‘A seat at the table’: Spaces of activism in the development of LGBTQ rights in Northern Ireland.

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Abstract

This study explores the spaces of sexual politics within Northern Ireland, through examining the spaces and strategies of activists. Geographers who study sexuality understand the spatially varied nature of sexual politics, and how this can be shaped by forms of activism. This research uses scholarship from political geography and the geographies of sex and sexuality to examine activist spaces, and how they may reproduce homonormativity and 'heteroactivism'. With a particular focus on parliamentary, online, and urban spaces, this study draws together multiple scales and spaces to understand the geopolitical processes which impact on sexual politics within Northern Ireland. By using the body as a scale and site of performance, I develop an understanding of the uneven geopolitical processes which impact on LGBTQ lives and activism in Northern Ireland. Ultimately, this research demonstrates the complex relationship between scales, spaces, activism, and sexualities.

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Contents

Abstract 2
Acknowledgments 3
Contents 4
List of Tables and Figures 5
List of Abbreviations 7
1. Introduction 8
2. Literature review 12
2.1 Political Geography 12
2.2 Geographies of Sex and Sexualities 17
2.3 Northern Irish Context: Historical and Sexual Geographies 21
2.4 Spaces of Activism 24
3. Methodology 29
3.1 Discourse 30
3.2 Fieldwork 34
3.3 Positionality and Reflexivity 35
3.4 Ethics 36
4. Parliamentary spaces and LGBTQ Rights 37
4.1 Parliament and Performance 38
4.2 Society: Drawing Family Life into the Public Sphere 41
4.3 Religion and Tradition 47
4.4 Parliamentary Politics: Sectarianism and LGBTQ Rights 49
5. LGBTQ and Heteroactivist Spaces 57
5.1 Ordinary or 'Normative': Love Equality NI 57
5.2 Heteroactivism in Northern Ireland: The Christian Institute 65
5.3 Comparing LGBTQ and Hetero-activisms 68
6. Parades and Politics: Darling, I want my gay rights now! 72
6.1 Belfast Pride Festival 2019 72
6.2 Constructing the Parade 75
6.3 Pride: Partying and Politics? 79
7. Conclusion 88
8. Appendices 91
9. List of References 93

List of Figures and Tables

Figures

Figure 1: The relationship between communication and geopolitical context (Adams, 2013)

Figure 2 Screen capture of a debate in the Stormont Assembly, which shows the spatial division within the Assembly Chamber (video file provided by the Northern Ireland Assembly via personal request).

Figure 3 Screen capture of the House of Commons as MPs leave to vote on Conor McGinn's amendment to the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill (Parliamentlive, 2019).

Figure 4 Paul Givan speaking against the motion for same-sex marriage, with members behind him responding to his speech (video file provided by the Northern Ireland Assembly via personal request)

Figure 5 A submission to the 'Tell Your Love Story' campaign ran by Love Equality NI, by a couple from Northern Ireland (Love Equality 2016d)

Figure 6 Another submission to the campaign, detailing the couple's feeling of inequality at their civil partnership being a lower status than marriage (Love Equality, 2016d).

Figure 7 A submission by a couple who remark on the inequality on not being able to use marital language like 'husband', and the desire for equality (Love Equality NI, 2016d)

Figure 8 Front page of Belfast Pride Festival Guide picturing an illustrated image of transgender activist Marsha P. Johnson, who was a key figure at the Stonewall Riots which helped to spark the global Pride movement (fieldwork photography)

Figure 9 Map of the Belfast Pride parade route through the city centre (Belfast Pride 2019b).

Figure 10 The front of the parade, led by Lord Mayor John Finucane, holding the banner with the official Pride slogan, 'Rights Now' (Belfast Telegraph, 2019).

Figure 11 Selection of signs at Belfast Pride, reading "Show some love", "Pan Pride", and "We are SORRY for how the church has mistreated LGBTQI+ people" (fieldwork photography).

Figure 12 Collection of signs in Belfast Pride, 2019 (fieldwork photography).

Figure 13 Members of Cara-Friend LGBTQ+ Youth Group marching in Belfast Pride, with one person holding a sign reading "Queer Liberation Not Assimilation"(fieldwork photography).

Figure 14 Members of the trade union Unison marching in Belfast Pride 2019. One sign reads "With or without you, civil marriage for LGBT+ people" with an image of the Stormont Assembly building (fieldwork photography).

Figure 15 Demonstrators outside Belfast City Hall. They have Belfast Pride Festival banners in the background, and are surrounded by metal barriers. Several police officers guard the area, indicating this is officially sanctioned, and they are being protected by a public service directed by the state (fieldwork photography).

Tables

Table 1: Summary of parliamentary debates.

List of Abbreviations

Term	Meaning
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
GFA	Good Friday Agreement
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly [Stormont]
PPF	Political Performance Framework
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party
TUV	Traditional Unionist Voices
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

1. Introduction

On 18th April 2019, the Northern Irish journalist Lyra McKee was tragically murdered by a member of the New IRA while reporting on riots in Derry, Northern Ireland (Carroll and Waterson, 2019). Her death resulted in the reigniting of power-sharing talks between the governing parties of Northern Ireland, whose disagreements led to the collapse of the devolved government in January 2017 (Mohdin, 2019). Since the collapse, the Northern Ireland secretary in Westminster has been responsible for introducing a budget for Northern Ireland's civil service, rather than returning to direct rule from Westminster. Consequently, there had been no legislative progress on devolved issues within Northern Ireland since January 2017, including same-sex marriage and reproductive rights. These are two issues regarding sexual and gendered politics that are 'behind' the rest of the United Kingdom, as the province has strict abortion laws and forbids same-sex marriage (Thomson, 2016). In addition to Lyra McKee's death sparking new efforts towards restoring power-sharing, in the months following her death it emerged that she had been planning on proposing to her partner, Sara Canning. In an interview in May 2019 with Channel 4 News (Thomson, 2019) Canning was critically outspoken at the lack of progress on same-sex marriage within Northern Ireland, and reflected on a conversation she had with then Prime Minister Theresa May:

> "To tell us that issues like gay marriage and abortion rights are a devolved matter is completely out of order. We're not a devolved state anymore. We're completely unsuccessful. It has been shown that we can't work together – so the British government has to be our government. And they have to be our voice and they have to do better."

Canning's statement is a harsh condemnation of the state of devolution within Northern Ireland, framed through the lens of sexual politics. On 9th July 2019, a debate in Westminster over imposing another budget on Northern Ireland's regional government was dramatically used as a conduit for addressing the lack of progress on devolved issues, with several amendments addressing the implementation of abortion

legislation and same-sex marriage if power-sharing is not restored by 21st October 2019 (McHugh and James, 2019). However, this was not the beginning of Northern Ireland's LGBTQ rights movement, nor will it be the end, and even if laws providing for same-sex marriage are passed, a future devolved government will have the power to overturn them. It is therefore necessary to fully grasp the motivations, arguments, and actions of activists working for and against the extension of LGBTQ rights within Northern Ireland, which I argue can only be accomplished when accounting for the spatial aspects of sexual politics.

The aim of this project is to explore the geographical variation in the sexual politics of Northern Ireland, through examining the spaces that activists use to campaign for and against LGBTQ rights in the province. I will meet this aim by considering several objectives:

1. Assessing how the progression of LGBTQ rights in Northern Ireland is impacted by variations in state structure through scale and governance, with attention to the Stormont Assembly and Westminster.
2. Questioning how activism for and against these rights is impacted by and constitutive of space through applying and expanding Routledge's (2017) framework for analysing radical activist spaces.
3. Exploring the way activism on LGBTQ rights can be understood, through the frameworks of heteroactivism (Browne and Nash, 2017), homonormativity (Duggan, 2002), and ordinary activism (Browne and Bakshi, 2013).

There is a spatial variation in sexual politics across the world; some countries actively persecute sexual and gender minorities, while others promote inclusion and equality. This geographical variation is often influenced by complex factors related to politics, religion, and colonialism. While many countries in the Global North and South recognise and protect gender and sexual minorities, even when rights have been 'won', resistance persists, in a somewhat different form to overt discrimination (Browne and Nash, 2017). In calling for a more diverse understanding of the global rights landscape, Lalor and Browne (2018) reflect that current narratives portray progressiveness 'here' in the UK, and regressive politics 'there', usually in the Global

South. However, in making that claim, they overlook the inequality within the UK, where certain rights have not been won in Northern Ireland.

This research meets their call, as by researching a province within the UK that has unequal legislative rights for LGBTQ people, it adds complexity to the UK government's narrative that they are a progressive leader for human rights. Also, by researching resistances to the development of these rights it demonstrates that progress is not linear, and even when rights are provided for, they may still be disputed. Another justification for focusing on Northern Ireland is the fact that this project began before the events described above. These events are symptoms of growing socio-political unrest and uncertainty, driven by lack of government leadership, Brexit negotiations, and rising conservativism in relation to social issues. It is therefore paramount to understand how Northern Ireland's sexual politics have developed in various phases of governance, and how rights may continue to be resisted.

In this study, I will review the literature relating to political geography and the geographies of sexualities to situate this research within its broader disciplinary context. I will also examine key concepts such as scale, citizenship, activism, and hetero/homonormativity. Lastly, I will identity the gaps in the literature that this research addresses. This will be followed by an outline of my methodological approach used to meet the research objectives. Following this, I will analyse the data collected through three empirical chapters. The first chapter will perform a discourse and performance analysis of parliamentary debates that took place in Stormont and Westminster, as this is a key space of activism in the progression of rights within Northern Ireland. The second analysis chapter will critically compare case studies of two charities that work in Northern Ireland, and how they use various spaces to campaign for and against LGBTQ rights. Finally, I will examine the occupation of public space during Belfast Pride, exploring the dynamics of radical, ordinary, and normative activisms present within the parade. Through examining these key spaces of activism, including government institutions, online media spaces, and urban spaces, I will conclude that activism within Northern Ireland is spatially and politically varied, and

demonstrates multiple conceptualisations of 'activism', with heteroactivism providing a substantial risk to the development of LGBTQ rights in the province.

2. Literature review

This study will critically engage with literature on sexual politics, which incorporates writings from a variety of sub-disciplines within and beyond Geography. Sexual politics is influenced by work from the geographies of sex and sexuality, as well as feminist critiques of critical geopolitics. In addition to this, the Northern Irish context requires a historical geographical perspective, while further engaging with critical geopolitical literature. This review will outline these areas of the literature to fully situate this project within the context of the growing debates over LGBTQ rights and activism within Northern Ireland.

2.1 Political geography

Flint (2009) describes political geography as the field of human geography which studies the relationship between politics, space, and place. It played a central role in the development of modern human geography, promoting the role of geography in the imperial project. The sub-discipline was tarnished by WWII, due to the relationship between geopolitical thinking and Nazi state expansion, which I will discuss further below in the context of geopolitics. The focus of the field became centred on studying geographical features like boundaries, and political events such as elections. However, this form of political geography was deemed inadequate to account for the radical politics of the 1960s, influenced by the Vietnam War and growing racial inequalities in the US.

Human geography as a whole became influenced by Marxist thinking, and the engagement with this produced a radical geographical tradition, later developing into critical geography in the 1980s as geographers looked to theories beyond Marxism (Gibbons, 2001). Flint (2009) goes on to explain how the cultural turn in the 1990s also influenced the discipline, challenging the dominant focus on scale and economic structures, with feminist theorists diversifying understandings of scale and private spaces such as the home. Key concepts in political geography of relevance to this study are scale and citizenship, which have been studied within geopolitics, an area of political geography which explicitly analyses statecraft and violence (Sparke, 2009).

Classical and Critical Geopolitics

Peake (2013) explains that geopolitics is a field of study concerned with analysing the impacts of geography on international relations, and the implications this has on the territories of nation-states. Geopolitics emerged at the forefront of the sub-discipline of political geography in the 1890s as a tool for geostrategic statecraft, demonstrated by the work of geopolitical thinkers such as Friedrich Ratzel (who utilised social Darwinism to theorise the state as organic) and Sir Halford Mackinder (founder of British university geography) (Dodds, Kuss, and Sharp, 2013; Kearns, 2009; Murphy, 2015,). These figures represent the classical imperial traditions common in the beginnings of human, and especially political, geography. Geopolitics was a tool of the state to extend its territory, and negotiate its relations with other nation-states. This was most evident when geopolitics was used as a tool by Karl Haushoffer, whose cooperation with Adolf Hitler tarnished the reputation of geopolitics until the late 20th century. Due to its association with authoritarianism and fascism, explicit engagement with geopolitics was avoided by US and European political geographers, who instead turned to methods which centred on modelling and testing (Dodds, Kuus, and Sharp, 2013; Dodds and Woon, 2015). Geopolitics experienced a revival during the Cold War in the 1970s, which indicated a continuation of the geostrategic and imperial influences of classical geopolitics. In response to this, and as part of the wider critical turn in geography, a new field of study emerged – critical geopolitics.

Dodds, Kuus and Sharp (2013) explore how critical geopolitics emerged as a critique of Cold War geopolitics, but rather than having a specific focus on certain territories or actors, it considers the processes by which these categories are produced. This highlights the influence of poststructuralist theory in critical geopolitics, especially the work of Michel Foucault on discourse and power. However, they also assert that critical geopolitics does not follow a single theoretical basis or methodology, but is instead informed by a myriad of approaches including Marxism, feminism, and post-colonial theory. This diverse theoretical groundwork allows for a broad scope of analysis, which has allowed for critical geopolitics to go beyond classical geopolitics' focus on state actors alone, to also consider the role of non-state actors and everyday life, which is significant for this research. Dodds and Woon (2015) and Agnew (2013)

emphasise the social construction of the assumptions that world politics are based on, indicating that critical geopolitics conceptualises geopolitics as something actively played out through a complex interaction between language and context, rather than something distinct to be seen 'out there'. This is in direct opposition to classical geopolitics – highlighting the nature of critical geopolitics' main concern in questioning the power and knowledge of classical geopolitical discourses. They assert that the development of critical geopolitics cannot be understood without reference to its classical counterpart. My own research is influenced by the way language and context produce discourses that construct attitudes and policies on LGBTQ identities and rights. Critical geopolitics is also not without critique, particularly by feminist and queer scholars, who have drawn attention to minorities and complicated understandings of key concepts such as scale and citizenship.

Feminist Geopolitics

Scholars, such as Jennifer Hyndman (2004), Linda Peake (2013), and Jasbir Puar (2007), have critiqued critical geopolitics for not being critical of itself, particularly in regard to its lack of attention on gendered, racial, and sexualised understandings of geopolitics. Massaro and Williams' (2013) overview of feminist geopolitics describes its focus on examining power structures, oppression, and resistance, at multiple scales, in order to understand how power is situated, embodied, and political. Hyndman's (2004) work linking feminist geography and geopolitics highlights the importance of everyday life and the bodily scale to ground and situate critical geopolitical scholarship. The body is an especially important concept here, as while both classical and critical geopolitics have traditionally focused on the macroscale nation-state, focusing on the body enables analysis of how geopolitical processes are experienced in varied ways across populations (Massaro and Williams, 2013). In addition to this, Dowler and Sharp (2001) claim that the body is a site of performance, while Staeheli et al. (2004) examine the body as a site of oppression and resistance. This demonstrates the centrality of the bodily scale to feminist geopolitical scholarship, particularly when regarding sexual and gendered minorities.

Peake's (2013) exploration of critical geopolitics and heteronormativity also asserts how critical geopolitics centres around and is organised by explicit attention to the

nation-state, which is the dominant spatial arena of the public. This relegates issues of the private to being outside of the concern of critical geopolitics, despite the fact that the nation is deeply implicated in the regulation of gender and sexuality, as well as heteronormative ideas of sexuality and gender shaping the national imaginary of nation-states. Peake asserts that:

> "The embodiment of queer subjects and the violence to which they can be subject to across a range of spaces is directly connected to the ability of the nation-state to assert control over global space… In this sense individual queer bodies are territorialised as geopolitical units revealing how the scale of the bodily, the national, and the global are fused and raising questions for critical geopolitics on the nature of belonging" (2013: pp.103).

This indicates the importance and relevance of queer bodies to understanding the interactions of geopolitical concepts such as scale and the nation-state. It also illustrates how understanding the body as a scale, a site, and a form of disruption, queer bodies may bring to light important issues relating to nationalism, citizenship, and power, which are core concerns of critical geopolitics. This is particularly significant for this research, as the question of LGBTQ equality raises issues of belonging and inclusion, which are key to the process of forming political subjects as citizens (Staeheli et al., 2004). Furthermore, understanding Pride as a form of activism involves understanding the relationship between queer bodies and urban spaces. This discussion of the development of geopolitics is significant, as these understandings are key to the concepts of scale and citizenship, which are central to this study.

Scale and citizenship

Scale is a concept intrinsic to geographical understandings of space, and has importance in political geography for representing the ways in which political power is spatially constituted (Jonas, 2015). While there is no specific definition for scale, it has been understood in multiple ways (Marston et al., 2009). While some consider the purely methodological operations of data collection at the micro or macroscale, others, including feminist scholars, have recognised it as being socially constructed

(ibid.). In response to the disputed definitions of scale and its multiple uses, some have radically suggested that the concept of scale be eliminated in geography, proposing a flat ontology which does not reproduce top-down structural limitations (Marston et al., 2005). In addition to these understandings, feminist scholarship has understood the relational nature of scale (McDowell, 1999; Jonas, 2015). McDowell (1999) imagines place and scale as a 'double helix', rather than a hierarchical tier, illustrating the constitutive interactions between the two concepts. She distinguishes the differences between places by scale, but also asserts that places aren't defined by a single spatial scale, but the intersection of a range of scales. This is significant, as understanding how the sexualised and gendered body is impacted by and influences other scales such as the city or nation-state is central to this study, and rather than look at these scales in a hierarchical fashion, I intend to examine the relationships between these scales.

Citizenship is another central concept in political geography, and can be used to examine the spatial variations in power explored by feminist geopolitical scholars through connecting the body with the nation-state, which draws together scale, power, and politics (Massaro and Williams, 2013). Hoipkemier (2015) suggests that citizenship can be divided into three categories – political (participation in formal politics), legal (rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship), and identity and belonging (practiced by people negotiating identity and spaces of belonging). Ehrkamp and Jacobsen (2015) outline how while there is general assumption that citizenship permits everyone the same rights and responsibilities, this has been disputed by feminist and postcolonial scholars, who argue that difference rather than equality is central to experiences of citizenship. This is significant for this study as I analyse the legislative equalities the LGBTQ community is campaigning for in Northern Ireland, and how this relates to citizens feeling a sense of acceptance and belonging in wider society. To expand on this understanding of citizenship, I will proceed to review the literature around geographical understandings of sexuality.

2.2 Geographies of Sex and Sexualities

The sub-discipline of the geographies of sex and sexualities has examined the relationships between sexuality, sex, gender, and space. Emerging in the 1990s following the cultural turn, it has largely focused on the history of urban gay spaces and 'gay ghettos' (usually in the Global North), and eventually adopted poststructuralist queer theory to examine broader questions of identity and politics (Browne et al., 2007). This research brings together two of the most prominent research themes in the geographies of sex and sexuality, which are urban sexualities, and sexual politics (Oswin, 2016). However, it is worth noting Brown and Browne's (2016) insistence that all geographical research on sex and sexuality remains political, regardless of its primary focus.

Sexual Politics

Browne and Nash's (2013) paper explores how recent political gains for LGBTQ people in countries in the Global North have resulted in wider inclusion in society, although these rights are not universal, as can be seen in the Northern Irish context. While progress in many places has been made, sexual and gender minorities continue to be discriminated against in many contexts, including when the law is behind them (Hubbard, 2013; Tucker, 2010). There are two concepts which are central to understanding the unequal socio-spatial impacts of laws regarding the LGBTQ community: heteronormativity and homonormativity. While heteronormativity is accepted in the field as a description of the ways heterosexuality prescribes sexual and gender norms (Brown and Browne, 2016), homonormativity is more contentious.

The term was coined by Duggan (2002) as a conceptualisation of the ways in which the gay rights movement in the USA had begun to embrace heteronormative institutions such as marriage and assimilate into neoliberal economic policies. Browne and Nash (2015) add that it explains how some 'normative' gays and lesbians embody certain other social criteria (e.g. white, middle class, able-bodied) are becoming accepted in mainstream culture, which leads to those who fall outside of those criteria being excluded further, and even facing discrimination in gay and lesbian spaces. Brown and Browne (2016) add that the term has connections to sexual citizenship, as

it is due to the legislative changes that include certain aspects of sexual and gendered diversity that specific groups have been included in wider society.

Gavin Brown (2012) presents a critique of the widespread, uncritical use of homonormativity within the field, however. He accepts that social changes (such as new legislative equalities and liberalisation of social attitudes) have occurred, and that these changes have had uneven social impacts, he takes issue with "homonormativity being represented as a homogenous, global external entity that exists outside of all of us and exerts its terrifying, normative power on gay lives everywhere" (2012: pp.3). Elaborating on this, Brown argues that there is an issue with the way that homonormativity as a theory overlooks the lives of gay and lesbian individuals who live outside of the metropolitan global city centres where the theorisations of homonormativity originated and developed. The geographies of knowledge production are significant here, as he argues that the theory has been developed largely in the urban areas it applies to, and there has been less work exploring how discourses of homonormativity are reproduced or contested elsewhere. He therefore calls for research on a wider range of 'ordinary' cities, to expand understandings of the lived experiences of sexual and gender minorities. This research meets this call, as Belfast is a smaller regional city, although the focus here is on activist spaces as opposed to the everyday lives of sexual and gender minorities.

Key concepts in understanding the geographies of sexual politics are sexual citizenship and nationalism. Richardson (2015) explores the relationship between activism, rights, and citizenship, explaining that the turn to human rights in LGBTQ activism has resulted in a focus on the rights which can be achieved in order for LGBTQ people to be valued and included in society. She argues that the focus on rights and equality for LGBTQ activists, instead of emphasising changing the way society operates, draws connections between the processes of homonormativity and citizenship. This is significant, as Routledge (2017) argues that radical queer activists have critiqued the focus on legislative reforms as assimilative, though he acknowledges that others have recognised the strategic value of such reforms, as they raise awareness and open space for wider struggles facing the LGBTQ community.

Nash and Browne (2015) and Richardson (2017) explore the concept of sexual citizenship, which refers to the way in which citizens in modern societies are normatively gendered and sexualised, tying together citizens as subjects and the state, and the bodily scale (Massaro and Williams, 2013). Furthermore, legislation relating to sexual and gender minorities is used as a benchmark for the progressiveness of a nation-state. Despite this, Nash and Browne argue that it is problematic to distinguish states supportive of LGBTQ people and those that are not due to heterogeneity within and between states. This is evident in discussions of LGBTQ rights in the UK, due to the disparity in rights between Northern Ireland and the mainland. This can be further examined by using Puar's (2007) notion of homonationalism, which refers to the way LGBTQ politics are implicated in US nationalism during the war on terror. LGBTQ 'friendliness' was utilised in order to present Islamophobic discourses, which portray Muslim cultures as primitive and discriminatory.

Lalor and Browne's (2018) paper takes an interdisciplinary focus on LGBTQ rights in the UK, exploring issues around rights progress, and how this shapes its foreign policy. They examine the tendency in the UK context, where rights have seemingly been 'won', to instead shift the focus on persecutions 'elsewhere', creating a binary mode of thinking. Furthermore, they argue that by narrowly focusing on a rights-dependent framework of progress, it can allow the 'worst' forms of violence against sexual and gender minorities to be relocated away from the UK – either to past actions of Empire, or elsewhere in the world. They summarise their reflection by arguing that the simplified narrative of progressive politics "here" in the UK, and regressive politics "there" elsewhere in the world (usually portrayed in post-colonial countries in the Global South) is repeated in different forums of British LGBTQ politics such as parliamentary debates, and that this narrative is hierarchical. It further imagines the space of "here" and "there" as homogenous, and Lalor and Browne make a call for more academic work to understand and address these narratives. They argue there is more research needed on spaces where rights have supposedly been "won", like the UK, to dispute the state's argument that they are a haven for sexual and gender minorities, so that the global rights landscape can be understood in a less homogenous way.

Heteroactivism

One of the ways in which resistances to LGBTQ rights exist in countries where LGBTQ individuals are already offered legal protections and a variety of rights, is through the framework of heteroactivism (Browne and Nash, 2017; Browne et al., 2018; Nash et al., 2019). In their 2017 paper, Browne and Nash describe heteroactivism as "the co-ordinated ideological response to sexual and gendered equalities rooted in an unwavering belief in the centrality of heteronormativity… as foundational to a healthy and sustainable society" (2017: pp.645). They add that the ideology is explicitly geographical, as it connects transnational activist networks, and focuses on specific areas where rights have been 'won'. In their 2019 paper, Nash et al. examine the use of discourses around freedom of speech by heteroactivists to oppose gender and sexual protections. While their paper explores the use of freedom of speech arguments on university campuses in Canada, Australia, and Great Britain, they acknowledge the variety of arguments heteroactivists have developed, which also include parental rights and religion. They call for further examination of emerging arguments which challenge sexual and gender equalities, and how these strategies may utilise other institutions in the effort against the development of equality for minorities.

For this reason, it is pertinent to study the development of LGBTQ rights within Northern Ireland, a province which has geographical proximity to other nations where heteroactivist groups have worked against equality for sexual and gender minorities (Browne et al., 2018; Nash et al., 2019). While Northern Ireland offers certain protections for the LGBTQ community, it is the only area of the UK to deny same-sex couples the right to civil marriage. This makes Northern Ireland a unique opportunity to examine the heteroactivist ideology, as well as meeting Nash et al.'s call to explore how this ideology may engage with state institutions, as the right to equal marriage has been regularly debated in parliamentary spaces since 2012. The following section will give an outline of the Northern Irish historical-political context in order to present the background of the current development of LGBTQ rights in the province.

2.3 Northern Irish Context: Historical and Sexual Geographies

In order to fully grasp the spatial dynamics of sexual politics in Northern Ireland, it is necessary to understand the political and historical contexts these take place in. This section will provide a brief overview of the historical background and recent political developments in the province, as well as existing geographical research on space and sexuality in Northern Ireland, in order to situate within existing research.

History & Politics

Several scholars have attempted to provide an overview of Northern Irish history, which has a complex relationship with the UK and Ireland. Patterson (1996) gives an overview of 20th Century politics. The province of was formed following the signing of the Government of Ireland Act 1920. The partition of the island was imagined as a method of reducing the risk of civil war. The province was governed by a single party, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) between 1921-72, who were mainly supported by Protestants, who comprised of the majority of the local population. However, biases within public services and employment practices against the minority Catholic population stirred unrest within the Province over the 20th Century. Arthur (1996) explores how while there was unrest during each decade since the formation of the province, these events intensified leading up to 1968. The civil rights movement had grown, focusing on issues such as housing and employment inequality and gerrymandering.

However, what began as non-violent protests escalated as campaigners were targeted by paramilitary groups. This violence escalated into a series of marches, protests, and riots, whereby the previously dormant IRA emerged as the apparent 'protector' of Catholic communities, whilst Unionist paramilitaries 'defended' the Protestant population. While the UUP had until then maintained full political control over the province, debates within Unionism over the 20th century over Unionist identity and responses to the demands of the civil rights protestors lead to a fracturing within their power. This ultimately led to direct rule being imposed from 1972 from Westminster, until the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) in 1998 McGlynn et al., 2014. Morrow (1996) adds that since 1972, there have been three consistent threads in

British Policy on Northern Ireland: British sovereignty, Northern Ireland power-sharing, and an Irish dimension. It is Northern Ireland power-sharing which is most pertinent to this research.

Only by understanding the historical context behind the ethno-religious groupings in Northern Ireland (Catholic Nationalists/Protestant Unionists) is it possible to grasp the current power-sharing system which fundamentally drives Northern Irish politics and has heavily influenced the legislative progress on same-sex marriage. McGlynn et al. (2014) provide an overview of post-devolution politics in Northern Ireland. They outline the consociational system of governance whereby power is shared by assigning collective rights to different groups as a way of representing diverse societies – in this case on an ethno-religious basis. As a result, the Northern Ireland Assembly is dominated by this power-sharing executive, which is subject to cross-community voting mechanisms. This issue is of particular concern to issues such as sexual and reproductive rights, due to the petition of concern mechanism which demands cross-community support for certain issues – effectively allowing one side of the house to veto the other. The current makeup of the Assembly is strongly dominated by two parties – Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) who represent the respective Nationalist and Unionist communities.

Geographies of Sex and Politics in Northern Ireland

Following the drawn out peace process in Northern Ireland, the issue of sectarianism has remained significant, albeit less heated in Northern Irish politics and society. In its place, Maginn and Ellison (2017) examine how the politics of gender and sexuality have come to the fore in the debates around identity politics in the region. Mycock and McDaid (2014) echo this, detailing the emergence of 'culture-wars' in the post-conflict era, of which there are two strands: public displays of national beliefs and identity, which are strongly associated with sectarian politics, and social and moral issues relating to sexual and reproductive rights. They suggest that while the former strand can be tied to ethno-nationalism, the latter falls less on sectarian lines, and more along the conservative and liberal boundary. However, this is contradicted by Hayes and Nagle (2016), whose work on ethno-nationalism and attitudes to LGBTQ rights explored the rise of the fundamentally ethno-nationalist parties, Sinn Féin and

the DUP, who came to dominate Northern Irish politics, and hold distinctly opposing views on these matters. Whilst Sinn Féin hold their position as the representative of the Nationalist minority which they claim proves their status as the defender of all minorities, the DUP maintain a largely hostile stance to LGBTQ rights progress. This highlights the distinctly sectarian attitude towards LGBTQ rights within the party-political context. However, based on Hayes and Nagle's analysis of the Northern Irish opinion polls, it is possible to view this pattern among wider society too, as the survey found that Protestants are about twice as likely to adopt a negative opinion towards equal marriage than Catholics, while also finding that it is more common for the Protestant community to adopt a congruent ethno-nationalist identity (i.e. identifying as both Protestant and Unionist) than the Catholic community. This indicates that resistance and support for LGBTQ rights in Northern Ireland does fall along ethno-nationalist and sectarian lines, which is distinctly tied to a historical geopolitical conflict.

These distinctions are important and necessary in gaining a full understanding of the spatial dynamics of sexual politics within Northern Ireland, particularly when considering the space of the assembly/parliament, as it is the political parties' views which have largely restricted the progress of issues such as marriage equality progressing into legislation. Thomson (2016) explores the development of legislation for sexual rights in Northern Ireland. Legal recognition of same-sex unions in the UK was introduced via the Civil Partnership Act 2004, and this included Northern Ireland due to it being under direct rule at the time. However, while the rest of the UK has since introduced same-sex marriage, Northern Ireland is yet to do so. Consequently, while Northern Ireland does offer a legal recognition of same-sex relationships, this does not extend to calling this union 'marriage', unlike other regions of the UK. Marriage is therefore a key issue in the debate for LGBTQ rights in Northern Ireland due to the disparity with the UK, which is one issue that will be explored during the course of this research, as well as the methods and spaces activists use to contest this right.

2.4 Spaces of activism

Before presenting the methodological approach of this research, it is necessary to outline the different activist spaces I examine and how they connect with the movements for and against LGBTQ rights within Northern Ireland. Activism here is defined broadly as political action by individuals or collectives in the form of social movements, and can be produced within a range of spaces including the media and grassroots organisations (Routledge, 2009). Routledge has also produced influential work on the radical geographies of protest (Routledge, 2017). He dubs protestors as "space invaders" (2017: pp.1), who both transform and are transformed by the space around them. Routledge's work primarily focuses on radical activism, despite this being only a single area of 'contentious politics', and therefore his framework may obscure some elements of ordinary (Browne and Bakshi, 2013) and implicit (Horton and Kraftl, 2009) activisms that challenge the radical/assimilative dichotomy.

Routledge (2017) outlines six spatial strategies that characterise the geographical contexts of protests: knowledge of place, making space, mobilising strategies, textual spaces, communicative strategies, and feeling 'out of place'. Of particular importance to this study are mobility (movement across space), textual spaces (intervening in and creating media spaces), and feeling out of space (challenging everyday meanings and functions of places, or disrupting space). In addition to spatialising activist strategies, Routledge also describes several sites of intervention for actions. These include sites of decision (e.g. government institutions), sites of circulation (e.g. roads, public squares), and sites of collaboration (e.g. engagements with existing powers such as national governments). This research will use Routledge's framework to explore the geographical aspects of LGBTQ rights activisms, by focusing on three activist spaces central to the development of LGBTQ rights within Northern Ireland: parliamentary spaces, online media spaces, and urban spaces.

Literature on activists within the LGBTQ community has largely focused on the distinction between radical queer activists who challenge assimilation and normalisation, and others who fall into the trap of reinforcing hegemonic norms (Brown, 2007). However, Browne and Bakshi (2013) have outlined a conceptualisation

of 'ordinary' activisms, which work potentially within normalising processes or institutions, and may show that working with the state can be both productive and normalising. Their work focuses on ordinariness as a way for the LGBTQ community to occupy a space unremarkably, to be accepted within the urban environment and political system, and that this does not necessarily reinforce normalising hegemonies suggested by homonormativity.

This conceptualisation is useful when researching organisations working on LGBTQ rights issues, to move beyond the hetero/homonormative and resistance/mainstream binaries, to critically explore the nuance in resistances and fights for LGBTQ rights progress, as will be demonstrated by this research. Their work adds further complexity to Browne and Lalor's 2018 research, as they link the 'deradicalisation' of LGBTQ politics to the assumption that liberation has been 'won', and the subsequent rise in queer activism in this century is partially a response to the apparent mainstreaming of LGBTQ politics. However, their insights are particularly focused on the British activism, and therefore the Northern Irish context will provide critique to their analysis. As a jurisdiction with some protections for LGBTQ minorities, but lacking in other areas, the state may be regarded as not uniformly hostile to the community, but certainly not fully inclusive as will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters. This offers potential for organisations within Northern Ireland to maintain partnerships or radical resistance to the state depending on the focus of their activism, whether that be legislative rights progress or the contestation of dominant social norms.

Parliamentary spaces

Central to the development of LGBTQ rights within Northern Ireland are parliamentary spaces. This includes the devolved Northern Irish parliament, and the national government at Westminster. Recent legislation in Northern Ireland has gone through the parliamentary process instead of the court system, and this places parliamentary spaces at the heart of the fight for and against LGBTQ rights, in particular the right to same-sex marriage. Shirin Rai (2010, 2015) has reflected on the importance of parliamentary spaces as sites of performance and representation. Rai (2010) describes how parliaments maintain public norms and legitimise political systems. This is especially pertinent to issues affecting sexual and gender minorities, as it is within

parliament that the systems which discriminate against or support the LGBTQ community may be challenged or upheld. In addition to this, politicians within parliament itself may contribute to the wider attitudes and systems which affect this community. Rai (2010) also comments on the way parliaments are presented as uniform institutions, despite the historical divisions of class, race, gender, disability, and sexuality. This would be disputed in the Northern Ireland Assembly, which is explicitly not undifferentiated, as it divides the house between the Unionist, Nationalist, and 'unaligned' parties, centralising the political divisions that remain after the ethno-religious conflict in their democratic processes.

Rai (2015) also examines 'political performance', which she regards as the performances which communicate meanings to an audience related to the state, government policy, and discourse. She developed a 'political performance framework' (PPF) which can be used to study political processes and institutions. She divides the framework into two main approaches: markers of representation (e.g. the body, space/place, words and speech, performative labour) and effects of performance (authenticity, representation, resistance to political representation). She understands performance as embodied within social relations, and asks that when politicians perform, who are they speaking to? This framework is helpful when exploring the way politicians may engage with social movements such as the LGBTQ rights movement, as well as how they may represent both their constituency, their country, and a broader cause, such as promoting or opposing LGBTQ rights. Rai states that PPF can be applied to political processes and institutions, so I will also use PFF to explore the spatial politics of Pride, in addition to parliamentary spaces.

Online media

As a form text, media is central to political geographical analysis, particularly critical geopolitics. Müller (2013) argues that critical geopolitics is reliant on the assumption that global politics can be read from textual evidence, and that texts may help to construct geopolitics. While this study focuses on sexual politics, this relates to concepts such as the state and nationalism, which draw heavily from political geographical study. It is therefore useful to view online media as a space in which activist activities and ideologies play out, as online texts help construct the politics and

arguments for and against LGBTQ rights (Müller, 2013). Adams (2013) adds to this by demonstrating the connection media has between geopolitical contexts, whether that be nationalism, sexuality, or the region, and communication content, including themes, texts, and discourses (Figure 1).

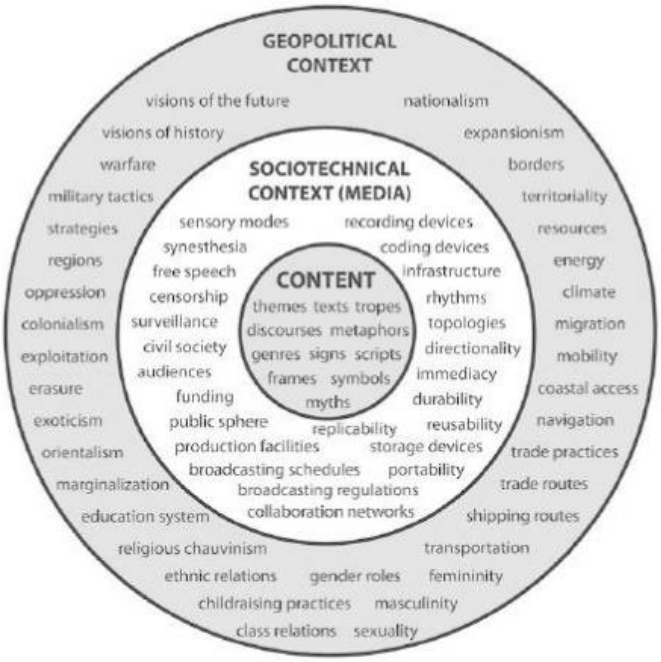


Figure 2: The relationship between communication and geopolitical context (Adams, 2013)

This demonstrates the centrality of media to political analysis, and Routledge (2017) recognises online media spaces as a significant site for activism. This research primarily uses online media as a space where different activist organisations promote and present their ideologies, and reflect on their activities. It is therefore central to gaining an understanding of the methods each organisation uses, and their wider viewpoints.

Urban spaces

The LGBTQ community has a long history of conducting activism in urban spaces, most famously during the Stonewall Riots in 1969 in New York (Dodderer, 2011). While not the start of the rights movement, Stonewall represented a watershed moment, helping to spark an international movement and a tradition of urban resistance within the LGBTQ community. Pride parades have become an annual staple in LGBTQ

oriented groups, whether they commercial, community, or activism centred. Pride has been recognised as significant in bridging the experiences of emotion (fun and enjoyment) with politics (Browne, 2007). Pride has evolved over the years to the extent that many argue it has become depoliticised, although others assert the intrinsically political nature of non-normative sexual and gendered bodies occupying otherwise heterosexual city spaces (Brown and Browne, 2007). Di Felicantonio (2016) argues that this has led to LGBTQ activist spaces and events, such as Pride marches, being criticised for adopting neoliberal business models and assimilating into normative understandings of gender and sexuality. However, he adds that it is inaccurate to conceptualise all Pride parades in the same way, as this diminishes the importance of place in shaping both politics and activism. Pride parades in the Global South and 'peripheries' of the Global North, such as in Budapest, continue to be controversial and sometimes violent. He also contends that as well as variation across national contexts, a range of positions exist within Pride parades, and that homonormative claims may present adjacent to more radical and critical positions.

3. Methodology

This research project has evolved in its shape and form over the last year, and acted in response to key events such as the recent ruling that Westminster will introduce same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland, and Lyra McKee's tragic death. This helps to demonstrate many of the practical and theoretical issues associated with researching current issues facing social movements and minority groups. This chapter will review the broader philosophical standing of this research, as well as the practical methods utilised to meet the objectives.

As the project investigates the rights and experiences of sexual and gender minorities and activists, I deemed it appropriate to adopt a qualitative approach. Qualitative analysis is integral to understanding both lived experiences and social structures and processes (Winchester and Rofe, 2016). Mike Crang (2002) asserts that there has been a long connection between qualitative methods and cultural, feminist, and social geographies. This is largely due to feminist critique of the masculinist sciences and the false objectivity of positive methods. Feminist researchers understood that all knowledge is a product of its space of production, and it is therefore important to situate knowledge. This is reflected in Jon Binnie's (1997) paper on creating a 'queer epistemology'. He reflected that the positivism associated with quantitative research could be critiqued for reinforcing heterosexism, and he reinforced that cultural and feminist approaches could also reproduce this. He argued, therefore, that it is necessary to respectfully understand the lived experiences of sexual minorities.

While there is no specific method associated with research on the LGBTQ community or the LGBTQ rights movement, a flexible and pluralist approach to data collection is helpful, largely due to the lack of official data sources or pre-existing surveys on this community (Della Porta, 2014). At the start of this study, I aimed to conduct interviews with members of activist groups who were working for and against LGBTQ rights within Northern Ireland. I hoped this would give insight into the motivations and experiences of activists, both to grasp an understanding of their lived experiences. However, due to many of the groups working for LGBTQ rights in Northern Ireland being small, community-ran, poorly funded organisations, it is understandable that

some did not have the time or resources to engage with this project. Others did not respond to my contact at all, and others (including the 'homoactivist' groups Christian Institute NI and the Evangelical Alliance NI) simply declined without reason.

Due to these unfortunate restrictions, I altered my approach. I primarily performed a discourse analysis on textual sources such as six parliamentary debate transcripts and over twenty online media publications. This allowed me to explore the arguments used by activists working for and against LGBTQ rights issues. In addition to this, I conducted a performance analysis based on Rai's (2015) political performance framework (PPF) which I discussed in the previous chapter, which I applied to five video recordings of parliamentary debates. I also conducted fieldwork at Belfast Pride Festival in August 2019 towards the end of this study. I will proceed to discuss the theory and practicalities of these methods in further detail, as well as the specific explanations of how I utilised them for my research.

3.1 Discourse

Before outlining my practical application discourse analysis, I will explore its theoretical basis. Discourse is an infamously challenging concept to define (Dittmer, 2010). On a basic level, Campbell describes discourse as a "specific set of representations and practices through which meanings are produced, identities constructed, social relations established, and political and ethical outcomes made more or less possible" (2009: pp.166). This describes how discourse structures how we think about the world, and how knowledge and 'truth' are produced (Craine and Gardner, 2016). Dittmer (2010) describes how discourse can be understood in two ways, with 'discourse' referring to the textual or linguistic elements that reveal representations about the world, and 'Discourse', which is how these 'truths' become embodied in the world. Methodologically, Dittmer argues that by paying attention to the linguistic elements of a text, and connecting this with the wider context of the text's production, this will account for both D/discourses.

Waitt (2016) outlines a Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis, which investigates how specific knowledge systems influence peoples' beliefs about the world through meanings and representations, and in turn how they shape what people think,

experience, and do. Waitt argues that discourse analysis can provide insight into social and environmental injustices, as it can illuminate the social powers that help to normalise certain 'common sense' attitudes and practices. This is reinforced by Lindekilde (2014) who explains the importance of discourse analysis to the understanding of social movements, such as the LGBTQ rights movement, as it can analyse the discursive debates over meaning which are challenged within social movements, usually in the public sphere.

So far, this discussion has outlined the theoretical understanding of discourse. It is also necessary to connect this discussion to my research. As a research project exploring the sexual politics of Northern Ireland, it seemed apt to utilise discourse analysis, as Müller (2013) argues that discourse provides a connection between text and politics. His work analyses the relationship between discourse and critical geopolitics, arguing that texts are integral to the critical geopolitical project. This is because critical geopolitics assumes that global politics can be derived from textual sources, and that texts themselves construct geopolitics. Therefore, it became apparent that through analysing various textual sources, I could read the sexual politics present within Northern Ireland, and understand the arguments used by activists.

The textual sources I used in this research were transcripts of parliamentary and assembly debates, and news articles published by activist organisations on their websites. Part of discourse analysis also involves reflecting on the context of the text's production. Cribb and Rochford (2018) describe how the spoken debates which occur in the Northern Ireland Assembly and the House of Commons in Westminster are recorded daily and written into an official transcript known as the 'Hansard'. The debates are transcribed in a 'naturalised' fashion, whereby they conform to written rather than oral linguistic conventions, for example omitting repetitions, utterances, and false starts (Bucholtz, 2000; Cribb and Rochford, 2018). Bucholtz also argues that the choices made during the transcription process connect the transcript to the context of its audience. In the context of parliamentary transcriptions, the audience of the transcript is the public who want to read the content of a debate. While lacking in oratory speech features, the transcripts do convey the meaning of the speeches made. In order to clarify the accuracy of the transcript, I also watched recordings of

each debate, finding few discrepancies beyond the expected lack of mistakes in people's speech and repetitions. This format of transcription provides for an easier reading of debate content (Bucholtz, 2000), and allowed me to have access to elements of the debates I would've otherwise been unable to transcribe myself, such as statements spoken in the Irish language. While the naturalised transcription omits elements of spoken discourse, from comparing this with the recorded debates, I was able to confirm that no meaning was lost and clarify the areas where it was.

The other textual source I analysed was that of news reports from activist groups. Cloke et al. (2009) discuss different data sources within qualitative geography, and outline how the news media is often presented in a neutral, objective fashion, despite biases between different publishers. They indicate the importance of understanding why and how news is published. In addition to this, they reflect on how the language of the news may stereotype and misrepresent minority groups to reinforce dominant cultural norms. In this instance, the news features come from the websites of two charities, rather than traditional newspaper publications. The audiences were the people interested in the charities. The news articles are therefore heavily biased with the ideals of the organisations written by them. In order to understand these biases I performed a discourse analysis to fully grasp the content of these texts, and connect them to the wider context of their publication.

While the definition of discourse has often been described as vague or hard to 'pin down', there have also been few attempts to describe the process of *doing* discourse analysis (Waitt, 2016). However, the work of Gillian Rose (2001) was significant in developing a more practical method to applying discourse analysis. She recommended several key steps, which include: being selective in your choice of material, being reflexive, familiarising yourself with the text and being critical about the social context of its production, coding thoroughly, inconsistencies within texts, investigating claims of 'truth', and 'silence' as discourse (i.e. investigating omissions and the impact this has on discourse). These are the steps I took when approaching my textual sources. My choice of texts was largely based on what was available to me, as work on social movements often relies on using what is accessible (Della Porta, 2014). I performed discourse analysis on six parliamentary debates (see Table 1), reflecting the major

debates that have occurred relating to sexual politics within Northern Ireland, largely focused on same-sex marriage legislation. These transcripts represented a total of 11.5 hours of debate, and 104,448 words. In addition to this, I also analysed 25 news articles published by Love Equality NI and The Christian Institute between April, 2014-August, 2019. This period reflects a growing period of activism around LGBTQ rights in Northern Ireland, particularly focused on same-sex marriage. I chose these texts in order to grasp an understanding of the spaces these charities work in, and how those spaces might construct the arguments and activities the charities use.

Date	Topic	Location	Duration
1st October, 2012	Same-sex marriage	Stormont; Northern Ireland Assembly	1.5 hours (12,691 words)
29th April, 2013	Same-sex marriage	Stormont; Northern Ireland Assembly	1.5 hours (14,067 words)
29th April, 2014	Same-sex marriage	Stormont; Northern Ireland Assembly	1.5 hours (13,612 words)
27th April, 2015	Same-sex marriage	Stormont; Northern Ireland Assembly	1.5 hours (12,711 words)
2nd November, 2015	Same-sex marriage	Stormont; Northern Ireland Assembly	1.5 hours (13,463 words)
9th July, 2019	Administration of Northern Ireland (with amendments on abortion and same-sex marriage legislation)	Westminster; House of Commons	4 hours (37,904 words)

Table 1: Summary of parliamentary debates.

In analysing these texts, I read them first for content, secondly to develop my understanding of the key themes emerging, and thirdly for coding different ideas, developing a robust familiarisation with the texts. Coding allows the structuring and interpretation of qualitative data (Waitt, 2016). An extract of my coding can be seen in Appendix 1. I identified 'in vivo' codes, which are comprised of the actual language used by the speaker, and helped me identify themes and patterns within the texts, and then proceeded to extract 'analytical' codes, which describe the content and

apply meaning and theory (Crang, 2013). I then proceeded to collect these codes within a single table to enable a systematic comparison between different texts (Appendix 2).

I identified three broad themes within my discourse analysis – religion, politics, and society. These themes organise my codes, such as religious freedom, tradition, morality, devolution, human rights, family values, and equality, into categories which can be compared. The arguments used by those opposed to LGBTQ rights progress largely reproduced discourses of heteronormativity such as protecting family values, and emphasised freedom and speech and religion. Those who were working for the progression of LGBTQ rights centred their arguments around the discourse of the universality of human rights and equality, referencing being included as a 'normal' or 'ordinary' citizen. Through discourse, then, it is possible to make clear the connections between textual sources and the spatial politics of sexuality in Northern Ireland.

3.2 Fieldwork

Fieldwork is a practice aimed at gathering data through the process of the researcher engaging with the world around them, in order to produce "situated knowledge about people, processes and places" (Katz, 2009: pp.251). My fieldwork at Belfast Pride on 3rd August 2019 involved observational walking (Pierce and Lawhon, 2015), a reflexive method of moving to gain an understanding of an area's physical landscape and social contexts. Walking through Belfast to situate the Pride event within the wider urban landscape, and understand the city's response to the festival was invaluable in developing a broader, situated understanding of the event. I used photography and field notes in order to document the event, which presented ethical queries I will discuss further. I positioned myself at the beginning of the parade in order to have a good view of the march, as well as walking around sections of the parade route before and after the march. Given the scale of the event, unless I had been marching within the parade itself, it was impossible for me to view the reaction of the crowds and march throughout the whole parade simultaneously. I also walked around the 'Pride Village' and 'Party in the Square' events, taking field notes as I observed my surroundings, paying particular attention to atmosphere and performance, informing

my analysis of the event. As a visitor to the city, I was in a position of unfamiliarity with my surroundings, as well as being a cultural 'outsider'. And yet, because of my lesbian identity, I felt a connection to the people I was observing. This distinction will now be deconstructed in my examination of positionality and reflexivity in this research.

3.3 Positionality and reflectivity

Feminist research has demonstrated the situated nature of knowledge, in that it is from a particular perspective and imbued with specific power relations (Pratt, 2009). The acknowledgement of this fact can be achieved by practicing 'reflexivity', which refers to the process of reflecting on the context of knowledge production (England, 1994; Matless, 2009). This involves reflecting on my own position in relation to my research, a concept known as positionality (Pratt, 2009). This process is not straightforward, however, as Gillian Rose (1997) discusses. She critiques the 'transparent reflexivity' of describing aspects of social difference (e.g. race, gender) and imagining these differences as distance across a landscape of power. She asserts that difference does not equate to separation, and that is important to reflect on complex relations to make them transparent, despite the 'messiness' of situated knowledge.

My identity as a lesbian from England meant I have a complex relationship with this study. I have a bias towards the LGBTQ activist charity and those who argue for LGBTQ rights, and against those who are opponents of the LGBTQ community. This partially influenced my motivation to conduct this research; I believe it is important to understand the arguments of those who are fighting against rights that have been won, or those yet to be granted. My English heritage is also relevant, as this study focuses specifically on Northern Ireland, which has a complex history with England, and whose politics were less familiar to me than that of Westminster. In addition to this, I am non-religious, which is significant due to the prevalence of religious arguments within the debate around sexual politics in Northern Ireland. Facets of my identity were most obvious at Belfast Pride, where I felt somewhat both in and out of place, due to my sexuality including me within the focus of the parade, but the

character of the parade being heavily influenced by Northern Irish identity making the distance known.

3.4 Ethics

Due to the lack of engagement with individuals, and the use of publically available documents and information, there is minor ethical concern regarding this study. One issue that had the potential to cause concern was the use of photography to document Belfast Pride and the protection of people's anonymity. Pauwells (2008) discusses the ethics of the use of visual materials in research, arguing that preserving anonymity is a key issue. However, he moderated this with the understanding that it is less crucial in certain circumstances, such as if people are unrecognisable. He also reflects that there is not a consensus on what is acceptable, such as whether it is reasonable to include photos of large crowds. However, the solution of blurring images, while protecting anonymity, can result in loss of data from the image. I have determined that the risk of loss of anonymity is minor as this research is a student dissertation which will not be published in an academic journal, and that obscuring parts of the images would detract from the value they add to my analysis.

4. Parliamentary spaces and LGBTQ Rights

This chapter explores how significant parliamentary spaces are in the development of Northern Ireland's sexual politics, through examining parliament as a multi-scalar space where bodies perform politics, and also decide on policies which construct the nation-state's treatment and attitude towards sexual and gender minorities. I achieve this by examining the discourses constructed during parliamentary debates, and analysing the performance of parliamentarians based on video recordings of the proceedings. I determine that politicians can engage with activism, and therefore, parliament is a type of activist space. In addition to this, due to the way language and context interact to produce geopolitical processes (Agnew, 2013), this analysis demonstrates how politicians, through their embodied performances and use of language, reproduce and construct sexual politics.

While politicians have not traditionally been understood as 'activists', Routledge (2009) defines activism as political action in the form of social movements which can be produced in a range of spaces. I argue that parliament is such a space, which I conceptualise according to Routledge's (2017) framework as a 'site of decision', where decisions on policy influencing social groups and movements are made. This is significant, as feminist geopoliticans have argued that studying state institutions and policies creates an understanding of how geopolitical processes are produced and shape social relations in uneven ways. In this case, politicians construct arguments around sexuality that reproduce heteroactivist (Browne and Nash, 2017) and homonormative/ordinary activisms (Browne and Bakshi, 2013). As following chapters will demonstrate, politicians reproduce arguments used by activists from campaigners outside of parliamentary spaces too, indicating multiple links across scale and space.

The debates analysed in this chapter represent the parliamentary progress of same-sex marriage legislation in Northern Ireland. As marriage is a devolved issue, it was a matter for the Northern Ireland Assembly to legislate for. The five debates in the Assembly were largely introduced by Sinn Féin, who were the political driving force behind the legislation. While the most recent debate in the Assembly achieved an overall majority, because of the Democratic Unionist Party's (DUP) lodging of a

petition of concern, a cross-community majority was required, which was not successful. Through this process, the DUP have effectively vetoed the progress of marriage equality in Northern Ireland. However, due to the collapse of the power-sharing agreement in January 2017, very little legislative progress has occurred in the region, meaning there is a large backlog of legislative issues which have remained at a standstill during this period. This has resulted in several MPs taking action in Westminster, by amending the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill on 9th July 2019. Conor McGinn, an MP born in Northern Ireland but representing an English constituency, introduced the amendment calling for marriage equality in Northern Ireland if power-sharing had not been restored by 21st October 2019 (McHugh and James, 2019). Before exploring the arguments used by politicians in these debates, it is important to consider the space that these debates occur in, and how parliamentary spaces draw connections across and between other scales and spaces.

4.1 Parliament and Performance

Rai's (2010; 2015) political performance framework (PPF) offers an opportunity to explore the bodily and spatial performances of politicians that help to construct parliamentary space. While I thoroughly discuss one element of her framework, words and speech as markers of representation, in extensive detail through discourse analysis, there are other elements of her framework which offer an opportunity to explore parliamentary space itself, and how this may influence debate and the construction of wider social relations.

One key element of PPF is the staging of representation. This includes the symbols, stage, and struggles that take place. These elements differ between Stormont and Westminster. While both parliaments are divided spatially, Stormont divides their Assembly by sectarian identity, with Unionist parties on one side, and Nationalist parties on the other (Figure 2). In comparison, the House of Commons in Westminster (Figure 3) is divided between the ruling government party, and the opposition.



Figure 2 Screen capture of a debate in the Stormont Assembly, which shows the spatial division within the Assembly Chamber (video file provided by the Northern Ireland Assembly via personal request).



Figure 3 Screen capture of the House of Commons as MPs leave to vote on Conor McGinn's amendment to the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill (parliamentlive, 2019).

This helps to demonstrate the importance of paying attention to the staging of space (Rai, 2015) in understanding wider social relations. While the power-sharing agreement in Northern Ireland means that several political parties can rule at once, meaning there is effectively no 'opposition', instead the Assembly Chamber reflects the sectarian divisions within Northern Irish politics. However, while the House of Commons chamber is strictly 'adversarial', in that opposing sides face each other

directly, the current Assembly Chamber, rebuilt after a fire in 1995, was designed with more curved layout to reduce the stark divisions within the room (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2014). This demonstrates how a local space, such as a debating chamber, can represent the wider political system of a nation, and this may in turn help to reinforce sectarianism when discussing varied political issues.

These figures also illustrate similarities in staging in terms of décor – both rooms have traditional wood panelling, and upholstered leather seats. These features create a sense of tradition and history, as well as formality. This is significant in creating a parliamentary space which is seen as legitimate and powerful. This is significant, as the Assembly Chamber at Stormont is significantly younger than the House of Commons, and the reproduction of the traditional style could be an attempt to add legitimacy to the devolved Assembly, which has experienced political instability since its formation. A further expression of formality in both parliamentary spaces can be seen in the clothes politicians wear. In both parliaments, members wear formal clothes, indicating that it is not simply the decoration that adds formality and legitimacy to the space, but bodily performance itself.

While the discourse analysis was performed using parliamentary transcripts, video recordings offer more detail on the oratory features that are not included within the transcripts. This includes laughing, interruptions, and a clearer representation of the Speakers keeping order in the chambers. These features, while not necessarily changing the meaning of the language used within the debates, illustrate how politics is performed within a space, as well as constructing meanings. Rai's (2015) framework suggests that there are two audiences for parliamentary debates – those within the debate chamber itself, and people outside of parliament who these politicians represent. As part of the audience for the debate, other politicians can support or contest members who are speaking by interrupting or jeering, as well as nodding and exclaiming "hear hear", a convention of parliamentary speech in in both Stormont and Westminster (Wheeler, 2015). Another example can be seen in the April 2014 debate, when Paul Givan (DUP) gives his speech (Figure 3) and the members behind him nod along with his speech and vocalise their support when he ends his remarks. This discussion has demonstrated the specificities of parliamentary spaces which help to

perform politics in a formal and powerful setting, adding legitimacy to their arguments and truth making claims, which I will proceed to deconstruct.



Figure 4 Paul Givan speaking against the motion for same-sex marriage, with members behind him responding to his speech (video file provided by the Northern Ireland Assembly via personal request)

4.2 Society: Drawing Family Life into the Public Sphere

Family values

During the debates, family values and familial rights were a key issue. As family life is usually associated with the home, traditionally regarded as the private sphere, this deconstructs the traditional geopolitical viewpoint that geopolitical processes operate in a hierarchical fashion (Massaro and Williams, 2013). Instead, it indicates the relational nature of scale and space (McDowell, 1999), as family life is brought into arguments around national policy regarding sexual and gender minorities. Politicians arguing against the motions for marriage equality claim that it disrupts traditional family values upon which society depends for structure and security, reinforcing the heteronormative conceptualisation of citizenship (Peake, 2013). Proponents of the motion argue that extending the right to civil marriage would support diverse family backgrounds and promote inclusion in society, as well as improving the wellbeing of the LGBTQ population. This is clear from the opening statement in the October 2012 debate by Stephen Agnew (Green Party):

> "We as an Assembly have the opportunity to say that we see those couples as equal, and see their love as equal. We can send a message today that those in same-sex relationships should be treated equally and fairly in our society" (Hansard NIA Deb., 1st October 2012: pp.13).

While his statement mentions the issue of 'equality', it is in relation to the position of same-sex relationships. This statement emphasises the importance of marriage as an institution in providing an equal footing for all relationships, which he makes clear by also stating that "extending the right to marriage to same-sex couples will strengthen the institution of marriage" (Hansard NIA Deb., 1st October 2012: pp.14). Although there is debate within the LGBTQ community over assimilating to normative values, referred to as homonormativity, inclusion in state-sponsored institutions such as marriage is internationally seen as a barometer for equality and rights progress (Browne et al., 2015). Tying equality to an institution associated with heteronormativity can either be seen as an attempt to extend and diversify that institution, or create opportunities for the more palatable members of the marginalised group (i.e. monogamous, middle-class) to access this institution.

This reinforces Richardson's (2015) study which found that there has been a 'rights turn' within the LGBTQ activism, which has focused on achieving rights such as marriage for LGBTQ people to be included in society. Rather than changing how society operates and eradicating exclusionary processes altogether, arguably the goal of radical queer activism, LGBTQ equality activists work for a broadening of the inclusion within sexual citizenship, or what kind of sexualised and gendered bodies are included as a 'normal' citizen within a society. Basil McCrea (UUP) goes on to describe the "crisis in marriage" (Hansard NIA Deb., 1st October 2012: pp.20), based on the declining number of people who cohabit and rise in divorces. He views equal marriage as an opportunity to 'save' the institution. It seems that politicians emphasise the importance of children being raised in a married family unit, regardless of the sexuality of the parents, although this may be a debate tactic to appeal to those resisting the motion.

The issue of family values is more prominent amongst those resisting the motion, who are more socially conservative and are exclusively Unionist politicians. This reflects the

maintenance of conservative views amongst Northern Ireland's Unionist politicians (Thomson, 2016). Furthermore, it suggests that they are reproducing heteroactivist arguments based on the threat to family values (Brown et al., 2018). Michelle McIlveen (DUP) states:

> "The question we are really asking today is this: what sort of society do you want to build? Is it a society that looks forward and that truly protects the rights of all, or a society that narrowly redefines an institution for temporary gain? I know what type of society I want to be part of, and it is a society that is truly inclusive and that looks to the next generation" (Hansard NIA Deb., 1st October 2012: pp.15).

Her view centres around who is included in modern society, and the importance this has for the 'next generation'. Her view centres on children being the most important part of society and needing to have values of 'inclusivity' instilled in them – although in this case, McIlveen is referring to including those with diverse and sometimes controversial religious beliefs. For her, protecting freedom of religion so that children may be raised according to her religious values is a fundamental right, which is under threat from the extension of civil marriage to same-sex couples. Her statement places children at the centre of this argument, largely falling back on older arguments that the LGBTQ community are a threat to children's innocence and safety (Browne et al., 2018).

McIlveen's statement reproduces heteroactivist arguments described by Browne and Nash (2017) whereby heteroactivists argue that heteronormativity is central to the good of society. Integral to this is the emphasis on heterosexual marriage as the best system for raising children, and freedom of religion, two arguments clearly demonstrated by McIlveen. This demonstrates that heteroactivist ideas and arguments can be reproduced regardless of whether someone belongs to a heteroactivist group, therefore expanding the definition of heteroactivism. Lord Morrow (DUP) reproduces McIlveen's sentiment in the final Assembly debate (Hansard NIA Deb., 2nd November 2015), by reflecting on the importance of children being raised by their biological parents, arguing that this system should be endorsed and promoted by the state. By emphasising the importance of children and

parenthood, this inadvertently draws in the space of the home, usually understood as a private space, into the argument against marriage equality. The contrast between the informal private sphere being invoked in a formal political space illustrates the fluidity of the supposed public/private binary.

Equality

The concept of equality was utilised in various ways throughout all the debates. Proponents of the motion argued for equal human rights for same-sex couples and the wider LGBTQ community. For example, Chris Hazzard (Sinn Féin) made a significant statement on this issue:

> "The suffragettes did not redefine voting practices. You only have to look around this Building to see that there are still not enough women in politics. The black Americans did not redefine how we eat out; they only wanted a seat at the table, and our lesbian, gay and bisexual community only want a seat at the table of marriage. They do not want to redefine it; they simply want a piece of the cake" (Hansard NIA Deb, 27th April 2015: pp.19).

His statement draws connections between other social movements, across different countries and time periods, such as women's and African-American civil rights issues. He outlines how the LGBTQ community also want equality in the form of same-sex marriage, and this would not be redefining, but extending the institution to include sexual minorities.

It was clear that politicians wanted the vote to 'send a message', showing that they are aware of the power embedded in their actions and the impact this has on a minority group. For example, Bronwyn McGahan (Sinn Féin) in the October 2012 debate remarked that LGBTQ people's basic rights should be respected, and that voting against the motion would send a message that LGBTQ people aren't equal (Hansard NIA Deb., 1st October 2012: pp.16). The proponents of the motion argued consistently that extending equal marriage is an issue of respecting fundamental human rights. This is clear based on McGahan's opening statement in the April 2013 debate, where she asserts that "the traditional family form based on marriage should

not be given higher status in law or practice than any other family form" (Hansard NIA Deb., 29th April 2013: pp.16). Her statement clearly demonstrates her belief that this is an equality issue based on the protection and status of same-sex relationship recognition, and reinforces the connection between equality and the law for LGBTQ people. While laws don't necessarily guarantee acceptance and safety to the LGBTQ community (Lalor and Brown, 2018), they send a message that LGBTQ people are included in a society's conceptualisation of citizenship (Richardson, 2017). Furthermore, as human rights are supposedly universal across the population, this indicates the issue is beyond the jurisdiction of national law, linking the bodily and global scales.

Members opposing the motion demonstrated arguments that were not 'anti-equality' or overtly suppressing the rights of LGBTQ people, largely due to the fact that they argued that this is not an issue of equality in the first place. Many opponents cited human rights legislation, such as Article 16 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights which outlines the right to marriage. While ambiguous towards gender, it does not specifically include or exclude same-sex couples, so if states do not extend it to same-sex couples, this does not contravene their human rights according to UN law. This is also supported by Article 12 of the European Convention of Human Rights, as well as the Northern Irish Human Rights Commission. Due to the fact that these international, regional, and national human rights institutions fail to explicitly recognise same-sex marriage as a human right, opponents of the motion utilise these rulings to justify their assertion that civil partnerships are equal to marriage. This issue clearly links legislative processes at different scales and how they fundamentally impact and exert power over one of the smallest scales – the body (Peake, 2013). By policing people's right to marry according to their gender, this illustrates the relationship between state power and the responsibility of citizens to reproduce heteronormativity through sexual citizenship (Richardson, 2017), which disproportionately excludes sexual and gender minorities. This relates to Hubbard's (2013) examination of equalities legislation and scales of citizenship, whereby understanding citizenship as solely being negotiated at the nation-state scale obscures inequalities at other scales, and instead understands citizenship as a process where

rights obtained at the national legislative scale may be enacted and contested on various other scales.

When discussing equality in relation to existing relationship recognition, Arlene Foster, who was a DUP backbencher in the April 2015 debate, stated:

> "We have civil partnerships in Northern Ireland, which allow persons of the same sex to acknowledge their commitment to each other in relationships. Civil partners in Northern Ireland enjoy the same rights as couples in a same-sex marriage in England" (Hansard NIA Deb., 27th April 2015: pp.17).

Here she clearly does not recognise same-sex marriage as an equality issue, as she asserts that existing civil partnerships provide parity to same-sex marriage. She also states that civil partnerships in Northern Ireland provide the same rights to those in same-sex marriages in England, despite several other politicians arguing this is incorrect, highlighting the spatial inequality in relationship recognition across the UK, complicating the UK's continued claims that it is a leading figure in LGBTQ rights (Lalor and Brown, 2018). For example, in the April 2014 debate, Megan Fearon (Sinn Féin) recognised the inequality faced by transgender individuals who must divorce or dissolve their civil partnerships in order to obtain a gender recognition certificate (Hansard NIA Deb., 29th April 2014: pp.53), and Fearghal McKinney (SDLP) recognised the inability to be listed as next of kin for a medical emergency or to automatically inherit property if their partner died without a will (Hansard NIA Deb., 29th April 2014: pp.21). Prior to this Stephen Agnew (Green Party) in October 2012 outlined the inequality in adoption law for same-sex couples, although this was amended in 2013 (Kelleher, 2018). The lack of recognition of these legislative inequalities shows the overlooking of equality in civil marriage legislation, justifying the proponents' claims of inequalities between civil partnerships and civil marriage. In addition to this, leadership figures, such as Samuel Wilson who was the Minister for Finance and Personnel from 2009-2013, have openly stated their opposition to civil partnership legislation:

> "I do not agree with the Civil Partnership Act 2004… that was the toe in the door and the means for pushing the boundaries even further in a direction that I, and the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland, do not wish them to be pushed as far as changes in society are concerned" (Hansard NIA Deb., 1st October 2012: pp.25).

This statement acknowledges his reluctance to allow legislation for any form of union between same-sex couples, despite some in his party claiming they support civil partnerships. Furthermore it alludes to the suggestion that it was simply a 'stepping stone' to eroding his beliefs and values that marriage is between one man and one woman, and that this is best for society. For the motion's opponents, this is not a matter of equality, which civil partnerships supposedly settled, it is an attack on their religious freedom and the fabric of society.

4.3 Religion and Tradition

Arguments on a religious basis were used throughout all Assembly debates, particularly by those opposing the motion. Society in Northern Ireland is overall more religious than that elsewhere in the UK with 83% identifying with a religion, although only 30% attending church (Page, 2014) which is reflected in their political representatives. The DUP and TUV (Traditional Unionist Voices) in particular have strong ties to conservative Presbyterian ministries. The two main discourses related to religion were arguments based around religious freedom and those centred on traditional definitions of marriage. This reinforces the continued importance of religion in contemporary Northern Irish society, and the continuation of religious opposition to the progression of LGBTQ rights. However, while older arguments centred around the sinful nature of sodomy, epitomised by DUP politician Ian Paisley's campaign to 'save Ulster from sodomy' against the decriminalisation of homosexuality (Maginn and Ellison, 2017), modern arguments centre on the erosion of religious freedom and the traditional meaning of marriage, fitting into the framework of heteronormativity (Browne and Nash, 2017).

Tradition and religious freedom

A prominent argument used by opponents of the motion was that same-sex marriage is not an equality issue, but an issue of the redefinition of marriage. Michelle McIlveen (DUP) in October 2012 stated:

> "Marriage is a complementary union between a man and a woman. This is not a debate about equality; rather it is a debate about redefining the centuries-old meaning of the word 'marriage'" (Hansard NIA Deb., 1st October 2012: pp.15).

This assertion is repeated throughout each Assembly debate, by several Unionist politicians. They emphasised the historical importance and meaning of marriage being between a man and a woman, the importance for producing children, as a strong basis for society. They do not see these arguments as discriminatory, as they believe same-sex couples' rights are provided by civil unions, as discussed in the previous section.

Their reasoning therefore fits into the framework of heteroactivism, whereby the argument against LGBTQ rights is not based on overt homophobia but on the protection of traditional beliefs and religious freedoms. However, this is a fine line, particularly when other politicians such as Jim Allister from the extremely conservative TUV describe it as an "issue of the perversion of marriage" (Hansard NIA Deb., 1st October 2012: pp.22). Samuel Wilson (DUP) also described marriage as being practiced for the purpose of procreation (Hansard NIA Deb., 29th April 2013: pp.26) emphasising the heteronormativity embedded in the institution of marriage. He sees the opening up of marriage to include couples of the same sex as a perversion of the original purpose of marriage for society. This reinforces the idea of marriage as an institution that is a privilege to have access to, and one that is endorsed by the state as having particular value in society, particularly with regards to children, emphasising the exclusivity of citizenship (Ehrkamp and Jacobsen, 2015).

This argument is based on the religious definition of marriage, when the proponents are only focused on introducing same-sex marriage for civil ceremonies. Therefore, whilst religious arguments proliferate against the motion, these arguments are applied to a *future* attack on religious marriage, and the overall expansion of the

definition of marriage to be gender neutral. Politicians such as Michelle McIlveen (DUP) in October 2012 and Peter Weir (DUP) in April 2015 both raised concerns about the issue of religious freedoms. McIlveen expressed concern over the risk that churches may be barred from using public buildings for youth groups, and that parents may be refused the option of removing children from lessons covering "redefined marriage" (Hansard NIA Deb., 1st October 2012: pp.15). This reflects their arguments that their religious beliefs are being encroached upon, and that they are the group being discriminated against for having those values questioned, when in their view the LGBTQ community already have a suitable provision for relationship recognition.

Members in support of the motion, such as Daithí McKay (Sinn Féin) in April 2014, also mentioned the hypocrisy of defending the traditional definition and value of marriage, when issues such as divorce and adultery were overlooked (Hansard NIA Deb., 29th April 2014: pp.44). These practices equally go against the 'traditional' meaning of marriage, but do not receive the same legislative attention. Furthermore, marriage has been altered throughout history to include people of different races and religions. Supporters argued that extending the right to civil marriage to same-sex couples was simply another expansion of this definition, emphasising links between equality and the rights afforded to citizens (Staeheli et al., 2004).

4.4 Parliamentary Politics: Sectarianism and LGBTQ Rights

Central to these debates were discourses relating particularly to sectarianism, representation, and devolution. Due to Northern Ireland's geopolitical conflict, the political system that was formed after the Good Friday Agreement emphasised power-sharing between two socio-spatially distinct communities. One political mechanism that emerged from this was the petition of concern, which was heavily referenced in the debates, as it was implemented for each of the five debates by the DUP to effectively veto the vote. Colum Eastwood (SDLP), in the November 2015 debate, emphasised "they were there to protect minorities, but they are now there to stop minorities gaining protections in law that they have in other parts of this island and across these islands" (Hansard NIA Deb., 2nd November 2015: pp.2). His statement reflects the profoundly geographical pattern of access to rights (Lalor and Browne,

2018), and in the case of Northern Ireland, how political mechanisms that emerged from geopolitical conflict may interact to prevent these rights from progressing. This is demonstrated by the fact that without the petition of concern, the motion for same-sex marriage would have passed on 2nd November 2015. This is significant, as support for marriage equality is lowest in Northern Ireland among those who identify as Protestant and Unionist (Northern Irish Life and Times Survey, 2018), who the DUP have traditionally represented.

Representation and sectarianism

While not directly relating to sectarian issues in Northern Ireland during the debates it became clear that it was being treated as such by MLAs. This can be explained by Hayes and Nagle's (2015) research which indicated that Sinn Féin, which represents the Nationalist minority, views itself as the protector of all minorities. In this way, LGBTQ rights within Northern Ireland are tied to sectarianism, unlike the cross-party support demonstrated by the amendment vote in Westminster. This demonstrates the spatial variation in sexual politics across the UK, and how only by taking into account place-specific political structures like Northern Ireland's consociational system can the spatial dynamics of sexual politics be understood. Sinn Féin and the DUP both tried to demonstrate their role as the paradigm of equality, albeit in differing ways. Sinn Féin MLAs emphasised their understanding of minorities due to their background of representing the generally Catholic nationalist minority community, whose civil rights movement in the 20th Century received harsh responses from the generally Protestant Unionist majority (Patterson, 1996). This is clear from Bronwyn McGahan's speech in 2012 during which she stated:

> "I speak as a republican, and one of the principles of the 1916 proclamation is a guarantee of religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all citizens… This island has experienced enough division and hatred without perpetuating any other divisions" (Hansard NIA Deb., 1st October 2012: pp.16).

Here, McGahan clearly references the 1916 Proclamation of the Republic, a key text in Ireland's independence movement (Ranelagh, 2012). By explicitly drawing upon

Irish political history, she reflects her nationalist background, and the Sinn Féin 'united Ireland' policy. She extends this in the April 2013 debate, when she draws upon the result of the Irish Constitutional Convention where they voted that same-sex marriage should be put to a public referendum (Hansard NIA Deb., 29th April 2013: pp.15). Her speech also reflects another element of Rai's (2015) PPF in the form of representation, and words and speech, to add authenticity to her Nationalist background and representation of that community. In her maiden speech, she opens with "Go raibh maith agat", an Irish phrase meaning 'thank you', which is a common feature of speeches by Sinn Féin politicians. The use of the Irish language reinforces this element of their identity and political representation, and reminds the audience of their affiliation to that community. By reinforcing their status of the representation of those who identify as Irish, this adds to their claim of the representing minorities, including the LGBTQ community.

These statements, while reflecting her nationalist background, also created sectarian tensions within the Assembly. Instead of same-sex marriage being debated along conservative/liberal lines, it focused on nationalist/unionist divisions, although there was some unionist support from UUP members, and non-aligned members in the Alliance and Green parties. Furthermore, by drawing up memories of division and conflict, she uses emotive language on an already tense issue. Other MLAs responded critically to her statement and the mention of the Constitutional Convention result in the motion, such as Roy Beggs from the UUP in April 2013. He asked "what constitutional convention? I did not know one was happening. I am a British citizen" (Hansard NIA Deb., 29th April 2013: pp.24). This makes clear the conflicting Irish and British identities held and perpetuated by Northern Ireland's political representatives, rather than a distinctly Northern Irish identity emerging from after the peace agreement and subsequent devolution of powers from Westminster.

In the Assembly debates these identities play out in several ways. The DUP, the largest unionist party, commits to protecting their conservative religious values and freedom of expression, which are supposedly threatened by the expansion of LGBTQ rights, while Sinn Féin portray themselves as proponents of equality for all minorities. This ties the issue of same-sex marriage to a longer history of geopolitical relations, in the

space of the Assembly which itself is divided in half to represent these two communities. By speaking across a divide, it emphasises the harshly different views, with the nationalist side voting for the motion, and the majority of the unionist side (bar some UUP MLAs) steadfastly against it. It is the UUP that has allowed a free vote, meaning some members have been persuaded to vote for the motion over the five debates, although they still lack a community majority. This, along with the subsequent collapse in power sharing, lead to the situation whereby an amendment relating to same-sex marriage was added to a motion extending Westminster's financial administration of Northern Ireland's regional government into 2020.

Devolution

Arguments around devolution were complex and varied. Tying together the concepts of space and identity, devolution is intrinsically geographical. The unionist opponents of the motion use devolution as a tool to enable difference in societal values, and therefore laws, between different geographical areas. Nelson McCausland of the DUP in April 2015 argues:

> "Some people argue that we are out of step with the rest of the United Kingdom and that what has happened in Great Britain should also happen here. However, there are times when it is right to be different" (Hansard NIA Deb., 27th April 2015: pp.16).

And Arlene Foster, then Minister of Finance and Personnel in November 2015 stated*:*

> "I do not for one minute accept the suggestion that, because Northern Ireland has not followed suit and has not followed along as if we do not have our own mind on these matters, we are less enlightened than those jurisdictions that have "extended" marriage to same-sex couples" (Hansard NIA Deb., 2nd November 2015: pp.15).

Together, these statements from the largest unionist parties in the Assembly demonstrate the desire for independence and difference on social issues, despite their overarching political unionism. It also conflicts with previous arguments that civil partnerships already provide equality to same-sex couples, as they supposedly

provide the same rights. However, as these statements illustrate, difference is being emphasised by Members like Nelson McCausland, who acknowledge the difference in legislation between jurisdictions. However, the unionist politicians do not see this as a difference in equality, and as Arlene Foster states, she refused to view Northern Ireland as 'backwards', or behind the rest of the UK. These claims create an almost paradoxical argument, which Colum Eastwood (SDLP) in November 2015 summarises:

> "The difficulty that we have, as Irish citizens on this side of the border, is that we do not have the same rights as people across the island. Equally, people who see themselves as British subjects or citizens do not have the same rights as people in Britain, because, of course, they have taken that step not through a referendum but through the parliamentary process" (Hansard NIA Deb., 2nd November 2015: pp.3).

Here, he highlights the variation in views across nationalist and unionist communities. Equality is present for neither political ideology – but as the unionist opponents of the motion refuse to see this as an equality issue, there is less of an imbalance here than for the nationalists who do see an equality issue. This directly ties conceptions of citizenship with the debate over same-sex marriage, and shows how the debate has evolved as the various jurisdictions around Northern Ireland have legislated for same-sex marriage.

Scales of governance: ruling from Westminster

The most recent debate on same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland occurred in Westminster on 9th July 2019. Here, the theme of religion was far less prominent with regards to same-sex marriage, potentially because the vast majority of contributors viewed this purely as an equality issue, potentially as Westminster had previously already legislated for same-sex marriage in England. Politics and society were heavily discussed, through discussions of equality and devolution. The debate was far less centred on whether same-sex marriage should be introduced in Northern Ireland, as only the DUP MPs were vocally against same-sex marriage in principle. Instead, the majority of the debate was centred on whether Westminster was the appropriate

place to introduce such legislation, and whether human rights took priority over respect for devolved governments.

Conor McGinn, the Labour MP who introduced the amendment, argued that his motion would respect devolution, as if the vote was successful, it would not take effect if Stormont reassembled by 21st October, and could be overturned when the Assembly does return after this date. He stated:

> "At the minute, however, the Assembly and the Executive exist in the ether, or as a concept, not in reality, so if they cannot make this law, we will make it here, because, as I have said often, rights delayed are rights denied" (Hansard HC Deb., 9th July 2019: col.166).

He makes it clear that this is an issue of rights, and due to this, it is of utmost importance that legislation is introduced at the closest opportunity. He reflects on the disruption caused by the lack of governance at the highest level in Northern Ireland, and how this means it is right for Westminster to step in and introduce the legislation, to promote and extend the rights of the LGBTQ community. This is highlighted by Nick Herbert (Cons), who acknowledges the fact that the UK is generally seen as a nation that has provided LGBTQ equality, while Northern Ireland is forgotten (Hansard HC Deb., 9th July 2019: col.178). He goes on to argue that it is right for Parliament to act, as in the last Assembly vote there was an overall majority, so there is a will for the legislation to be introduced, there just isn't currently a body to introduce it and speak for the people of Northern Ireland. The idea that MPs in Westminster were offering a 'voice' for those who currently did not have one was repeated several times throughout the debate. This was despite the fact that DUP MPs were there representing their constituents, although Sinn Féin's constituencies remain unrepresented in Westminster as they do not take up their seats.

The idea of Westminster 'speaking' for a devolved jurisdiction was worrying for some. Several MPs expressed concerns about the dangers of legislating for Northern Ireland, mostly DUP politicians, who were not only against the content of the amendment, but also the way it was introduced. As the same-sex marriage amendment was part of a much more specific motion, DUP MPs such as Nigel Dodds questioned the

'cherrypicking' nature of the issues which had been covered in amendments, which also included legislation for abortion, recognised as another divisive social issue (Calkin and Freeman, 2018). So while the DUP MPs did not necessarily have a problem with Westminster introducing legislation, effectively under de facto direct rule, they did have an issue with the way certain issues had been prioritised other overs, when there has been no legislative progress on devolved issues since the collapse of the power-sharing agreement. This illustrates the complex situation Northern Irish politics is in, where it is on the borderline of being directly ruled from Westminster, until a point where the elected politicians can come to an agreement on power-sharing once more.

The main arguments used by supporters of the amendment was that same-sex marriage was an equality and human rights issue, and therefore took precedent over respect for devolution. Stewart Malcolm McDonald (SNP) acknowledged the overtly spatial inequality in terms of rights (Lalor and Browne, 2018):

> "We talk a lot in this place at the moment about hard borders. There is currently a hard border on civil rights and equal rights for LGBT people, and it runs down the Irish Sea" (Hansard HC Deb., 9th July 2019: col.200).

The phrase 'hard border' references Northern Ireland's complex position within Brexit negotiations due to the possible return of a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Furthermore, it reinforces the idea that sexual and gendered others can be 'territorialised', embodying spatial inequalities in geopolitical processes (Peake, 2013). He also clearly identifies that marriage is an equality issue in his eyes. It also emphasises the geographical differentiation in access to these rights across several scales. The Houses of Parliament are a space imbued with power, where individuals act as representatives for local communities, and the decisions they make together affect the lives of people across the country on a national scale. Politicians therefore can act on certain activist issues, which charities involved in LGBTQ rights have been calling for, as I will discuss in the following chapter.

This spatial inequality was further highlighted by Ged Killen (Labour/Co-op) who described his personal experiences of injustice:

> "We can get on a plane in Glasgow as married men and arrive in Belfast as civil partners, despite never having left the UK, so it has been a great source of frustration… that for the last two years, I have had to contend with the DUP talking about how much it does not want any regulatory divergence between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK." (Hansard HC Deb., 9th July 2019: col.210)

His statement reinforces the disparity between the rights accessed by the LGBTQ community in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, and references the stance the DUP have taken in Brexit where they are advocating to avoid difference, and yet on this particular social issue, have been encouraging it. The debate here is far more centred on assuming same-sex marriage is an equality issue, which may in part be due to the fact that this parliament had already voted to introduce same-sex marriage in England. For the majority of these politicians, there is no question that same-sex marriage should be implemented, regardless of where the legislation originated, indicating their belief in the universality of rights.

This chapter has critically analysed six parliamentary debates to explore the arguments used by politicians who were voting on legislation which is seen as a mark of equality for the LGBTQ community (Nash and Browne, 2015). I have reviewed these arguments according to three broad themes, and also analysed how these arguments can be spatialized and affect various scales, from the body to the nation. I have also examined the space of parliament as a site of decision (Routledge, 2017), one which is related to state power on the national level, but ties that together with local communities, indicating the multi-scalar nature of LGBTQ activism. However, this is only a narrow view of activism on LGBTQ issues in Northern Ireland. In all of the debates analysed, only one politician contributed who openly identified as a member of the LGBTQ community, and in looking at the various spaces and scales of activism it is important to look further into groups who are more directly involved in campaigning on these issues, as well as those who are resisting progress on LGBTQ rights.

5. LGBTQ and Heteroactivist spaces

This chapter provides a case study analysis of Love Equality NI and The Christian Institute. Whereas Love Equality NI are campaigning to introduce same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland, The Christian Institute work in opposition to extending marriage rights and other LGBTQ issues. Through Routledge's (2017) conceptualisation of spatial activist strategies, this chapter argues that digital spaces are a key site of LGBTQ activism and the construction of geopolitical processes such as scale and citizenship (Müller, 2013). I utilise Routledge's sites of intervention, of which sites of decision, circulation, and collaboration are of particular importance.

By focusing primarily on marriage equality, an issue both organisations have engaged with, I explore the spaces used by each group, while also considering how their actions fit into the framework of heteroactivism (Browne and Nash 2017) and campaigning for LGBTQ rights where they have supposedly already been 'won' (Lalor and Browne, 2018). I further apply the concept of 'ordinary' activism (Browne and Bakshi, 2013), to broaden Routledge's specific focus on radical activist spaces. I argue that Love Equality NI uses sites of collaboration and circulation in an ordinary and sometimes homonormative form of activism, as engaging with the state is the only way for legislation on same-sex marriage to be implemented, and because they are campaigning for access to the institution of marriage rather than radically deconstructing it. I also argue that Love Equality NI's campaigning emphasises the legal understanding of citizenship which refers to the rights and responsibilities afforded to citizen-subjects, and develop this understanding according to the concept of sexual citizenship (Richardson, 2017). I further argue that The Christian Institute reproduces heteroactivist discourses, which is of utmost importance to understand, due to the fragile nature of legislative progress in LGBTQ rights in the province.

5.1 Ordinary or 'normative': Love Equality NI

Love Equality NI is a group of organisations in Northern Ireland who are campaigning for extending civil marriage to same-sex couples. Their website describes the group's composition, history, and motivation (Love Equality NI, 2016a). The group consists of Amnesty International Northern Ireland, The Rainbow Project, Irish Congress of Trade

Unions Northern Ireland, Here NI, Cara-Friend, and NUS-USI. These diverse groups, which include community-focused groups within Northern Ireland, and local branches of national or international organisations, have varied backgrounds in campaigning for LGBTQ rights. Together, however, they have focused on one issue: equal civil marriage for same-sex couples. They view marriage as a fundamental human right which must be secured without discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender. They use sites of collaboration by lobbying politicians, which in turn impacts on sites of decision, as seen in the previous chapter. They believe it is the responsibility of legislators to vote in the interests of the local people, and avoid seeking changes via the court system as it is a lengthy process. Since the collapse of the power-sharing agreement in Northern Ireland, they have instead lobbied Westminster's politicians to introduce equal civil marriage to Northern Ireland. This demonstrates their shifting spatial focus to achieve their campaign goal, indicating that sectarian politics (e.g. devolution and independent rule) are less important to them. This could be due to their view of equal marriage being a universal human right that should be spatially equal.

Spatial activist strategies: cities, text, and politics

Love Equality have held several marches in the city of Belfast protesting the right to equal marriage. In June 2015 (Love Equality NI, 2015b) over 10,000 people marched for equality, spurred on by the referendum in Ireland and the most recent vote against civil marriage in the Assembly. This illustrates how social movements are influenced by politics elsewhere, especially in countries with close socio-political ties. The most recent march for civil marriage happened in May 2019 (Love Equality, 2019) and involved Sara Canning, the partner of journalist Lyra McKee who was murdered by a member of the New IRA. The march was aimed at demanding that the next Stormont government must deliver marriage equality, or for Westminster to introduce the legislation if power-sharing talks failed. The strategy of protest marches through urban space will be explored more thoroughly in the following chapter, however it is worth acknowledging the difference between Love Equality NI's march and a LGBTQ Pride Parade. Their marches were focused on a singular rights issue, rather than queering otherwise heterosexual space, celebrating queer bodies, or protesting diverse political

and social issues (Di Feliciantonio, 2016). However, they share Routledge's (2017) 'mobility' spatial strategy, consequently disrupting the everyday function of urban space. They achieved this by occupying 'sites of circulation', the streets of Belfast. This demonstrates the overt spatial element of Love Equality NI's activism in urban space, which involves linking the bodily and city scales to increase awareness of their campaign and apply pressure to the government.

In February 2018, members of the CaraFriend youth group in Belfast created an online petition, with aid from Amnesty International, both members of the Love Equality Coalition (Love Equality NI, 2018c). This collaboration worked together to produce a petition that called for marriage equality to be included in any agreement during the talks to reinstate the government in Stormont. In the case that the talks were not successful, they called for MPs at Westminster to legislate instead. This action shows a clear preference for marriage to be legislated domestically, but also shows that young people want equal marriage regardless of where it comes from. This shows that they are less concerned with the devolved status of Northern Irish governance, and more concerned with being granted what they view as a human right. This demonstrates the use of 'textual spaces', in the production of an online petition, and the 'site of collaboration', as they are petitioning both the regional and national states, illustrating the multi-scalar nature of this action (Routledge, 2017). However, an online petition cannot be regarded as a radical or disruptive protest, but may be described as an ordinary form of activism (Browne and Bakshi, 2013).

Another textual based activist strategy was the launching of a report. In April 2018, Love Equality NI organised a launch for a report commissioned in 2016 by the then Minister of Finance, Máirtín Ó Muilleoir (Love Equality NI, 2018b). The report was titled 'Civil Conversations on Marriage Equality' and aimed to investigate a diverse range of views across different sections of society. By arranging the launch, Love Equality NI wanted to promote the report to show cross-community support for marriage equality, including those in religious groups. A statement from Clare Moore, a Love Equality NI campaigner, explained that "we don't just want to change the law, we want to change our society for the better and make it a more welcoming place for everyone" (ibid.). This indicates the value Love Equality NI places in how growing

support across different communities may help encourage politicians to act, and not just change the law, but also people's views. This shows how legalising same-sex marriage does not only provide equality within the law, but also promote the values of equality and normalises different relationships across society as a whole. Due to the fact that the report was commissioned by a former finance minister from Sinn Féin, this demonstrates how Love Equality NI use collaboration with the state in order to campaign for their goal, demonstrating their multi-scalar methods, from marching in the streets to working with representatives of the national government.

Several of the methods detailed above were used in order to lobby politicians, whether that be MLAs or MPs. Love Equality NI also met with and wrote directly to politicians in order to campaign for equal civil marriage. In January 2018, Love Equality NI wrote a letter to the Secretary of State, Karen Bradley, to further press the issue of including marriage equality as part of any settlement to restore devolved powers, or to introduce legislation from Westminster (Love Equality, 2018a). Through the medium of letter writing, Love Equality hoped to put further pressure on politicians to act on the issue. This shows how activist groups may utilise different spaces for campaigns. In this case, Love Equality NI are aiming to influence parliamentary spaces, whether that be Stormont or Westminster, which indicates the spatialized nature of the issue and the scales upon which politics acts, from the body (same-sex couples) to the state (Stormont and Westminster) where decisions are made.

Digital media spaces

#TellYourLoveStory

This campaign focused on promoting why equal marriage was important in an effort to give the campaign a 'voice'. Photos and accompanying text were submitted by individuals who wanted to promote the campaign, with twelve 'stories' being posted on the website. This draws together the organisation and the citizens their work aims to impact on. These stories come from individuals and couples from a range of gender identities and sexual orientations, and all bar one include couples in committed relationships. While this could suggest that Love Equality NI's published materials reproduce discourses of homonormativity, it is more reasonable to assume that

couples already in a relationship have a more urgent interest in achieving same-sex marriage than single or polyamorous LGBTQ individuals. Sally and Catherine (Figure 5) said "We're very proud of our family. We want young LGBT people to grow up in a world where they don't feel like second class citizens and we want families like ours to have equal rights" This reflects their desire for equality, specifically for the benefit of younger people. They also mention not wanting to feel like 'second class citizens', which links understandings of citizenship on a legal basis, including the rights you are granted as a citizen, and on the basis of identity and belonging (Hoipkemier, 2015), demonstrating the connections between sexual politics and key geopolitical issues of rights and belonging (Staeheli et al., 2004). It further disputes the idea the UK providing LGBTQ equality for all of its citizens on the basis of rights legislation and a sense of being included in society (Lalor and Browne, 2018).

Several of the other couples are already in civil partnerships, but comment on the injustice they feel at their relationship being viewed differently to marriage. Kyle (Figure 6) stated that "it would mean so much to us if Northern Ireland could recognise our marriage as exactly that and not something similar but different". Kyle emphasises the importance of similarity and difference in legislation of relationships, and how this adds value and recognition to someone's relationship. This is added to by Shane (Figure 7), who mentions "I can't refer to Eoin as my husband, I can't refer to it as matrimony in any way… we're not asking for special status we just want to be the same and treated the same as everyone else and I don't think that's an unreasonable thing to ask for". Here he highlights specific experiences such as not being able to use the term 'husband', which for him, demonstrate the unequal nature of the difference between civil partnerships and civil marriage. This adds a level of inequality not addressed in the parliamentary debates. While politicians acknowledged the legal inequalities between civil partnerships and civil marriage, this demonstrates the emotional impact of these inequalities. This sense of difference helps to create a lack of a sense of belonging, excluding same-sex couples from participating in the same institution as heterosexual couples, reinforcing the basis that difference, not equality, is central to how people experience citizenship (Ehrkamp and Jacobsen, 2015).

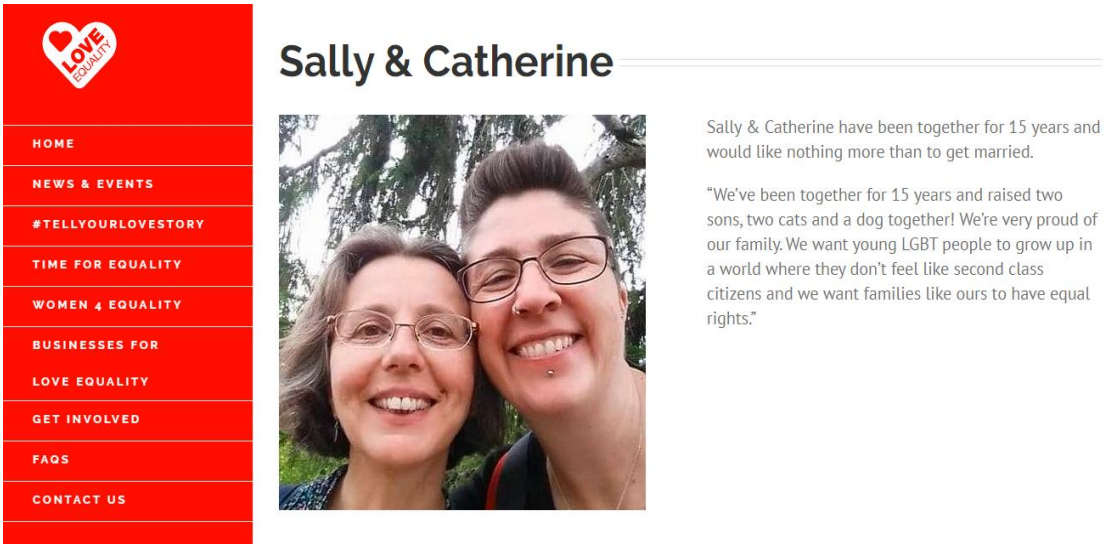


Figure 5 A submission to the 'Tell Your Love Story' campaign ran by Love Equality NI, by a couple from Northern Ireland (Love Equality 2016d)

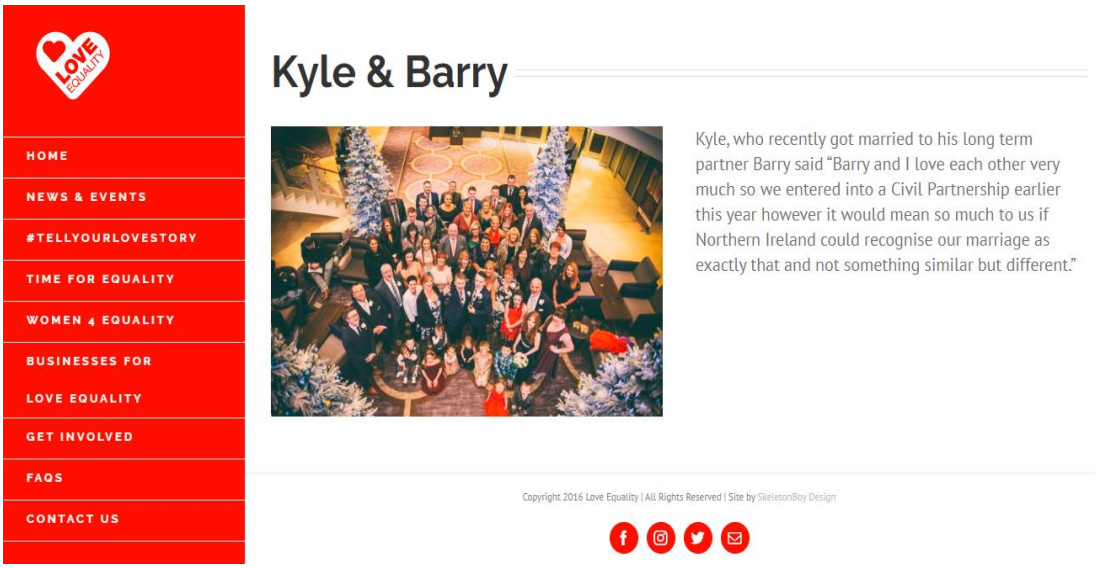


Figure 6 Another submission to the campaign, detailing the couple's feeling of inequality at their civil partnership being a lower status than marriage (Love Equality, 2016d).

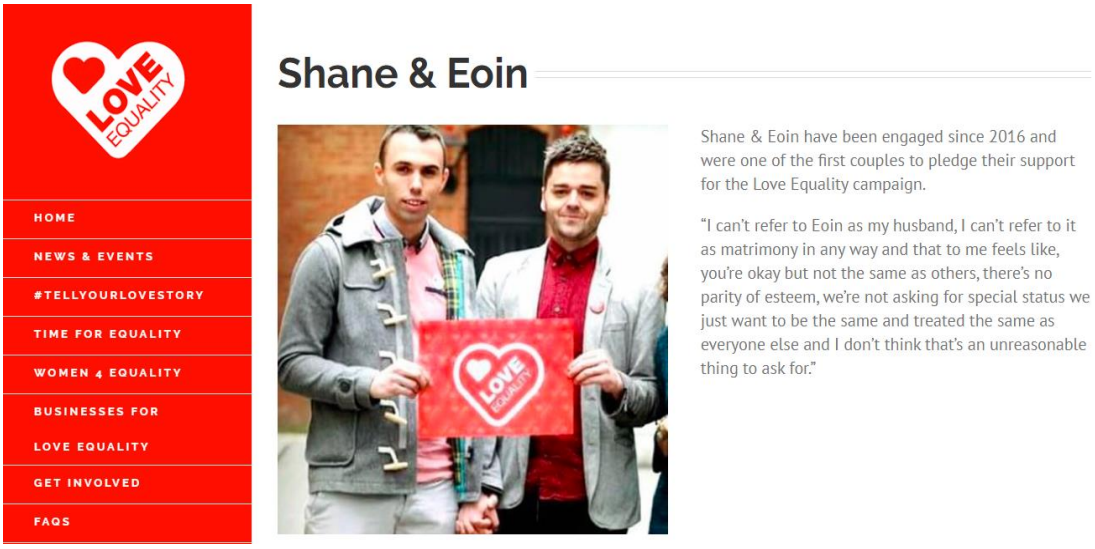


Figure 7 A submission by a couple who remark on the inequality on not being able to use marital language like 'husband', and the desire for equality (Love Equality NI, 2016d)

These stories also offer an insight into the experiences of those who are married in another jurisdiction within the UK, whose marriage is not recognised within Northern Ireland. Jackie married her wife Lesley in Scotland in 2015, and stated "Our marriage is no more a political stand than anyone else's… our marriage will never be equal until it is truly made equal in the eyes of the law" (Love Equality NI, 2016d). They had to travel to marry in a place where their relationship would be recognised with parity to opposite-sex relationships, demonstrating the spatial inequality faced by those living in Northern Ireland, and the geographical specificity of understanding equalities legislation. Jackie insists that her relationship is not a political standpoint, and yet marriage equality is treated as a contentious political issue. This demonstrates the fallacy of the public/private boundary, as while sexuality is usually placed in the private sphere of the home (Rodó De Zárate, 2016), the campaign for same-sex marriage is very public. This is indicated by the demonstrations in urban spaces and debates in government institutions, where people's private relationships become a publically contentious issue for politicians to debate.

News column

Love Equality NI also produces online news accounts of developments in access to same-sex civil marriage in Northern Ireland. These articles report on their activities, and those of others, and portray their attitudes towards the campaign for marriage. This supports Müller's (2013) argument that online media is a space where activist activities and ideologies are written, with these texts constructing the politics of LGBTQ rights.

In April 2016, Love Equality NI posted an article documenting the launch of their first major campaign, focused on emphasising marriage equality as an election issue (Love Equality, 2016b). Their aim was to apply pressure to Northern Ireland's political parties to ensure that marriage equality was on the agenda for the Assembly's five-year term. One of the group's main strategies involves lobbying politicians to introduce legislation. This is necessary as Northern Ireland's court system has declined to rule against the government to force them to implement legislation. It means that Love Equality NI focus on sites of collaboration to apply pressure to local and distant politicians, from both Stormont and Westminster.

Amnesty International is one of the international organisations who are members of the Love Equality NI Coalition, illustrating the multi-scalar composition of the campaign network. In December 2015 the Northern Ireland Programme Director, Patrick Corrigan, reflected on how the lack of progress in the Assembly had "forced" couples to take court action to "demand equal treatment before the law" (Love Equality, 2015a). Love Equality NI's overall stance is that change should take place within government, as it should listen to the 'will of the people'. This asserts their belief that politicians should represent the citizens they are campaigning for, and that based on public support for same-sex marriage, politicians should act immediately. Love Equality NI reported on the publication of opinion polls that indicated growing public support for same-sex civil marriage. In their June 2016 statement (Love Equality NI, 2016c), spokesperson John O'Doherty said:

> "This poll demonstrates that, not only is there overwhelming support for marriage equality in Northern Ireland, but that support is only increasing

> over time… Couples in Northern Ireland shouldn't be forced to travel to other regions for their right to marry. Couples in Northern Ireland who were married in other parts of the UK or Ireland shouldn't be in a legal limbo because their government refuses to acknowledge their marriages"

O'Doherty uses the support of the opinion poll, which found that 70% of those surveyed supported same-sex marriage, to infer the importance of the issue to Northern Irish citizens. He also argues that the injustices same-sex couples are facing are due to the failure of the state to offer the appropriate recognition, and the impact this has on individuals. For him, marriage is an issue pertaining to rights and equality, and a mark of a progressive society, which he believes Northern Ireland should be. For same-sex couples to be fully equal citizens, they should be able to access equal marriage, reproducing the legal definition of citizenship (Hoipkemier, 2013). By directly referencing the failures of the state, O'Doherty makes this an explicitly political issue. Through tying same-sex marriage to the values of a progressive society, it reinforces the idea that it is a marker of inclusion for LGBTQ people, despite the debate within the community about the heteronormative values instilled in the institution of marriage (Brown and Browne, 2016). However, the majority of the LGBTQ community are not engaged in radical queer politics, and may simply desire to be treated as ordinary citizens (Browne and Bakshi, 2013).

5.2 Heteroactivism in Northern Ireland: The Christian Institute

The Christian Institute's website describes its history and background (The Christian Institute, 2019c). It is a charity formed in 1990 with the aim to promote Christianity and the teaching of Christian values across the UK. They run discussion events, write petitions and letters, publish news reports and publications, and fund legal defences for cases they are invested in. They campaign on issues only where they believe they are supported by Biblical texts, such as campaigning against abortion, divorce, same-sex marriage, and gender recognition. While the purpose of the organisation is not to explicitly campaign against the rights of the LGBTQ community, they do campaign against issues that affect the community directly. As the charity works nationwide, I will only explore issues they have worked on specifically focused within Northern

Ireland – that of the Ashers Bakery legal case, and same-sex marriage. I chose to focus on this charity as I identified their language as being representative of heteroactivism, as they reproduce arguments for freedom of speech, religious freedoms, and the importance of heterosexual marriage to society (Browne and Nash, 2017; Browne et al., 2018; Nash et al., 2019).

Redefining marriage

The Christian Institute (2019a) describe their attitude towards marriage as fitting the biblical definition, which stood in English law until it was "redefined by the introduction of same-sex marriage". This clearly outlines same-sex marriage as an issue of redefinition rather than equality, as it is perceived by from pro-LGBTQ campaigners. The Christian Institute also describe the benefits of marriage for wider society, and for raising children, reproducing heteroactivist discourses (Browne and Nash 2017, Browne et al., 2018). While they are not campaigning directly against LGBTQ individuals in an overtly homophobic manner, they are campaigning for traditional family values and the 'protection' of young people, suggesting they fit into the definition of a heteroactivist organisation.

When speaking about developments relating to same-sex marriage, members of The Christian Institute have used a variety of arguments and justifications for their opposition. In April 2014, after the third Assembly vote on same-sex marriage, Callum Webster, the Northern Ireland Officer for The Christian Institute remarked that the "political elite" were trying to "force the change", against the will of the people of Northern Ireland (The Christian Institute, 2014). While some politicians, such as Samuel Wilson of the DUP, were praised for their opposition, the politicians who introduced the motions were described as the "political elite", out of touch with the everyday person. The idea that some politicians are accurate representatives of their communities whereas others are elitist and out of touch, in order to justify opposition to a bill on same-sex marriage, demonstrates the diverse arguments heteroactivist groups will use that don't overtly demonstrate homophobia, but instead hold little sense and meaning when assessed closely. In his statement in April 2015, following the fourth vote on same-sex marriage in the Assembly, Webster raised the issue of freedom of speech in opposition to the bill (The Christian Institute, 2015). This

argument was also used by MLAs within the debate, as there are concerns about the protections for religious individuals in the public and private sector who may not support the implementation of same-sex marriage if it passed. Since the collapse of the Stormont government, The Christian Institute's arguments against same-sex marriage have centred around protecting devolution and respecting the rights of local people, who risk having unwanted legislation 'imposed' upon them (The Christian Institute, 2019b). This shows the similarities between the heteroactivist arguments used by campaign groups and politicians, both of whom can be considered activists with the potential to work for or against social movements. In this case, the similarities in the arguments used by both The Christian Institute and some Unionist politicians demonstrates similarities between heteroactivism in both informal and formal spaces, expanding the analysis of prior research (Nash et al., 2019).

Ashers Bakery

The Christian Institute published an informational leaflet in December 2018 detailing the background and outcome of the legal case against Ashers Bakery in Belfast (The Christian Institute, 2018). This leaflet provides a history of the case, which began in May 2014 when the McArthur couple declined to bake a cake with the message "Support Gay Marriage" iced on it. They were subsequently taken to court in May 2015, and lost, and lost their appeal in October 2016. The case was then heard by the UK Supreme Court where the owners were cleared of all charges. This was on the grounds that the couple had declined the message, not the customer, and so their freedom of speech was protected, as according to law, people are not compelled to support a political cause they disagree with.

This case has been significant in debates around freedom of speech and LGBTQ rights and has been used by The Christian Institute to argue against the implementation of same-sex marriage due to the threat of similar cases arising if free-speech and religious protections are not guaranteed. The Christian Institute funded the McArthur's defence and assembled their legal team, demonstrating how their activism extends into sites of decision (Routledge, 2017). This example shows how heteroactivist organisations can engage with arguments for freedom of speech and religion, in their cause to campaign against LGBTQ rights. This case in particular

demonstrates the multi-scalar nature of this activism, as the case went through several levels of the court system, from the Belfast County Court, to the UK Supreme Court. This also demonstrates the importance and complexity of issues of freedom of expression and LGBTQ rights, emphasising the contentious nature of these issues.

5.3 Comparing LGBTQ and Hetero-activisms

Having outlined the backgrounds, main activities, and views of these organisations, it is possible to compare them to explore which spaces are used by activists working on LGBTQ issues, and what the similarities and differences are between those working for and against these issues. This will present a unique comparison of an LGBTQ rights charity that may engage in 'ordinary' activism, and a heteroactivist group who campaign based on freedom of speech and traditional values.

Both organisations make similar use of online spaces (Routledge, 2017), such as websites and social media accounts. These platforms are used to present and publicise their ideas and activities, and help build online communities to support their causes. The online news articles posted by both organisations have many similarities. They often feature a current event, which they are commenting on, usually with a spokesperson from their organisation. This gives the effect of the groups presenting a 'voice' on the issue, as a leading figure or authority on the cause they are working on. As detailed above, the content of these news reports vary greatly between the organisations, due to their opposing views.

The Christian Institute also differs in that it has a much broader scope than Love Equality NI. The charity's ethos is to campaign on issues with clear 'biblical teachings', which is far more varied than Love Equality NI's sole focus on marriage equality. However, Love Equality NI is formed form a variety of different groups who have come together to work on a sole cause, but individually work on diverse, sometimes overlapping, issues. This means they have all been able to bring something different to the cause in order to work together and support each other. This collaboration echoes similarities in Pride events, where diverse groups and political views come together under one banner (Di Feliciantonio, 2016). This indicates collaboration as a key feature of LGBTQ activism.

Collaboration may also feature within heteroactivism, as The Christian Institute has close ties with the Coalition for Marriage, a campaign group against the redefinition of marriage (Coalition For Marriage, 2017). The director of The Christian Institute, Colin Hart, is also the chairman of the Coalition for Marriage. This emphasises the co-ordinated and networked nature of heteroactivism in Northern Ireland and elsewhere in the UK, as the Coalition For Marriage is a national organisation, again illustrating the diverse scales activisms act in (Browne and Nash, 2017; Jonas, 2015). It is important to understand how heteroactivist groups may be operating in order to understand the threat to existing and potential LGBTQ rights such as marriage and the recognition of gender diverse people.

It is also possible to comment on the discourses each organisation uses and how these are constructed by the wider context of the groups' backgrounds. As demonstrated by the analysis of their activities, Love Equality NI are committed to the implementation of same-sex marriage. They have campaigned for this since 2015, and have acted by lobbying politicians through letter writing, petitioning, and marching in Belfast to encourage politicians to support their cause. They have also attempted to demonstrate widespread community support for the issue to demonstrate to politicians that it is the will of the Northern Irish people. They have argued that while devolution is important, ultimately the right to marriage is more important due to its status as a universal right. This became even more overt when Sara Canning, partner of journalist Lyra McKee, joined their cause for the march in May 2019. At her address at City Hall in Belfast, Canning (Love Equality NI, 2019) said:

> "If the politicians won't legislate for equal marriage at Stormont, then the Prime Minister should do it at Westminster. That's what I told Theresa May at Lyra's funeral. I wanted her to know that Lyra and I had a right to be treated as equal citizens in our own country."

Here, it is clear that she would prefer legislation for marriage regardless of where it comes from, and that the right to marriage is part of being included as a citizen in wider society, indicating the importance of the legal status of citizenship affording rights to citizens (Staeheli et al., 2004; Hoipkemier, 2013). Canning expresses her frustration with the lack of legislative progress within Northern Ireland on devolved

issues such as marriage due to the collapse of government at Stormont. As the political background in Northern Ireland is currently rather vulnerable, groups and individuals like Love Equality NI and Sara Canning are insisting that the former direct ruler, England, make use of their power to influence the laws governing the lives of Northern Irish people. This marks a dramatic step back from devolution, although Canning has also remarked that "we're not a devolved state anymore" (Thomson, 2019), referring to the fact that the Assembly has been dissolved for almost three years (Mohdin, 2019). This complex situation indicates that sexual politics can shape and be shaped by different scales and spaces, including different government institutions, and regional and national states, which then relate to individuals impacted by the laws in question.

While Love Equality NI's arguments are focused solely on achieving equal marriage through the political system, regardless of which government does so, The Christian Institute's arguments are far more wide ranging. As examined above, they have switched in focus from equal marriage being driven by the 'political elite', to protecting freedom of speech and expression, to protecting the right to devolution. Based on this, it appears that they are willing to use flexible reasoning depending on the matter at hand in order to justify their opposition to equal marriage at any cost. Rather than rely solely on their position that same-sex marriage is immoral according to their religious beliefs, The Christian Institute diversify their opposition when the opportunity presents itself. While they claim they only take a position on issues clearly supported or prohibited on a religious basis, they also utilise arguments with no religious component, potentially in an attempt to reach a wider audience. This supports my identification of The Christian Institute as a heteroactivist group.

Browne et al. (2018) stated that more research was required on such groups in order to explore their opposition to and campaigning methods against LGBTQ rights progress, and this analysis has shown that they will utilise a variety of methods and arguments to justify their opposition. By using arguments about freedom of speech, and protecting the right to devolution, they make their position more palatable and accessible to more people than a hard-line religious opposition in a growing secular society. In the face of growing secularisation, it may be that these groups attempt to

justify their opposition in increasingly diverse ways to grow support for their cause. Furthermore, I have argued that Love Equality NI collaborates with state institutions to expand legislative equalities, which it believes will create a sense of belonging in a region which has continued to leave them behind. Their actions centre on inclusion and emphasising marriage as an equality and rights issue in order to be counted as an 'ordinary' citizen. This desire for normality and ordinariness supports Browne and Bakshi's (2013) conceptualisation of ordinary activism, applied in a different spatial setting, thereby proving its geographical relevance. However, in addition to online media spaces, LGBTQ activism has been performed in urban spaces, which further complicates understandings of LGBTQ activist spaces and strategies.

6. Parades and Politics: Darling, I want my gay rights now!

Belfast Pride Festival 2019 ran from 26th July-4th August, involving a week of events and activities. The focal point of the Festival, however, was Belfast Pride Parade on Saturday 3rd August. In this chapter, I examine the spatial strategies and sites of intervention (Routledge, 2017) utilised by Belfast Pride as well as the smaller groups within it, in addition to examining elements of political performance (Rai, 2015). Through examining the spatialities of activism at Pride and the way this activism is performed, this analysis argues that Pride remains political in a varied sense, rather than a uniform radical/assimilative manner. This is significant, as more countries are gaining legislative equalities, so it is important to understand the evolving shape of LGBTQ activism, in varied contexts (Lalor and Browne, 2018). I pay particular attention to the scales of activism within Pride, emphasising the relational nature of scale, and the importance of understanding the body, especially queer bodies, as a geopolitical unit upon which power is exerted, and resisted (Massaro and Williams, 2013; Peake, 2013).

6.1 Belfast Pride Festival 2019

The official guidebook produced for the Belfast Pride Festival offers information about the wider context of the event (Belfast Pride, 2019a). The theme for this year's parade was 'Rights Now' (Figure 8), based on a quote from the transgender activist Marsha P. Johnson, one of the leading figures at the Stonewall Riots, '*Darling, I want my gay rights now*'. The organisers chose this theme in order to highlight the rights denied to the LGBTQ community, including transgender healthcare, marriage equality, and fertility rights. The broad range of focus of these rights, instead of simply focusing on equal marriage, demonstrates awareness of rights issues across the entire community, rather than one small part. This is significant, as Pride marches have been accused of reinforcing homonormativity, the inclusion of certain sexualised/gendered bodies in a way which reinforces hegemonies and promotes exclusions within LGBTQ spaces on the basis of intersecting factors including race and gender (Browne and Nash, 2013). However, by recognising inequalities across the community, instead of focusing on a particular group within it, this shows that the organisers intentionally engaged an

intersectional approach to rights inequalities. The organisers also recognise Stonewall as a key moment in the Pride movement, and that this Pride is the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. This demonstrates the transnational and historical links in LGBTQ activism, as this one moment has been reproduced around the world in remembrance of the New York LGBTQ community standing up against state endorsed police violence (Routledge, 2017).



Figure 8 Front page of Belfast Pride Festival Guide picturing an illustrated image of transgender activist Marsha P. Johnson, who was a key figure at the Stonewall Riots which helped to spark the global Pride movement (Belfast Pride, 2019a)

A key feature of the organisation of Belfast Pride is its strict regulation in relation to the state. Anyone who participates in the parade is subject to the Parade's

Commission's Code of Conduct as part of the Public Processions (NI) Act 1998 (Belfast Pride Festival, 2019b). The code of conduct aims to minimise disruption and offence to the areas surrounding the march, and was originally implemented due to the sectarian violence that occurs around so-called 'Orange marches' conducted by some in the unionist community (Walsh, 2015). While created to manage sectarian parades, the Commission has jurisdiction over all parades deemed 'contentious', and Belfast Pride Parade is the largest parade to fall under its remit (Belfast Pride, 2019b). This demonstrates that activist marches in Northern Ireland have to be carefully planned and organised in line with legislation, and so may not allow for more radical, disruptive tactics.

It further illustrates that the LGBTQ community has not been fully accepted within Northern Irish society, despite some legislative equalities, reinforcing that rights being 'won' does not necessarily translate to transforming the everyday lived experiences of LGBTQ people (Lalor and Browne, 2018). In addition to this, it shows the place-specific nature of LGBTQ activism (Di Feliciantonio, 2016), and supports Peake's (2013) assertion that queer bodies are territorialised geopolitical units which reveal the connections between various scales. The laws regarding parades are explicit in demonstrating the links between state control and the bodily scale (Massaro and Williams, 2013). By policing and controlling the actions that people can take during a parade, this reinforces the official and self-imposed restrictions placed on LGBTQ individuals who occupy public spaces in their everyday lives (Hubbard, 2013).

As a parade through the city, Belfast Pride can understood as using the strategies of mobility (moving through the city space) and feeling out of place (challenging the usually hetersexualised city streets), with the site of intervention of circulation (roads and public squares) (Routledge, 2017). As the specific movement and route through the city is specific to Belfast Pride, this demonstrates the place-specific nature of activism (ibid.). The route is also planned by the organisers to maximise safety and visibility – they aim to walk directly around the city centre (Figure 9), while passing the small but notable gay quarter, centred on Donegall and Union Street, located on the northern route out of the main city centre. There are several gay bars located here,

with the Belfast LGBT Centre (headquarters to several charities such as The Rainbow Project and Cara Friend) located to the south in the city's Cathedral Quarter, and the Belfast Trans Resource Centre located in the university Queen's Quarter. This suggests that while there is a geographical focus of LGBTQ commercial venues in the city, this is not a strict district housing the entirety of the focus of Belfast's LGBTQ community's spaces.



Figure 9 Map of the Belfast Pride parade route through the city centre (Belfast Pride 2019b).

6.2 Constructing the Parade

The Parade, which started in Albert Square, consisted of a large variety of different groups. The parade was led by Belfast Lord Mayor John Finucane, holding the banner with the official parade slogan (see Figure 10). Finucane's presence marked a significant step in Belfast City Council's involvement with Pride, adding legitimacy to the parade. On Saturday morning, he had raised the Pride flag above City Hall, which

was also on the parade route on the south of the route. This is the first time the flag has been raised from the building, central to the city's government, and a symbolic representation of the council's support for the community. This gave the appearance of placing the LGBTQ community at the centre of the city and its government. State endorsement, however, does not necessarily translate to the lived experiences of the LGBTQ community. As previously made clear, the community face several legislative inequalities, not limited to same-sex marriage, indicating the varied support at different scales of state governance. While the city government supported the festival with funding and participating in the parade, the LGBTQ community has faced significant backlash from unionist politicians in government. While it may seem that these two scales are completely distinct, they are connected by the scale of the body, emphasising the relational nature of the scales of LGBTQ activism and access to rights (McDowell, 1999; Massaro and Williams, 2013; Jonas, 2015).



Figure 10 The front of the parade, led by Lord Mayor John Finucane, holding the banner with the official Pride slogan, 'Rights Now' (Belfast Telegraph, 2019).

The structure of the parade was organised by colour coordinated zones, each containing a diverse range of groups. This gave the parade a diverse and varied structure, with some vehicles and other pedestrian groups. The participating groups

included local charities (e.g. The Rainbow Project, Love Equality NI, Cara Friend), political groups and parties (e.g. Sinn Féin, SDLP, Alliance Party), businesses and sponsors (Citi Bank, Tesco, IKEA), religious groups (All Souls Church) entertainment and local nightclubs (Taboo, Kremlin), and public services (Police Service Northern Ireland, Fire Brigade's Union, Northern Ireland Ambulance Service). The wide diversity of groups participating firstly suggests that there is acceptance and support for Northern Ireland's LGBTQ community across broad aspects of society, and also that the parade could be seen as an opportunity for different socio-political causes to come together under shared interests (Di Feliciantonio, 2016). For example, the considerable union presence implies that workers' rights are entangled within LGBTQ rights, and that Pride is still a platform to promote and support those rights, rather than conforming to the neoliberal agenda (ibid.).

In addition, the presence of some LGBTQ friendly religious groups, like All Soul's Church and Affirmation (charity supporting LGBTQ Mormons), and the inclusion of youth oriented groups such as Scouts NI and the NI Commissioner for Young People, displays opposition to two of the main arguments used by heteroactivists against LGBTQ rights progression (Browne and Nash, 2017). Heteroactivists argue that some LGBTQ rights progress infringes on religious freedom, and the protection of 'family values'. However, the religious and youth presence at Belfast Pride, as well as the numerous family-friendly events organised by the Festival, indicates religious and family diversity within the parade, and Northern Ireland's wider LGBTQ movement. By creating spaces accessible to families, where the focus is on inclusion and support, it helps to refute the idea that LGBTQ people and their rights are a threat to the family unit. Therefore, the engagement with young people and marketing itself in a 'family friendly' way may be viewed as an attempt to include all aspects of the community and its supporters, while also making Pride more palatable to its critics. Conversely, this could be critiqued as assimilating into hegemonic ideals of what a 'good' LGBTQ community looks like – emphasising monogamous family units at the expense of diverse relationship forms like polyamory (Brown and Browne, 2016).

One notable presence in the parade was that of the European Pride, who were joined by Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Leo Varadkar. As an openly gay head of state, he

may be seen as representing the progress LGBTQ people have made in being included in wider society, and leading it. He represents a 'site of collaboration' within Pride (Routledge, 2017), demonstrating the connections the event has with national governments. The presence of European Pride and Varadkar represent the international connections evident within Pride events. Pride is an historical and transnational movement, which varies across spatial contexts from commercial parties to underground protests (and space in-between) (Di Feliciantonio, 2016). At the party in Custom House Square, Varadkar stated:

> "I always say the biggest parade that happens in Northern Ireland isn't orange or green, it's rainbow-coloured… I had a real honour today to walk with Lord Hayward, who, along with Conor McGinn, put the legislation through the Commons and Lords to bring about marriage equality here in a few months' time. So, we really want to thank them."

These comments use colour to reference other political marches in Northern Ireland, with orange being associated with the Unionist marches, and green with the Republicans. However, Varadkar emphasises the importance of Pride within Northern Ireland. By placing Pride as more significant than politically oriented marches that are prominent in Northern Irish society, it demonstrates Varadkar's belief that Pride, and the LGBTQ movement, is integral to Northern Ireland's society too. Furthermore, he references Westminster peer Lord Hayward and Labour MP Conor McGinn who were responsible for bringing legislative amendments to provide for marriage equality within Northern Ireland. With the Irish Taoiseach marching alongside a Westminster Peer, behind the banner of Europride, in the city of Belfast, this draws together multiple scalar connections, and demonstrates the relational scalar politics of LGBTQ rights movement in Northern Ireland.

Due to the fact, however, that Belfast Pride was not a uniform event, I argue that it cannot be described as uniformly homonormative. Belfast Pride included a variety of groups which represented the diversity of the community. The inclusion of queer bodies that are further excluded by homonormativity within the LGBTQ community demonstrates Belfast Pride's organisers' attempts to create an inclusive atmosphere, especially for those who are usually rendered less visible. There were party busses and

drag queens, representing the traditional nightlife and drag culture element of the community, alongside support groups for and ran by transgender people and their families, as well as a bus that drove through the parade for those who would not have felt comfortable or able to walk the parade route. There was also a subgroup of The Rainbow Project, the Gay Ethnic Group, who represent ethnic minorities within the LGBTQ community in Northern Ireland. The lack of a sole focus on one aspect of the community, during the parade and the other events preceding and following the march, demonstrates Belfast Pride's awareness of the different aspects of the community, and while not necessarily purposefully aiming to, helps dispute homonormative arguments against LGBTQ rights progress.

6.3 Pride: Partying and Politics?

Kath Browne's earlier work (2007) explores pride as a 'party with politics', and contests that despite the lack of radical queer activism in Brighton Pride, it remains political in the sense that queer bodies are occupying usually heterosexualised urban spaces. Her later work with Leela Bakshi (2013) explores the middle ground of 'ordinary' activisms at Brighton Pride, which may not be radical, but do not reproduce the normalising hegemonies homonormativity. It is by using this concept that I will examine the nature of activism within Belfast Pride, and explore the spatial methods through which performance may be politicised (Rai, 2015).

One of the ways that political performance may be observed at Belfast Pride is through the use of displaying banners and placards, which carry messages and are part of the visual atmosphere at Pride. Johnston and Waitt (2015) reflect that banners and placards were common in earlier marches in the 1970s, displaying politically motivated messages to protest for equal rights and the decriminalisation of sexual acts. This suggests that banners and signs are common historical method within Pride parades. As a prominent feature in some parts of the parade, they illustrate the political motivations of attendees. Rai's (2015) framework of political performance can be extended to include symbols and signs, which help to create the 'stage' that politics is performed on; in this case, the parade route. By reading these messages, it is possible to infer the political attitudes present in the parade, which in turn help to

create the sense of atmosphere. Furthermore, it reinforces the importance of textual spaces in constructing spatial politics (Müller, 2013)



Figure 11 Selection of signs at Belfast Pride, reading "Show some love", "Pan Pride", and "We are SORRY for how the church has mistreated LGBTQI+ people" (fieldwork photography).

Some signs expressed general messages of celebration and support with the LGBTQ community. Figure 11 shows a collection of signs in a section of the parade led by All Souls Inclusive Church. These signs display messages indicating support and celebration, such as 'Show some love' and 'Pan Pride'. These help people celebrate their own identities, which are largely underrepresented in the LGBTQ community, and literature studying them (Oswin, 2007; Paternotte and Tremblay, 2015). The sign referencing the Church's mistreatment of the LGBTQ community is significant in showing religious acceptance, which is one of the prominent resistances to LGBTQ rights progress where they have already been 'won' (Browne and Nash, 2017). Other signs in the parade also display religious acceptance (Figure 12), such as "God Loves All of Us", while another sign in this figure states "Love is here to stay", which may be in reference for the potential implementation of same-sex marriage if the devolved government is not restored in October. While not obviously political, this message is

celebratory of the potential rights progression, and implies the message that once 'won', said rights will not be taken away. This message shows hope in a global political environment where LGBTQ rights are being encroached upon. This can be seen in the US, where the Supreme Court is currently scheduled to debate whether employees are protected on the basis of 'sex discrimination', which if repealed would allow LGBTQ people to be fired from their workplaces (Levin, 2019).



Figure 12 Collection of signs in Belfast Pride, 2019 (fieldwork photography).

Other signs and banners were more radical, tackling issues around rights, protesting, and legislation. One sign in the Cara-Friend LGBTQ+ Youth Group section of the march read "Queer Liberation Not Assimilation" (Figure 13), while the youth group's main banner read "Queer Liberation Not Rainbow Capitalism". These messages echo the views of more radical queer activists, who position themselves against social norms and neoliberalism (Browne and Bakshi, 2013). It is also significant that this is a group of young people, who potentially represent a new generation of queer activists who view the mainstreaming of some LGBTQ rights and identities as assimilating into homonormative ideals (ibid.).



Figure 13 Members of Cara-Friend LGBTQ+ Youth Group marching in Belfast Pride, with one person holding a sign reading "Queer Liberation Not Assimilation"(fieldwork photography)



Figure 14 Members of the trade union Unison marching in Belfast Pride 2019. One sign reads "With or without you, civil marriage for LGBT+ people" with an image of the Stormont Assembly building (fieldwork photography).

Figure 14 depicts a sign reading “"With or without you, civil marriage for LGBT+ people”. Instead of radical queer politics, this references the politics of devolution. This demonstrates that marches be a platform for diverse political conversations, rather than one unified message (Di Feliciantonio, 2016). As the message is read alongside an image of the Stormont Assembly building, it is profoundly geographical, with Stormont representing the face of Northern Irish devolution. Evoking the image of a different political ‘stage’ (Rai, 2015), the sign contrasts with the stage surrounding it, the parade route. The contradiction between the formal and supposedly powerful (despite the collapse in the devolved government) state parliament being carried along the informal realm of urban space diversifies the spaces upon which geopolitical processes play out, suggesting that sexual politics must be understood on multiple scales beyond state institutions and the nation-state (Massaro and Williams, 2013).

The parade was also used as a platform to promote rights for other issues not traditionally understood as an LGBTQ rights issue. This included reproductive rights, marijuana legalisation, and support for striking workers at the Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast’s docks. Whilst reproductive rights is more commonly discussed alongside LGBTQ rights issues in Northern Ireland (see Smyth, 2006) due to the disparity with laws in the UK, the other examples more overtly indicate how Pride can be used as a platform for political messages, regardless of their connection to LGBTQ rights. In one sense, this can help draw solidarity between different communities and raise support for various causes, but it may also be seen to divert attention from issues central to the community. Fundamentally, it demonstrates that the political messages presented visually at Belfast Pride are varied, and show no uniformity in voice. This was a parade made up of groups with their own methods and agendas, all marching under the banner of support for LGBTQ rights and the community. It is therefore possible to understand Belfast Pride as political in multiple ways – in a more traditionally radical sense with people protesting assimilation, to spreading feelings of love and acceptance which challenge the heterosexualisation of urban space, emphasising the activist strategy of ‘feeling out of place’ by challenging the everyday assumptions and function embedded in a space (Routledge, 2017).

Another aspect of Rai's (2015) political performance framework includes the auditory power of words and speech. Several groups in the march used chants to portray their message. The Belfast Trans Resource Centre group used megaphones to exclaim "We will not give up this fight, healthcare is a human right", later supplementing this with "trans rights are human rights". This references clearly the demand for rights for the transgender community to combat existing inequalities. However, rather than demanding 'normalisation' they are calling for what they see as a human right, and was more demonstrative than celebratory. This may suggest that the transgender community, who are further behind in legislative equalities than sexual minorities, are still fighting for basic rights for their community, although this did happen alongside the wider LGBTQ community, demonstrating solidarity across difference. The significance of their position towards the front of the parade implies the organisers gave visibility to the group, which is significant as transgender people are often marginalised both within and outside of the LGBTQ community (Oswin, 2008; Paternotte and Tremblay, 2015). The National Union of Students-Union of Students in Ireland (NUS-USI) group also used a megaphone to chant "pride is protest". As a group for younger people, this again affirms the idea that the mainstreaming of LGBTQ rights has led to a rise in queer activism against the commodification of LGBTQ spaces (Browne and Bakshi, 2013).

A further piece of speech significant during the day, was Lord Mayor John Finucane's introduction to the 'Party in the Square':

> "50 years on from Stonewall, there's one message that's coming round now very clear from Belfast, and that is we want our rights, and we want our rights now. Our LGBT community is part of Belfast and Belfast welcomes our LGBT community and we stand in solidary, we march in solidarity… Everybody enjoy your day, happy pride!"

Finucane's speech, at the most evidently 'party' aspect of the festival, remains distinctly political. He references the Stonewall Riots, and repeatedly mentions rights that people are fighting for. This implies political solidarity with the attendees, who while may be preparing to party, by occupying Custom House Square in central Belfast, conduct what Routledge (2017) describes as the intervention site of circulation, and

potentially collaboration, as the festival organisers worked with the City Council to arrange the event and include Finucane in the proceedings. Whilst it would not be accurate to describe the Belfast Pride organisation as a radical queer activist group, elements of Routledge's framework do apply, albeit in a more implicit way (Horton and Kraftl, 2009). Despite Routledge's framework being developed to explore the geographies of *radical* protest, it can be useful here too. While having a concert in a city centre in itself may not be political, I argue that the inclusion of queer bodies does have an overtly geopolitical impact. By rendering joy, pride, and celebration visible in a largely marginalised community, queer bodies occupying space that is otherwise understood as heterosexual helps to make their presence ordinary in the urban environment, rather than exceptional or radical way (Browne, 2007; Browne and Bakshi, 2013).

Rai (2015) also refers to how political institutions use songs, bands, anthems, and language to represent unity and nationalism. In applying PPF to Belfast Pride, it is apparent that songs and sounds were used to create a party atmosphere. Various party busses, representing clubs and bars in the Belfast LGBTQ scene, used music and dancing to create a sense of excitement and celebration. This was further aided by a samba band marching within the parade. The use of upbeat music and dancing demonstrated the celebratory atmosphere of some parts of the parade, in distinction with the groups marching with chants, and those simply waving at crowds. The variation in sound and movement helped to create a diverse political atmosphere, with some people demonstrating typical protest tactics of banners, signs, and chants, and others using dancing and movement to celebrate queer bodies and diversity.

Before drawing this section to a close, I will discuss how the Belfast Pride was subject to a minor counter-protest. Outside Belfast City Hall (Figure 15), a fenced off area, occupied by a handful of individuals, guarded by around 10 police officers, used a sound system make speeches throughout the day. Set up well before the start of the parade, the group were from an unidentifiable church, and spent their time recounting scripture and pleading with passers-by to talk to them about religion, in the hope to 'save' them. The absolutely central location, alongside the parade route, outside the city's centre of government, indicates the desire of the demonstrators to

be visible to the attendees. It also demonstrates that even with the city council's cooperation to organise and permit the event, and wider legislative equalities within Northern Ireland, this acceptance is not uncontested. This is further demonstrated by the fact that the event was marked 'contentious' in the first place, ensuring the parade's regulation under the Parade Commission, subjecting queer bodies to further scrutiny than their usual everyday lives.



Figure 15 Demonstrators outside Belfast City Hall. They have Belfast Pride Festival banners in the background, and are surrounded by metal barriers. Several police officers guard the area, indicating this is officially sanctioned, and they are being protected by a public service directed by the state (fieldwork photography).

This chapter has examined the spatial politics of Belfast Pride. Through examining multiple elements of performance, such as symbols and signs creating the 'political stage' space, and the auditory power of words and speech. These aspects of performance help to politicise Pride, and demonstrate the performative ways politics can be embodied (Massaro and Williams, 2013; Peake, 2013). In addition, Routledge's (2017) framework for understanding the spatialities of radical protest explains how

several spatial strategies, such as 'feeling out of place', and moving through space, were utilised as an intrinsic part of how Pride functioned. Movement, whether it be marching or dancing, is how Pride extends through urban spaces, to displace the usual heterosexualised nature of the urban landscape. While this Pride was not overtly radical, there were elements to its composition that did echo radical protest, such as the use of political placards, chants, and the occupation of urban space. However, this is mediated by Browne and Bakshi's (2013) theorisation of ordinary activism. The majority of the people in the parade were not staging a radical protest. They were celebrating their identity, or supporting loved ones, and demonstrating the inclusion of LGBTQ people within Northern Irish society. They were also staking claims for the community to receive the rights they are fighting for, that are slowly being achieved.

7. Conclusion

From 21st October 2019, there is all likelihood that Westminster will be required to introduce same-sex marriage legislation for Northern Ireland. Some have celebrated this, claiming that Northern Ireland will no longer be 'left behind', and argue that it will create a sense of belonging within society. Others have argued that this goes against the principles of devolution, and is 'imposing' equal marriage on a society who do not want it, risking religious freedoms and the traditional meaning and value of marriage. These arguments have emerged from different spaces, and help to construct the sexual political landscape of LGBTQ rights within Northern Ireland. Significantly, through this study, I have critiqued the idea that the UK is a country where LGBTQ rights have been 'won' (Lalor and Browne, 2018), instead demonstrating the spatially uneven nature of legislation, and the activist strategies campaigning for and against it.

By expanding an understanding of 'activism' to include politicians who campaign for or against social movements, I have demonstrated that activism can be performed in diverse spaces, whether that be in parliament, online, or out on the streets. I have also examined the way that these spaces intersect, indicating the multi-scalar and varied spatial nature of activism on LGBTQ rights in Northern Ireland. Through using Shirin Rai's (2015) political performance framework, I have explored how parliamentarians perform politics and how this is specific to space, with politicians constructing different arguments, and policies, across different spaces. However, I have gone beyond Rai's original applications of the framework and also applied it to the Belfast Pride parade, examining elements of performance to demonstrate the way Pride is politicised and performative. Both spaces use words and speech to create a 'stage' upon which politics is performed. These stages are spatially specific, and so it is only by paying attention to the particularities of political spaces, such as parliament and parades, can the geographies of sexual politics be understood. In addition to this, I have argued that online media spaces construct geopolitical discourses, whether that is to challenge or construct hetero and homonormativity. Charities like Love Equality NI and The Christian Institute use their online spaces to produce media which promotes their viewpoint, and the language they use has been repeated in

parliamentary and urban spaces. This indicates that activists campaigning on issues relating to sexual politics use diverse spaces that help produce powerful discourses that have implications outside those spaces.

I have used Routledge's (2017) understanding of the spaces of activism, but also broadened his framework to include a more varied understanding of activism, such as ordinary activism (Browne and Bakshi, 2013) Activist groups like Love Equality NI have engaged in less radical forms of activism to achieve a right they believe is universal, equal civil marriage. The engagement of LGBTQ activism with global rights discourses indicates to some the reproduction of homonormativity, as some members of the community become accept into mainstream culture, and others (e.g. people of colour, gender diverse individuals) are left behind (Browne and Nash, 2015). However, in exploring activism outside of the metropolitan centres where the theory was produced (Brown, 2012) I have argued that the nature of activism within Northern Ireland varies between those considered more radical, as seen in Belfast Pride, to activists who want the way they live their lives to be unremarkable and ordinary. This meets Browne and Bakshi's (2013) claim for a broader conceptualisation of ordinary activism in different spatial contexts. Furthermore, I have identified the connections between ordinary activism and citizenship in offering a geographical understanding of sexual politics. Due to the desire for campaigners to be treated like an 'everyday citizen' with equal rights, this demonstrates the connections between ordinary activism and understandings of sexual citizenship.

I have also explored the dynamics of heteroactivism, a term conceptualised by Brown e and Nash (2017) to explain new resistance to existing LGBTQ rights progress, in places where rights have already been accomplished. The Christian Institute fit this dynamic, reproducing arguments around traditional family values and freedom of religion in the face of extending rights to same-sex marriage. These arguments are vital to understand, due to the continued risk of the retraction of equalities legislation where it has already been won (Levin, 2019). Due to the fact that I examined heteroactivism within parliamentary spaces, it is even more significant to understand the dynamics of heteroactivism if it is present within decision making spaces which impact on the

everyday lives of the LGBTQ community. This is especially the case, as a future devolved Assembly within Northern Ireland will have the power to repeal

While I attempted to engage with activists who work on these issues, unfortunately due to lack of interest and/or resources, they declined to take part. This means that unfortunately, I have been less able to understand the lived experiences of activists and how this influences the spaces and methods they use. In addition to this, I have focused largely on one legislative issue, marriage equality. This is because it has been hugely prominent in the national conversation for Northern Ireland's politics, demonstrated by the amendment to the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill, which effectively introduces the will of Westminster to the citizens of Northern Ireland. In addition, the conversation around marriage equality was accelerated by the tragic death of Lyra McKee and her partner subsequently speaking out on the issue. In the future, other elements of Northern Irish sexual politics should be explored.

While beyond the scope of this study, it is necessary to further explore the dynamics of heteroactivism, especially the secular formations of it. The UK has recently seen protests outside of schools that provide lessons which recognise diverse family structures. This is despite legislative equality and protection for sexual and gender minorities, indicating that equalities legislation does not fully protect from discrimination. In addition to this, further research is required on activism outside of metropolitan centres to expand the application of theories developed by those researching the geographies of sex and sexualities. In order to combat the increased threat to existing rights legislations, which aim to include diverse groups of people in wider society, it is vital to understand the threat to sexual and gender minorities, and the progress they have fought so hard for.

8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Extract from coding table for parliamentary transcript analysis, detailing the coding method.

Speaker information	Quote	Theme and Code	Additional Comments
Steven Agnew • Opening statement • Green Party • 1/10/12	We as an Assembly have the opportunity to say that we see those couples as equal, and see their love as equal. We can send a message today that those in same-sex relationships should be treated equally and fairly in our society. This is very much an issue of equality.	Society: Equality	Emphasising the issue of equality and how the Assembly should send that as a message it promotes.
	this is also an issue of religious freedom	Religion: religious freedom	
	Equally, we have an absurdity in the law: an atheist couple of different sex may, if they choose, have a religious ceremony, yet a devout Christian couple who happen to be of the same sex cannot even have hymns played or have any religious overtones to their civil partnership	Religion: religious freedom (Law)	Drawing attention to the hypocrisy of arguing for religious freedom
	Some churches will not marry two people of different religions because they do not see that as being within the value of their church, and that is their right, yet the state will still perform marriages between two people of different religions. Equally, those who are divorced cannot be remarried in some churches, but the state will marry divorcees	Religion: religious freedom Politics: responsibility of state	Drawing attention to the difference between state and civil marriage and why this is important

Appendix 2: Extract from compiled coding table to organise and compare codes across different debates.

Bronywn McGahan • Sinn Fein • Opening statement • 29/04/13	What Churches do is a matter for Churches, but the state needs to treat everyone with equality		
	The traditional family form based on marriage should not be given higher status in law or practice than any other family form	Society: family values	
David Ford • Alliance Party 29/04/13	The majority of our citizens no longer live as Christians in any meaningful sense. There may be a loose cultural affinity with Christian tradition, but there are a few who live their lives as though bound by the Westminster confession of faith, the thirty-nine articles of religion or Catholic canon law. The law of the state, which is influenced by but not beholden to our Christian heritage, is what governs all of us, regardless of background, belief, gender, race, nationality, religion or sexual orientation.	Religion: religious lives Politics: separation of church/state	
Caitriona Ruane • Sinn Fein Closing Statement 29/04/13	It has moved away, thankfully, from the language of sodomy, perversion and deviance to the new language. They now talk about protecting the traditional institution of marriage between a man and a woman and protecting society	Society: equality	Changing nature of the argument against marriage equality – directly linking to Browne's work on heteroactivism
Mervyn Storey • DUP 29/04/14	The redefinition of marriage would represent a change of monumental significance. It must not happen in Northern Ireland. I know that I speak for a large number of people across the community divide. When we come to the	Politics and religion: partisan issues	The relationship between religious community and voting support

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