda (2005) write how colonialism is the ultimate slavery or ownership by the mother country. NI and many societies were ravaged by colonial and post-colonial structural, cultural, and direct violence (Maiangwa et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2017). There is chronic trauma and fatigue from the unbalanced power relationship, and as Sean writes, produces a siege mentality that takes a toll on people who may be potential research participants.

Researchers should consider how colonial and post-colonial societies create a siege mentality among marginalized research participants like LGBTQI+ people and people with disabilities whose lives are less valued by white supremacist, ableist, classist, cissexist, and queerphobic power elites. As Judith Butler (2016) writes in her book, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable,* all members of society should have equal value and be equally grievable. War creates differential distributions of grievability as some populations are targeted and mourned, while some are not (Butler, 2016).

As Robert writes, international actors can also be homophobic in practice. A tragic example is when liberators devalued homosexual prisoners as ungrievable, relegating them to remain in concentration camps after heterosexual prisoners were liberated at the end of World War II. LGBTQI+ prisoners were mutilated, experimented upon, and sexually assaulted in camps: the pink triangles they were forced to wear symbolized cultural violence that enabled direct and structural violence by not only the Nazis researchers in the camps (who did medical

experiments on them) but the allied "liberators" after the camps were “liberated” (Grau & Shopmann, 1995).

Therefore, researchers need to consider that strategically undervalued participants need to feel grievable, valued, and equal in the research process by ensuring inclusion during recruitment, in the design of methods that help their stories authentically come forward, and in the way data is analyzed and discussed. Researchers need to remember the lived experience of the siege mentality, the fear of unequal grievability (Butler, 2016), and the longing for peace, equality and true liberation from colonial and post-colonial marginalization and war.

Nancy: Like what has been carefully outlined above, entrenched non-disabled privilege has naturalized the research process (Hansen, 2009). Disabled people have been marked as other, socially excluded, infantilized and problematized through various mechanisms and varying degrees of severity for well over a century (Hansen et al., 2008). Their bodies have been subject to social surveillance, colonization, and eugenic experimentation to the point of elimination (Hansen, 2009). However, this long history of disabled people's oppression is mainly unrecognized, misunderstood, and not characterized as discriminatory (Hansen, 2009).

Religious rights discourse dominates the process of peace. Strategically undervalued groups have begun to make some headway. However, despite comprising the largest number of disabled people in the UK, disabled people in NI have remained for the most part, invisible and overlooked. Disabled people are characterized as vulnerable and in need of “protection” (Hill & Hansen, 2011). Consequently, the need for protection is seen as being paramount. As a result, disabled people's experience has been absent from NI’s “Troubles” history (Hill & Hansen, 2011). Further, myths and misconceptions coupled with hyper-medicalized understandings of disability continue to dominate, and disability issues are not seen as social justice or human

rights issues (Kerr, 2013). Gradual progress is being made, drawing parallels between disabled people and other strategically undervalued groups (Shea-Irvine & Hansen, 2019). However, although strategically undervalued groups may be recognized in legislation, deeply entrenched beliefs overshadow rights and service provision amid residual conflict realities. A great deal of unlearning remains to be done (Hansen, 2021; Ravenscroft et al., 2021). Researchers have only begun this process.

Findings

The article presented our perspectives about the challenges we faced doing research with strategically undervalued communities in NI during a global pandemic. Grounded in our understandings and experiences, we suggest five findings that emerged from our discourse on grappling with trying to research both strategically undervalued communities during the pandemic: realizing the liminal role of external researchers; research as social action; participant-centred research; responsive research administration; and the role of psychosocial triggers.

First, strategically undervalued communities might be more comfortable with internal and external researchers working as a hybrid team as they do not want to place themselves in vulnerable situations, thus increasing their stress. From our online interactions with friends and colleagues in NI, it was apparent that strategically undervalued people were suspicious of outsiders in the context of the pandemic, peace fatigue, retraumatization, Brexit, and security issues around ableism, and trans and queerphobia. NI's people's siege mentality has been heightened at this time, and therefore the response may be to strengthen and access current networks and not expand them.

Second, the NI conflict and peacebuilding there are framed as an ethnonationalist struggle as both communities currently engage in culture wars over cultural symbols like the

Gaelic Irish and Scots-Irish languages, flags, and emblems that were accentuated by Brexit and COVID-19. However, the liminal peace contains a plethora of heterogenous stories. Strategically undervalued people's lived experiences include a myriad of stories that can be shared with researchers who use intersectional research methods (e.g., asking questions that cut across identity differences) (Byrne et al., 2018; Mizzi et al., 2023). Similar to Frølunde et al. (2017), we see difference as a "prerequisite," as it "gives life meaning–to perceive, think, feel, and categorize our relations with our surroundings," which is particularly important for transnational research. These methods promote social action (dialogue, activism, change) and generate data for us to learn and share (Phillips et al., 2013). During the turbulent days of the pandemic, research needed to have multiple goals, including what could alleviate immediate challenges.

Third, empathetic interdisciplinary researchers must be pragmatic partners with strategically undervalued people with intersectional identities as they interact with the research project. Trans/interdisciplinary researchers' efforts must respect people's wishes and meet them where they are at. They must respect their wishes if they are not willing to engage in the research project during this time. We responded accordingly in our efforts to engage participants, respecting their time and requests. We chose not to be intrusive or meddlesome, and as Adler and Hansen in Blinne (2016) prompted, proceeded with a "compassionate lens" (p. 98).

Fourth, research administrators must be open to intersectional and trans/interdisciplinary research with strategically undervalued and invisibilized people, particularly how this can take longer than other forms of research. Social justice and human rights-oriented research mean deconstructing patriarchy and hegemonic and toxic masculinity and ableist, ageist, gendered, homophobic, misognyst, racist, and xenophobic politics so that mainstream researchers and administrators must be comfortable in the uncomfortable and not essentialize and devalue people

living on the margins. We were fortunate to receive extensions from the University of Manitoba to our research grant due to the fact that we could not travel to NI during the pandemic, which we deeply appreciated and are very grateful for the kindness.

Fifth, the personal vigilance of strategically undervalued people becomes paramount. NI people experience overlapping stressors due to their marginalized identities along with the health and economic stressors of COVID-19, intergenerational war trauma, Brexit, and everyday aggressions that shape their lives. All these pressures may trigger psychosocial coping mechanisms among potential participants to withdraw from engaging "outsider" researchers and instead, isolate with the familiar networks and local research milieu instead of the international research milieu. The pandemic affected us as well as researchers, causing us to reflect on our experiences working in the NI conflict milieu and realize that it is essential to pause, reflect, question, deconstruct, and discuss what it means to do research within strategically undervalued communities during times of great strife. We are forever learning from our participants, even when research falls apart.

Conclusion

This dialogic and reflexive paper provides an account of what happens to qualitative research when a global pandemic and responsive public health orders become a dominant force. Our dialogue adopted multiple layers, including a wide-angle lens zooming out on the social and political situation and how that complicates research and a more nuanced discussion on specific challenges facing strategically undervalued communities with multiple intersections of identities. Through our dialogue, we offered five findings for consideration whenever researching projects with highly vulnerable populations: realizing the liminal role of external researchers; research as social action; participant-centred research; responsive research administration; and the role of

psychosocial triggers. We realized that research biases could take many forms, including that strategically undervalued communities are readily available to participate in research projects. We suggest that conducting research with strategically undervalued communities needs to consider the timeliness and the changing context of the research and the methods of engagement. This approach means examining external pressures and regulations that may influence social lives when designing and implementing research projects and adjusting accordingly as the participants see fit. Positioning flexibility and respect as foundational to research designs seeking social emancipation is crucial, especially during perilous times.

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Civil Society Organizations and Relational Infrastructure: Challenges, Obstacles, and Measuring the Success of Peacebuilding Work in Northern Ireland

Mehmet Yavuz and Sean Byrne

Introduction

Everyday intergroup contact is a common occurrence in divided societies like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, India, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, and others. Everyday peacebuilding consists of daily social practices to manage ethnic tensions, and these often invisible and underappreciated methods are used by local community members in deeply divided societies (Mac Ginty, 2014; Ring, 2006). Local communities relearn how to coexist or fail to reconcile due to multiple factors that prevent them from living together (Yavuz, 2025). Everyday peace encompasses the critical conditions that encourage fostering mutual respect and cooperation among community members to maintain peace (Ring, 2006).

While peace in Northern Ireland may appear stabilized on paper, especially following the 1998 Belfast or Good Friday Agreement (GFA), the society remains socially and politically precarious (Yavuz & Byrne, 2023). Despite the GFA's formal framework, everyday life continues to be shaped by ethnopolitical divisions, contested identities, culture wars, and deep-seated mistrust between both communities (Byrne, 2023). Overcoming the mistrust and social exclusion experienced by those with different or intersectional backgrounds requires the active participation of social actors committed to rebuilding trust and fostering a shared sense of belonging through ordinary, sustained interactions (Simone, 2004). Critical engagement is

essential for cultivating mutual recognition and cooperation that empowers people to function in a post-peace accord milieu. That said, mobilizing communities around critical social issues relies on a diverse civil society that incorporates initiatives grounded in community knowledge that enhances social stability (Mizzi et al., 2023).

This article explores how grassroots Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Northern Ireland navigate this evolving ecology of peacebuilding amid the persistent threat of dissident violence and shifting local, national, and global political and financial terrains. By exploring these dynamics, we gain some insight into the precarious balance CSOs must maintain to support local agency, democratic accountability, and social justice in deeply divided societies. The crucial role CSO leaders play in fostering peace and nurturing a shared future in post-peace accord Northern Ireland are explored through the lens of community leaders' stories and experiences. The article discusses participants' narratives around (1) bureaucratic and financial challenges to CSO sustainability, (2) obstacles to mainstreaming and sustaining everyday peace for strategically disadvantaged groups striving for social justice, and (3) the complacency and difficulty in measuring the success of the plethora of funded peacebuilding projects in working to empower local communities.

Civil Society Organizations and Relational Infrastructure

The importance of people's local agency in peacebuilding informs critical and emancipatory approaches to peacebuilding and has emerged from the critiques of the liberal democratic peace model (Thiessen, 2011). The integration of neoliberal economic policy and liberal political systems in the construction of market democracy in post-peace accord societies labels contemporary peacebuilding efforts as "neoliberal" (Thiessen, 2011). Peace and Conflict

Studies (PACS) scholars and practitioners who employ emancipatory peacebuilding practices and research methods emphasize the importance of listening to and including local and Indigenous grassroots understandings, wisdom, and experiences, and their ideas about the preconditions necessary for achieving sustainable peace (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015).

Locals lived experiences can contribute to a more in-depth understanding of why and how communities are in conflict, and what they need to do to coexist peacefully (Zapata-Barreto et al., 2017). Additionally, questions from locals about everyday peacemaking, and the role of politics, the state, and external actors create space for supporting bottom-up local community peacebuilding (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013). The role of researchers and peacebuilders in extending their scope to the grassroots is critical for uncovering the "treasure trove of stories" of successful bottom-up peacebuilding practices (Autesserre, 2021).

These bottom-up, grassroots social systems utilize local people's knowledge to enhance and create space for peaceful engagement throughout society and can be understood by applying the concept of physical infrastructure to the social sphere. Infrastructure is commonly known in physical terms "as reticulated systems of highways, pipes, wires, or cables" (Simone, 2004, p. 407). However, this narrow definition of infrastructure is challenged by Simone (2004) who proposes a critical concept of "people as infrastructure," which highlights how everyday social interactions, relationships, and social networks operate as a kind of living infrastructure that supports the functioning of a city, using Johannesburg as an example (pp. 407-408).

Despite visible signs of decay in Johannesburg, a complex, flexible, and dynamic social system exists where locals collaborate and create economic and social opportunities through their interactions with one another (Simone, 2004). These interactions enable residents to become the

social foundation of the city. Building on this foundation of grassroots resilience and collaboration, the emergence of a functioning, diverse civil society becomes essential for fostering inclusive dialogue and institutional dialogue (Simone, 2004).

A functioning and diverse civil society help to encourage dialogue and the reintegration of people into a unified polity that can provide a vital base for transitioning to justice while holding state institutions and its agents accountable on critical issues like elections, legislation, and police training, etc. (Belloni, 2001). In the context of divided societies like Northern Ireland, drawing on Simone (2004), we argue that CSOs operate as relational infrastructures because they deeply connect with local people providing the glue to hold them together that help to create opportunities for coexistence across groups. These organizations provide needed services and stimulate social interactions, mediating everyday tensions by creating opportunities, and keeping the locals busy, which offers meaningful, goal-oriented superordinate activities to keep them focused.

Building on Simone's notion of people as infrastructure, CSOs in Northern Ireland function as a platform for connection, resilience, and sustainable peacebuilding. Although the primary focus of many CSO projects is to achieve greater local community engagement, inclusivity, and reconciliation, this intended outcome is often limited in achievement (Oloke & Byrne, 2022). For example, CSO projects can experience bureaucratic and competitive funding, social retaliation, historical trauma, and feelings of abandonment in minority communities (Byrne et al., 2023)

The role of CSOs is especially important for strategically undervalued communities like working-class youth, ex-combatants, and the disability and LGBTQIA+ communities that

continue to suffer with little hope for the future in terms of employment opportunities (Yavuz, 2025; Yavuz & Byrne, 2023). For example, ex-combatants in Northern Ireland continue to face barriers like ageism, and because of their criminal records have had to create livelihood niches like driving black taxis and working in the peacebuilding industry (Shirlow, 2013). Similarly, working-class youth have low educational attainment levels, precarious employment opportunities, and high unemployment rates compared to their peers in the United Kingdom (UK) (Holland, 2022). In other places like Bosnia and Herzegovina, queer people experience similar multiple structural challenges, including everyday homophobia, unemployment, and disownment from their families (Yavuz, 2025).

Young people bear the greatest burden in post-accord societies as they grapple with ongoing conflict and experience intergenerational trauma and unemployment (Townsend et al., 2020; Yavuz & Byrne, 2023; Yavuz, 2025). Berents (2018) noted the importance of exploring how young people make sense of "notions of peace both abstractly and as a functional concept in their everyday lives" (2018, p. 150). Building on Mac Ginty's discussion of everyday peace, Berents (2018) argued that the notion of "everyday" cannot be perceived as static as it is a consistent and "mutable and negotiated embodied process" (p. 150). Thus, it is vital for strategically undervalued communities to envision a shared future without any restrictions if active and genuine CSO efforts are to play a transformative role in the communities.

The Northern Ireland Conflict

Eurosceptics and populists manipulated Brexit and the controversial Northern Ireland Protocol and flying the flags conflict alienated Protestant Unionist Loyalist (PUL) youth who became embroiled in a culture war with the Catholic Nationalist Republican (CNR) community

(Mizzi et al., 2023). New Irish Republican Army (NIRA) dissidents and rogue loyalist paramilitaries have also intensified tensions in Northern Ireland. The collapse of the Northern Ireland executive (2017-2020) over the energy scheme with the resignation of former first minister, Arlene Foster of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), and the suspension of the executive over Brexit (2022-2024) further underlines the political instability (Byrne et al., 2023).

Several significant issues like the parades conflicts, Brexit, the 2020 Withdrawal Agreement from the European Union (EU), and the 2017 and 2022 collapse of the Northern Ireland executive escalated the culture war and disagreement between the PUL and CNR communities that have different ideologies, beliefs, and opinions as Protestant youth and Loyalist paramilitary groups protested on the streets against threats to their British identity (Byrne et al., 2022). The GFA's 23rd anniversary in Belfast resulted in "dozens of police officers" being injured by rioters from the "British Loyalist community" with Loyalist paramilitary groups egging on alienated youth to commit violence (Smith, 2021). The flag protests led to youth violence that caused unforeseen risks to the already deeply entrenched conflict.

Added to the culture war was the language conflicts. The Scots Gaelic and Irish Gaelic Language Acts are major cultural issues impacting the cultural well-being of both communities (Ó Conchubhair, 2022). Language is connected to each group's cultural identity, and the GFA offered parity of esteem to both cultures. Sinn Féin supports legislation to promote Irish language usage, while the DUP sees this as undermining the PUL community's sense of British identity (Gorvett, 2020; O'Reilly, 1999).

External economic assistance was provided to facilitate cross community reconciliation and build the peace dividend in Northern Ireland and the border area. The 1985 Anglo Irish

Agreement initiated the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) in 1986 to address community development and reconciliation while the EU PEACE Fund was created after reciprocal ceasefires in 1994 by rival paramilitary groups to address reconciliation, community development, and peacebuilding in Northern Ireland and the border region (Byrne et al., 2023). These funds were pivotal in providing important aid to foster coexistence, reconciliation, and community peacebuilding in a society characterized by segregated neighbourhoods and schools (McCall, 2021). The peacebuilding grants were provided to local CSOs through EU PEACE I (1995-1999) €667 million; EU PEACE II (2000-2006) €995 million; EU PEACE III (2007—2013) €333 million; EU PEACE IV (2014-2020) €270 million; the IFI (1986-2010) $971 million; the EU, Northern Ireland Executive, and British and Irish government's PEACE PLUS program (2021-2028) £1 billion; and the Irish government's Shared Island initiative and fund (2021-2025) €500 million (Byrne, 2023, p. 17).

Methods

After approval from the University of Manitoba's research ethics board, the second author generated the data during the summer of 2010 over a ten week period interviewing 102 CSO worker's, five civil servants administering the IFI and the EU PEACE III Fund, and three IFI and five EU PEACE III community development officers that were the linchpin connector between both funding agencies and local grassroots peacebuilders. The research was funded by a SSHRC research grant. The CSO peacebuilding projects included in the field research were funded by the IFI and/or the EU PEACE III Fund. The 60–90-minute tape-recorded semi-structured interviews included ten questions related to cross-community peacebuilding,

reconciliation, and community development. The data was anonymized, and all names and other identifiers were removed, and pseudonyms were used to report the findings.

The interviews were conducted in the participants' places of employment in Derry and the counties of Armagh, Cavan, Derry, Donegal, Fermanagh, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan, and Tyrone. Local leaders with years of experience provided valuable insight into the hopes and needs of local communities, as well as their concerns and fears about their future and the future of Northern Ireland's peace process. Their local wisdom and values have not changed significantly, and the issues they raised remain significant and prominent today.

Challenges, Obstacles, and Measuring the Success of CSOs Peacebuilding Work

Peace often remains in a liminal state, neither deep nor sustainable, as structural constraints prevent a genuine transformation of a conflict milieu as it becomes paused as reconciliation becomes challenging (Byrne et al., 2018; Mac Ginty, 2008; Murphy & McDowell, 2019). As communities continue to struggle to overcome these barriers, innovative and context-sensitive peacebuilding practices used by a myriad of CSOs working with local people in Northern Ireland face many challenges and obstacles.

Bureaucratic and Financial Challenges to CSO Sustainability

Local conflict transformation practices and peacebuilding methods can be adopted in divided societies with the support of local CSOs. As a method of operationalizing local, culturally appropriate knowledge generated from the people of Northern Ireland, CSOs have a unique position to direct their efforts into building an infrastructure that meets the community's needs (Lindsay et al., 2021). Embracing these local practices can help strengthen local activists' skillsets in presenting issues, transforming communities, and, more importantly, developing the

local people's capacity to hear and engage with the voices of marginalized people who suffer and face all the obstacles brought about by past and current conflicts (Simone, 2004; Yavuz & Byrne, 2023). Yet the CSOs face a myriad of bureaucratic and financial challenges that impede their sustainability.

Darren observed a noticeable shift in the community sector's direction, particularly towards an integration of authorities and a blurring of boundaries between established community organizations and commercial enterprises. This transition has resulted in a loss of grassroots control and democratic accountability, leading some within the community to acknowledge the necessity of adapting to the changing peace-aid landscape or face extinction. Consequently, there was a departure from the sector's initial grassroots principles, with many community members now occupying influential roles in local government, raising concerns about their potential co-option by the government.

> *DARREN:* Now that clearly is the way in which there will be authorities in Northern Ireland and across the water, but particularly locally, that's the way they see the community sector going. So, the days when, of course, you can't do that and have grassroots control over it. You can't have a business plan worked out with a for-profit organization and then subject it to democratic accountability. Or you can ask people to approve of it, that's the same as any other commercial organization. But a blurring of the edges between community organizations, particularly the longer-established and better-organized community organizations, known, and commercial enterprises on the other hand (CSO leader).

Darren saw that the trajectory of development meant that some people in community organizations felt that they "would still see themselves as radical…, either do that or go out of existence, that's the choice." While grassroots initiatives have fostered greater interaction between members of both communities, they continue to experience numerous challenges (Skarlato et al., 2016). Darren observed some of these challenges for grassroots CSOs:

> DARREN: I think we have lost a bit of democracy in that, and there is no answer to what you do about that other than grow from the grassroots again or try to support any grassroots initiatives that come along. But the formerly organized sector is definitely further away now from its radical … grassroots beginnings than ever before. There's no question, and a lot of people have been completely co-opted. I mean a lot of community people are now sort of high officials in local government….

Daithi stated that there was a financial sustainability issue that needed to be addressed as many CSOs went bankrupt, while the government, the Northern Ireland Assembly, and the EU didn't recognize that CSOs were financially sustainable and dependent on government support.

> *DAITHI:* And what I have noticed over the last number of years was that there has been a cull of community organizations and community groups who have been totally dependent upon public funding. And I have seen them in the transition from PEACE II to PEACE III. A lot of groups have gone, and if groups are totally dependent on other people supporting them then there [are] more groups on the go. We're not going to be like that, and what we have decided to do is we have tried to generate as much of our own income as possible, which means that we run social enterprises where it's all about generating income, and then that comes in and goes to the core.

> And then we generate and develop the core, whilst still asking for public sector intervention monies, but knowing over time it's going to reduce. So, in terms of the PEACE program, the money is very, very important because it keeps a lot of this kind of work alive. It also takes risks with projects that you wouldn't normally get funding for and are not on the government's agenda. It's not on the Northern Ireland Assembly's agenda, it's not generally on the European Union agenda, but they are specifically targeted in the PEACE III program's criteria (CSO leader).

Daithi noted that the current situation is challenging as CSOs operate with limited staff since their "sources [are] tied up in the machine and there is no product coming out at the end of the machine." CSOs were aware of the need to train individuals as volunteers to be able to sustain themselves in difficult situations.

Daithi also foresaw the importance of the CSO filtering system within communities, and finding ways to incorporate strategically undervalued communities into CSO agendas by decentralizing their organizational interests and empowering CSOs that do-good cross community work in the community (see Belloni, 2001):

> DAITHI: Because what it allows is those people who promote the PEACE III program now have control over what's on the agenda and what's off the agenda. And I'm not being sort of cynical about that. I think there is an issue around selective support. Some organizations who in my view don't deserve the kind of quantity of support that they get for the work that they do because the actual product that comes out again out of the process is top heavy, and the product is very light. And I would want to be much more

> critical in the way that money is invested in organizations because they are invested in sponges you know, which is just all about money.
>
> And it's all about where the next money comes from, and we have them all the time because X issue is suddenly on the agenda with PEACE III. We have friends whom we never knew we had. We have people who want to work in partnerships that we never knew were even interested in the kind of work that we have been doing for the last number of years. And every time there is a round of applications, they're all so sweet …. I'd be a wee bit more cynical in that and say, "look where were you when we were trying to forge relationships and build up bonds and working relationships with organizations." But we'll work only with those who are genuine, and not those who just want to see it as another moneymaking racket, or another application potential.

Centralizing funding initiatives to have a direct impact on the community is essential to the frameworks of positive peace (Lindsay et al., 2021) and it is a necessary need described by NGO officials. Orienting the funding of civil agencies to focus on the needs of the community, even in opposition to funder goals, is essential for meaningful use of allocated funds (Belloni, 2001)

For example, Rebecca believed that County Councils in the Republic of Ireland were gaining more control over community development, which brought challenges to some organizations. Controversies around the PEACE I program arose from many peace workers because it did not align with community development goals (Byrne et al., 2009). Rebecca also explained how managing the EU money posed some additional difficulties:

> *REBECCA:* But also, in the South, there's a move towards the [County] Councils having more authority, and more power over community development funding. So, you now

> have a lot of community organizations that don't have a track record over the last five years or more with the Councils. And given that we are now in the great recession [2008-2013] it is going to be quite hard for some of them to get back into the loop. And that the work they do might not fit into quite the right boxes and stuff as well. So, whereas there was a lot of pressure and controversy around the PEACE program, particularly PEACE I. You know, there are a lot of people who attack the PEACE program because it wasn't a community development program, and the reason they did that was because there is PEACE I, which was sort of something for everybody (CSO leader).

Community conflicts were intricately connected to CSO staffing, funding, and control over funding as they worked to facilitate social justice and community peacebuilding processes. However, ordinary people who experienced various conflicts also felt included, noting that critical services should be provided so that the grassroots can feel that justice is being delivered to them.

Obstacles to Mainstreaming and Sustaining Everyday Peace for Strategically Disadvantaged Groups Striving for Social Justice

Cross community peacebuilding requires time, countless effort, everyday tolerance, civility, and critical decisionmakers who focus on the wisdom and wellbeing of communities (Byrne & Senehi, 2012; Mac Ginty, 2021). Further, integrating peacebuilding principles, practices, and objectives into all levels of governance is crucial, so that peace is not treated as a separate initiative but rather as a holistic approach to peacebuilding. However, when the potential of mainstreaming peace efforts is ignored by those in power, strategically disadvantaged groups do not fare so well (Yavuz, 2024). For example, Niall argued that peace was never mainstreamed in Northern Ireland because "it has always been seen as a European issue."

> *NIALL:* It has been tinkered with, and tweeted with, and played with, and toyed with. But I always argue that until PEACE was actually gone, and that we were left to have to look at this ourselves, it would be a measure of how important it really was to us. Would it become [a] course so that with any District Council and government department PEACE was at the center, it was the core hub, and everything else emanated from that, and I don't see that. I think we see that from the move from the *Shared Future* [2005 government document], and I haven't seen the cohesion in the inclusion document. But I know that several CROs are highly concerned that they live together but apart, rather than sharing this place (CSO leader).

Niall recognized that the sustainability of the peace process would become a major challenge. He didn't believe CSOs had the politicians to assist them as they supported a process of equality and inclusion and living apart, as the new paramilitaries continued to be active in both communities:

> NIALL: We're not asking people to actually discover the talents and the gifts and the resources and the beauty in one another and the friendships and the potential that difference and diversity bring. We're saying all right that you're different and live together, but live together in a way that you don't hurt one another. It's a minimum approach, equal but apart. And that's my real concern, and whilst these people who said I think the Americans have given us too much attention, and the Clintons coming in and out, and whatever else, it's been good.
>
> But it's also been bad, and people expect that. They expect to … kick-up stink, and everything will come their way. I think we have those people managing the programs and those people running the programs, and I guess we have a political journey to travel.

> We've Sinn Féin and the DUP. But still, when it comes to decisions around allocations of money, it is still very tribal, and they talk about due process; there is no due process.

Additionally, Dara averred that Republican Action Against Drugs (RAAD) and the Real Irish Republican Army (RIRA) posed a threat to the current peace process and the mainstreaming of peace. Dara recognized that the government was not aware of the seriousness of the situation and didn't fully grasp how this problem could lead to potential dangers ahead.

> *DARA:* We are then looking at how the [political] vacuum that will be created will bring on board the spoilers of the peace process who are on the wings who are currently operating in this city and elsewhere, but particularly in this city. And the city's Republican Action Against Drugs (RAAD), and you have the Real IRA, which is allegedly the armed wing of the Thirty-Two County Sovereignty in England, heavily working to bring down the peace process (CSO leader).

Dara was also frustrated by the ongoing violence in the community. He had argued about the continuation of political violence for a long time. However, the political leaders "fail to get the message" which eventually disrupts the sustainability aspect of the work that the CSOs do. Dara articulated, "I just see dangerous things ahead. And the evidence for it is quite simply this week alone in the city, a group called RAAD has put [x] young people out of the city, last week they shot a guy in Strabane."

Dara also pointed out the increase in Republican activities, narrating that "it has been horrendous." His concern was that RIRA's attacks on the police could provoke a retaliatory response from Loyalist paramilitaries, escalating violence. The cycle of violence was not addressing issues important to people, and CSOs and local communities faced further challenges

ahead. When communities remain trapped in conflict, critical issues such as access to resources, enforcement of laws, and human rights are often sidelined, while the lack of social justice perpetuates the cycle of structural inequalities (Yavuz, 2025).

Social justice work encompasses a commitment to equity, as well as adherence to moral and ethical principles that promote tolerance and equal opportunities for all, including people's access to basic human needs and providing critical resources for those in need to sustain a peace process (Hande et al., 2024). Social justice practices aim to dismantle systemic barriers that communities face, as these barriers create inequalities and hinder their ability to thrive (Fraser, 2003). Bolstering the human rights of all people and societal groups is essential to promoting the pillars of peace, encompassing the socio-cultural, economic, and political domains of everyday life (Lindsay et al., 2021). In a society with restricted visibility for strategically undervalued communities and the persistence of localized violence, the impact of CSOs has garnered much attention through peacebuilding projects that fill the public space with strategically undervalued communities' voices (Byrne & Dean 2022; Simone, 2004)

In the context of post-peace accord Northern Ireland, social justice also requires proactive efforts to mainstream initiatives addressing the disproportionate levels of youth unemployment. Youth have historically been excluded from critical economic opportunities due to societal labels, a lack of inclusion and training, as well as systemic barriers rooted in the legacy of the conflict (McEvoy & Shirlow, 2009).

Lorcan proclaimed the necessity of having a community audit to identify local community needs that must be addressed to create local employment for local people to remain, so they weren't forced to migrate in search of economic opportunities. Creating livelihoods for

young people is central to social justice and to the sustainability of peace, especially in rural areas in Northern Ireland.

> *LORCAN:* Coming from a background where my generation emigrated to find work, I believe the work we do now provides options for individuals to stay. Indigenous [X] businesses are embedded in the community and endure tough times, unlike larger international firms. These businesses provide a degree of dignity, choice, and freedom for not only that individual but also any employees that they would provide work for over the longer term. It gives people good standard jobs, jobs they can be proud of, a decent standard of living, so there's freedom (CSO leader).

Creating local CSOs and businesses ensured that local people had the dignity of having jobs as well as the freedom of choice to remain in their local communities. The spillover effect of providing employment to local people was that it promoted cross-community ties among workers, improving communication, trust, and reconciliation.

Aoife also revealed that youth often feel demoralized when seeking justice and equal treatment by the instruments employed by the GFA. It was critical to provide for young people's basic human needs (food, self-care, opportunities, self-validation) to ensure that their human rights were respected, especially by the police.

> *AOIFE:* A huge benefit in terms of information is helping people access their rights, helping people know what they are entitled to. It's currently doing an awful lot with non-nationals who would have been working and lost jobs, dealing with young people who are out of work, dealing with issues around employment legislation, and so on. It's dealing with social welfare queries. It's dealing with education queries, grants, and so on.

> You might ask what the link is between those and peace. Well, people need to be able to live, people need to be able to eat, people need to be cared for, and in terms of peacebuilding, education is a key (CSO worker).

Embedding justice through institutions and policies was critical in changing people's attitudes. Aoife pointed out how joint policing committees and peace partnerships illustrated how young people were accountable to their community. It sent a strong message that "whether you're white, black, Protestant, Catholic, Republican, Unionist, North or South, you are equally as important as anybody else and you have a right to information and opportunities and so on." CSOs needed to encourage young people to recognize that they have a role in seeking justice for others.

That said, Ian spoke about the need for natural justice as he remembered how hurtful and tragic the Claudy, Co. Derry car bombs were in 1972 when three explosions happened in the late morning, two on Main Street and one on Church Street (The Irish Times, 2022). Ian, a CSO leader, expressed concern about the victims who felt that they were left behind and not supported after the bombing as they never received social justice. Ian didn't believe that justice was delivered for the survivors:

> *IAN:* The Claudy bomb was in the early 1970s, and those people are still hurting. You can almost touch the hurt when they start talking about how they feel, and how they feel about how they didn't get justice. They didn't get the truth of what happened to them in their wee village. You know, at Claudy, three bombs went off in two wee streets. People running from one bomb and straight into the next bomb, and then the next bomb, you know, in a small village. And those people, they just certainly haven't forgotten. They are

> not in a forgiving state of mind, and that is what 30-odd years ago. Ok, maybe in another generation that might be gone but what happens to those people in the meantime because they have nobody to turn to apart from, they go to their GP [General Practitioner]. They go to their doctor, and he prescribes tablets (CSO leader).

Providing meaningful education and training opportunities is critical for PUL youth who were trapped and left behind by the peace dividend. Bringing young PUL people out of the conflict could only be achieved by providing them with jobs and educational opportunities, keeping them away from new Loyalist paramilitary groups.

When young people are provided with opportunities in education and job training, their close social circle, including friends, family, and parents, should be involved in their future goals. Ian emphasized that education and job training alone were not sufficient to keep young people out of trouble and were a challenge to the sustainability of the peace process:

> IAN: There has to be something there. There has to be employment, whether it's self-help in their own place, creating their own employment opportunities, which would be better. And if that's not happening, then resources have to be put in there from the government. And if that's going to be taken away, you know, you're facing a situation where we could be back to where we started in the '70's now.

The direction of current peace efforts was a concern for CSO workers. Governments often believed that peacebuilding efforts were only needed within a certain period; however, peacebuilding is an ongoing effort (Mac Ginty, 2021; Yavuz, 2024). When employment, education, or other critical resources are not provided for communities, their lack of access to basic human needs often escalates conflict (Byrne & Senehi, 2012).

Similarly, Eoghan disclosed that the funding addressed the root causes of the conflict, and neglected people living along the Northern Irish Border corridor, especially in the PUL community. He noted that PEACE II created employment for hundreds of community development workers in villages and small towns, and the resources flowing into the region were crucial in bringing the peace dividend to the grassroots level and sustaining peace efforts.

> *EOGHAN:* On human needs, the Border region, particularly parts of Northern Ireland, lacked many facilities and services. These programs kick-started stuff like childcare. In terms of equity, equality, and justice, they have made a big contribution there. I think that people's attitudes towards "the other" have shifted, and the wider community recognizes the importance of equality and justice in the conflict.
>
> The challenge remains to ensure that mainly the Unionist community begins to see quality and justice as issues for them, not as a threat to them. At the working-class level, it's seen as a loss, and at the Unionist leadership level, they seem not to have fully bought in (CSO leader).

Sinn Féin activists initially began to articulate the significance of equality and justice needs within the CNR community. Today, equality and justice issues are imploding in some of the Loyalist heartlands while the terms are perceived as cloaked in Republican rhetoric. Yet addressing equality and social justice within the working class PUL community is an integral part of any long-term legislation initiatives and peacebuilding projects within Northern Ireland and the Border Counties to build a sustainable peace.

Darren disclosed that the Northern Ireland peace process altered the balance of power, with the PUL working class losing out to the CNR middle class. The absence of direct violence

everyday mainstreamed negative peace and aided community relations because people were not living in a constant state of fear. The CSOs improved conditions on the ground; yet the PUL working class perceived that the CNR community had accrued all the benefits of the funding, and people continued to live in a state of negative liminality, with structural violence still harming the PUL working class.

> *DARREN:* All of the attention placed on Northern Ireland can be seen as pressure to end discrimination against Catholics and has been a factor in the passage of civil rights legislation in the Good Friday Agreement. But without fundamental change, it means altering the balance between Protestant and Catholic working-class people.
>
> Many Protestant working-class people see themselves as the great losers from the Troubles, and they are. If you wish to know which section of the Northern Ireland population has lost most, it's the Protestant working-class; if you wish to know which section of the Northern Ireland population has gained most, it is the Catholic middle class.
>
> This creates great resentment on the Protestant side, as they feel they have lost something they ought never to have had. A Protestant from East Belfast remembers that their father and their grandfathers had a more or less right to a job, and now they can't get a job at all (CSO leader).

Darren noted that "Protestants in X city say everywhere they look, they can see Catholics advancing." He perceived that this analysis was problematic and not representative of the majority who saw the aid mainstreaming and sustaining a negative peace as the absence of everyday violence improved over time:

> DARREN: You don't wake up in the morning and hear that last night another person was killed, and then you are wondering who that person was? Where was it? What side did that person come from? What side did the killer come from? Is it an internal feud? Is it a sectarian killing? All that was a sort of anxious experience was daily life. The fact that that is gone makes all sorts of things easier. So, I wouldn't be too cynical or too negative about the way things have changed.

While everyday direct violence may have ended, the structural roots of the conflict remain, and if unaddressed, will continue to foster resentment within the PUL working class. Given the right conditions, such as the escalation of conflict post-Brexit, this resentment could morph into a new round of political violence.

Hannah also revealed that social justice was about everyday people caring about and listening to each other and having the space to speak about what is on their minds. Sharing one's story with individuals from the other community opens the possibility of seeing a different perspective as they hear and understand the teller's experience, which is an action that fosters positive encounters and interactions, thereby forging everyday peace and mainstreaming peacebuilding at the local level.

> *HANNAH:* People [must] be able to share what has happened to them, what their life experience has been. So, many people have never had that space to share but also have the opportunity to talk to those who would be the perceived enemy. Maybe not the actual person who pulled the trigger or planted the bomb or whatever. But to talk to those groupings to say, "this is what was done to me," and just allowing that for people to actually tell their story, how this left them, how this left their family.

> Now I think that is a human need for people to express themselves to tell their story to say, "this is how it was for me"… So, people need opportunities to be able to express themselves, and to be listened to very, very respectfully. But also giving them an opportunity to hear where the other grouping is coming from, so that they might better understand the circumstances, you know, to come to terms with it and make sense of what went on.
>
> I think with regards to justice, I think with telling your story sometimes is the only justice people are going to get. They're not going to have their day in court. They're never going to express in the public realm what has happened to them. But in very safe spaces, speaking … their story may be the only form of justice.
>
> I think even at the very minimum, as human beings, we reach out to somebody and say that we care, we kind of touch the emotions, we touch the heart, and it is something about love. It is sharing, it's about humanity, and at the very basic level, we are saying, "listen, it is important that your voice is heard, it's important that you are allowed to tell your story." And we really do feel … humbled that people are willing to share. So, I think that goes to the heart of maybe somebody walking away and thinking, "that's the first time that I have been able to tell what it was like for me."

When one hears another person's story in a profound and authentic way, it rehumanizes that person, and it becomes difficult to demonize or otherize them (Senehi, 2020). Survivors were able to understand and make meaning out of what happened to them through the process of telling their stories. There was a level of healing that took place where they found a form of natural justice, they could not attain through the criminal justice system.

Yet Northern Ireland remains a deeply polarized, segregated, and sectarian society where people have few opportunities to dialogue and hear the other person's political positions to account for and broaden their own (Holland, 2022). Hearing only one point of view from within one's community reinforces that one-dimensional view, and it generates a sense of self-righteousness when addressing equity and justice across communities.

Measuring Success - Complacency, Isolation, and Accessing Resources

Eoin recognized that the conflict had festered over the years since partition, and CNR people had internalized the anger and frustration that eventually exploded in the late 1960s when the civil rights movement took to the streets of Northern Ireland to advocate for the CNR community's human rights, culture, and identity as the conflict escalated into the Troubles. Eoin noted that while IFI and EU PEACE funding has provided a platform to ensure equity and inclusion to work toward social justice and to improve cross-community relations in a slow-moving peacebuilding process, people remain complacent about what has happened:

> *EOIN:* I certainly think that they [IFI and EU funders] have contributed to the whole area of the equality of opportunity for people and communities, where, I suppose, the impact of conflict had fast-forwarded a spiral of decline at a local level. And I think that society, as well as government, had a responsibility because people did not create it; it's a bigger question.
>
> All the Troubles were there for a decade, virtually until the eruptions in the '60s post-civil rights movement. And really, in the end of it all, it was a problem that people hoped would go away, and it never went away because it wasn't addressed, and it wasn't acknowledged. And the respect for the identity and culture certainly, in terms of the

> Catholic community living in the North, wasn't there. But I think that we need to acknowledge that the respect in terms of the identity of the Protestant culture and their perspective on life, and the world around them, wasn't necessarily embraced in the South.
>
> So, I think that the funding has at least provided the platform where equity and justice can actually happen. I would think that they have provided the platform for that to be at least delivered. Do I think we're there yet? No. Do I think there's a level of complacency about what has been done and what has happened? Yes. I think that the institutions of the state, like the government, ministers, set the context, whether we like it or not, the way society goes. And they need to constantly be reminding us of what our priorities are as a society (PEACE III development officer).
>
> External funding provided the platform where equity and social justice happened so that PUL and CNR citizens could express their hurt, anger, and frustration, and not bottle it all up inside, so that they couldn't move forward.

People's most fundamental need was to feel safe. Vulnerable people were afraid to engage because of Republican dissident activities, while some CNR young people entrenched within sectarian attitudes aspired to join the RIRA, while DUP and Sinn Féin politicians remained estranged from each other in the public forum not appearing to give too much ground while working together behind closed doors.

At the same time, Cormac also believed that CSOs were promoting contact and behind-the-scenes peacemaking that addressed local people's human rights. The funder's fixation on measuring success meant that CSOs had to focus their activities on quantity rather than on the quality of delivery.

> *CORMAC:* One of the difficulties with it sometimes, the funders are more interested in quantity rather than quality, the number of people you have. And we felt with experience, it might be better to fit 20 people and take them on a few exchanges to really build up a relationship, rather than 20 different people every time. And other groups have said that you were only starting to feel relaxed with people, especially when there's huge mistrust, and that just comes down to that qualitative and quantitative. Well, certainly it broke down barriers and has contributed to an awful lot of the peace that is there at the moment (CSO leader).

CSO-funded projects have made a difference in bringing people together to break down barriers and create tolerant and respectful communities. This contact has led to a deeper understanding of the issues impacting people in these communities.

Conan also revealed that understanding different cultures provided local people with a broader global view that enriched the cultural and economic well-being of the local community, enhancing people's quality of life and broadening peaceful encounters. Conan noted that isolated people found it difficult to access resources.

> *CONAN:* Basic human needs, I suppose, when it goes back to the statute on human rights, it is about that opportunity to access health and education. And education for me is a much broader term than simply the three R's of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Education is about understanding and having a greater view of the world, and a greater understanding of different cultures and what their perspective is.
>
> If you have a grounding in a broader global view of things, if your mind kind of has access to understanding broader cultures, I think you have a better platform to start

> out from. But I also think a lot of people, as well, find it very difficult to access the resources that are open to them or the channels that are open to them, if they're isolated at a time, within one, you know, if it's an insular kind of community view. You know, it kind of just stays in one community now (CSO leader).

Conan believed that some people feel secure and safe within their community. He also emphasized the importance of facilitating opportunities for community members to engage with one another, which could make them feel more secure as they don't feel as lonely and isolated, "as they feel their own cultural personalities are more accepted." Conan also pointed out that demographic changes in Northern Ireland have impacted the sectarian nature of the conflict in a positive way as newcomers have enriched the culture with new ideas, experiences, and cultural practices in terms of peacebuilding:

> CONAN: But here it seems to be that the demographic is very much about the Western ex-colonial people coming into Ireland, and I don't know why that is. You know it's interesting, there are a number of West African taxi drivers here, so it's just been a massive increase…. Sometimes when you have people from [immigrant] communities, they have a different viewpoint on how Ireland operates as a whole, and they can contribute something to that than the Indigenous population can't.
>
> You know, because it is grounded in an older kind of more very fixed kind of prejudice, where you have the likes of Portlaoise appointed its first mayor, a guy that came from Nigeria [Rotimi Adebari], I think. But anyway, just to see the fact that this guy had come [and] in seven years [of] living in Ireland … was now the mayor of an Irish town.… So, it was just a fantastic kind of thing to see that is one of the more truer

> success stories of Ireland actually being welcoming to those communities and providing a kind of shelter for people who are escaping persecution in their own countries.

More immigrants from West Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Asia have moved into the north-west region, and demographic patterns have shifted dramatically (Byrne, 2023). Including new immigrants in local peacebuilding projects was a welcoming and validating experience, recognizing and respecting their knowledge and cultural practices. New immigrants were working with local people on joint peacebuilding projects to understand cultural differences and complex problems, to build cross-community relationships. Strategically undervalued communities like the long-term unemployed, disabled people, LGBTQI+ people, and ex-combatants should also be included in the decision-making process. They must be provided opportunities to engage with other communities around sustainable local community economic development and unemployment and be able to influence policymaking in the statutory bodies to meet their needs.

Discussion and Conclusion

Young people live in fragmented communities where they have few opportunities to vent their frustrations and to have an economic outlet that would improve their livelihoods. Extremists in the PUL and CNR communities weren't interested in bringing communities together, and they felt threatened by CSOs trying to do so. A sustainable reconciliation process could be achieved through strong CSOs if they're supported, funded, and allowed to operate independently (Skarlato et al., 2016). Consistent everyday dialogue could also bring about enduring community peacebuilding so that CSOs must be included in critical government agendas where they

continue to play crucial roles in working with local communities working to forge a sustainable peace in Northern Ireland.

A notable shift in the direction of Northern Ireland's community sector toward political authorities and commercial enterprises seemed to pose a threat to the grassroots control of peacebuilding projects, resulting in a loss of democratic accountability. Grassroots CSOs face many obstacles and challenges as they work to achieve their peace agenda goals while they struggle to remain financially sustainabile. Consequently, the British and Irish governments and the funders must prioritize and mainstream peacebuilding and support CSO project initiatives until their work is completed. Local CSO peacebuilding activities are necessary and needed. That said, the education system must also change and be radically overhauled because segregated education continues to damage young people's perceptions of other groups, creating societal division, as well as embedding a mythology and fear of the other in young people's psyche. The churches still have a powerful hold over the segregated education system that continues to regenerate and replicate the sectarian conflict. Northern Ireland could integrate its education system and become a truly inclusive society where over time ethnoreligious identity may not be so central in everyday local interactions. This change would contribute to the transformation of the ongoing conflict in Northern Ireland.

Moreover, an equity and human rights agenda was embedded in the 1998 GFA, and Sinn Féin emphasized consolidating equity and social justice for all. Human rights were an anathema to the British government's belief that they were already deeply embedded in British political culture, and it did not have to concern itself with European codified rights that were part of the architecture of the GFA, and there was a sort of collusive silence around them (Arthur, 2000). It

is important for people to listen to one another to move toward respecting everybody's human rights.

The Northern Ireland government could also establish a department of community and voluntary peacebuilding that would provide ongoing resources to CSOs and facilitate the development and implementation of a local grassroots vision for the region's future. This might include creating a regional peacebuilding credit union with local community branches, where resources from external funders are housed, with local community boards meeting with CSO applicants from their communities to evaluate and fund good project ideas. The peacebuilding credit union would eliminate neoliberal bureaucratization and consultants that eat up community resources (Oloke & Byrne, 2022).

The CSOs continue to work to facilitate dialogue that contributes to better relations as groups gain a clearer understanding of where they are coming from, and they can appreciate the experiences and perspectives of others. As people have engaged with each other, prejudice, misunderstanding, and attitudes have mostly changed for participants because they are in safe spaces where they are free to discuss controversial issues openly about what happened to them and their families during the conflict.

Extremism is preventable if solid measures are put in place, and many stakeholders have a responsibility to collaborate with local communities to create sustainable peace in Northern Ireland. To do so, it is essential for the Stormont government to actively work with CSOs to continue supporting their peacebuilding efforts. In so doing, the CSOs will be able to address some of the many challenges that engulf Northern Ireland and create more inclusive, peaceful, and forward-thinking steps toward building a sustainable peace for all.

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