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Ben Lyons

Lost for Words

The Silence of Peacebuilding on Minority
Language Rights in the North of Ireland
and Euskal Herria

European Master's Programme
in Human Rights and Democratisation

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in the North of Ireland and Euskal Herria

Foreword

The European Master's Human Rights and Democratisation (EMA) is a one-year degree established in 1997 as a joint initiative of ten universities, and with support of the European Commission, has grown into a network of 43 universities found in all EU member states, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Based on an action- and policy-oriented approach to learning, it combines legal, political, historical, anthropological and philosophical perspectives on the study of human rights and democracy with targeted skills-building activities. The aim of the EMA programme is to prepare young professionals to respond to the requirements and challenges of work in international organisations, field operations, governmental and non-governmental bodies, and academia. As a measure of its success, EMA has served as a model of inspiration for the establishment of seven other EU-sponsored regional master's programmes in the area of human rights and democratisation all over the world. Today these programmes cooperate closely in the framework of the Global Campus of Human Rights, which has its headquarters in Venice, Italy.

Up to 90 students are admitted to the EMA programme each year. During the first semester in Venice, they learn from leading academics, experts and representatives of international and non-governmental organisations. During the second semester, they are hosted by one of the 43 EMA participating universities to follow additional courses in an area of specialisation of their own choice and to conduct research under the supervision of the university's EMA Director or their academic colleagues. On successful completion of the requirements of the degree, students are awarded the European Master's Degree in Human Rights and Democratisation, which is jointly conferred by seven EMA universities who accredit the programme.

- Each year the EMA Council selects five theses, on the basis of:
1. Originality of the research topic, and its relevance and importance (including its contribution to the promotion and implementation of human rights and democratic values);
 2. Innovation with respect to argument, methodology, and theoretical approach, including case studies;
 3. Exceptional knowledge of the academic literature and excellent capacity for critical analysis;
 4. Clarity of structure, language and argumentation of a publishable standard with minimum revisions

The EMA awarded theses of the academic year 2024/2025 are:

- Bourne, Hebe, *Between the Lines: Subtle Media Discourse and the Normalisation of Anti-Migrant Sentiment in the Run Up to the United Kingdom 2024 Riots*. Supervisor: Katarzyna Blay Grabarczyk, Université de Montpellier.
- Dulce Ramírez, María, *The Right to Own or the Right to Live? Re-examining the Human Right to Private Property in the Age of the Socio-ecological Crisis through Indigenous and South Sámi Knowledge and Struggles*. Supervisors: Julien Pieret, Oona Le Meur, Université Libre de Bruxelles. This thesis will remain unpublished in accordance with the author's wishes.
- Lyons, Ben, *Lost for Words. The Silence of Peacebuilding on Minority Language Rights in the North of Ireland and Euskal Herria*. Supervisor: Faris Kočan, University of Ljubljana.
- Murillas García, Itziar, *The Security – Democracy Trade-Off? EU Policies and Civic Space in Morocco*. Supervisor: Harlan Koff, Université du Luxembourg.
- Nogueira de Sá Rosas de Castro, Clara, *To Be or Not to Be Neuroenhanced? Personal Identity under Siege in the Age of AI-powered Neurotechnology*. Supervisor: Thérèse Murphy, Queen's University Belfast.

The selected theses demonstrate the breadth, depth and reach of the EMA Programme and the passion and talent of its students. We are proud of the range of topics as well as the curiosity and research skills demonstrated by this year's cohort. On behalf of the Governing Bodies of the EMA programme, we applaud and congratulate these graduates for their work.

Prof. Manfred Nowak
Global Campus Secretary General

Prof. Thérèse Murphy
EMA Chairperson

Dr Orla Ní Cheallacháin
EMA Programme Director

Biography

Ben Lyons holds a Bachelor's degree in Sociology, Politics, and International Relations from University College Dublin. His research interests include minority language protection, indigenous rights and the politics of recognition. He was fortunate to complete his second semester at the University of Ljubljana where he deepened his knowledge on peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Following EMA, Ben completed a research internship in Stockholm. Beyond academia, he remains committed to amplifying community perspectives in discussions on conflict transformation and cultural rights.

Abstract

Post-conflict peacebuilding has historically been centred upon political and economic restructuring at the expense of cultural and linguistic justice. Language rights, however, remain a vital, if often overlooked, element of constructing sustainable peace. Nowhere more so is this the case than in those societies shaped by deep-rooted ethnolinguistic divisions. This thesis asks whether minority communities, and particularly their linguistic rights, have been left behind in the peacebuilding processes in the North of Ireland and Euskal Herria.

Using Linguistic Human Rights theory as a foundation, the research takes a comparative approach across six analytical concepts: access to education, institutional support, public use, discrimination, intergenerational transmission and links between language and identity. It draws on domestic, regional and international legal and policy documentation from the United Kingdom, Spain and France, as well as semi structured interviews with Gaeilgeoirí and Euskaldunak.

The findings show that while both regions have seen considerable grassroots language revival efforts, institutional support remains unbalanced and is often constrained by the politicisation of the languages by state actors. Gaeilge continues to be marginalised within the North of Ireland's stagnant political system which has struggled to accommodate cultural inclusion, while Euskara, though better supported in Euskadi, continues to face institutional obstacles in Nafarroa and a lack of state recognition in Iparralde, despite the efforts of speakers there.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that language rights must be brought to the centre of peacebuilding if it is to be truly inclusive and lasting.

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First and foremost, I must express my most sincere gratitude to my supervisor Dr Faris Kočan, without whom this thesis simply would never have been written. You have truly inspired a level of self-confidence in my writing over the past months for which I cannot thank you enough.

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To the friends I've made along the way, Aoife, Kate, Pien, Miguel, Mattia, Vito, and the rest of the Neighbours who made life on Lido feel instantly like home.

Finally, I cannot express how grateful I am for the support of my family over the past year and throughout my academic journey, your belief in me has been unwavering and your motivation has been inspiring. To my girlfriend, Aoife, I am eternally grateful for the support you've given me in the past year, and the push you gave me to take the EMA leap has been life changing.

One final word goes to my Grandad, the man who sparked my love for Gaeilge and Irish history from a young age, buíochas óm chroí leat.

‘SÍ teanga na muintire a shlánás an mhuintir’

Máirtín Ó Cadhain

*‘Nire aítaren etxea
defendituko dut.
Otsoen kontra,
sikatearen kontra,
lukurreriaren kontra,
justiziaren kontra,
defendituko dut
nire aítaren etxea.’*

Gabriel Aresti

Table of Abbreviations

BPF	Bunscoil Phobal Feirste
BMLM	Bilingual or minority language medium education
CoE	Council of Europe
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ECRML	European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages
ETA	Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque Country and Freedom)
FCNM	Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities
GFA	Good Friday Agreement
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

LHR	Linguistic human rights
LNE	Ley Básica de Normalización del Uso del Euskera (Basic Law on the Normalisation of the Use of Euskara)
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NILA	Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly
UN	United Nations

List of translated terms

An Ceathrú Gaeltachta

First Irish speaking area of Belfast, also known as Gaeltacht Bóthar Seoighe (Shaws Road)

An Dream Dearg

The Red Group

Beart do réir briathar

Keep your word

Bunscoil

Irish-medium primary school

Bunscoil Phobal Feirste

Farset Community Primary School

Castellano

Spanish language as referred to by the Spanish state

Catalá

Catalan language

Comhairle Oideachas Gaeilge

Irish Language Education Council

Cymraeg

Welsh language

Cúrsaí Gaeilge

Irish-medium education courses

Egun on

Good morning

Euskadi

Basque Autonomous Community containing the three historical territories of Araba, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa

Euskal

Relating to the Basque people or the Basque language

Euskal Autonomia Erkidegoko Justizia Auzitegi Nagusi

High Court of Justice of the Basque Autonomous Community

Euskal Herria

The Basque Country comprising the seven historical communities of Araba, Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa, Lapurdi, Nafarroa Beherea, Nafarroa Garaia and Zuberoa

Euskaldun/Euskaldunak

Person/people who speak Basque

Euskaltzaindia

Royal Academy of the Basque Language

Euskara

Basque language

Euskaraldia

Basque social movement promoting the use of the Basque language in daily life

Eusko Jaurlaritz

Basque Government

Fada

Name for accented vowels in the Irish language: á, é, í, ó, ú

Foras na Gaeilge

Institute of the Irish Language

Gaeilge

Irish language

Gaeilgeoir/Gaeilgeoirí

Person/people who speak Irish

Gaelg

Manx language

Gaelscoil/Gaelscoileanna

Irish-medium school/schools

Gaeltacht

Region in which Irish is the primary spoken language

Gaeltacht Béal Feirste

First Irish speaking area of Belfast, also known as Gaeltacht Bóthar Seoighe (Shaws Road)

Galego

Galician language

Gaueskola/Gaueskolak

Now defunct Basque-medium night school for adult learners

Glottophagie

The absorption or replacement of a minority language by a dominant one

Gàidhlig

Scottish Gaelic language

Hablame en Cristiano

Speak Christian to me

Heldeun Alfabetazte eta Berreuskalduntzerako Erakunde

Adult Literacy and Language Reeducation Institute

Ikastola/Ikastolak

Community run Basque-medium school/schools originating outside of the state school system

Iparralde

Northern Basque Country comprising the three historical regions of Lapurdi, Nafarroa Beherea and Zuberoa

Kaixo

Hello

Kernewek

Cornish language

Madrileño

Person from Madrid, Spain

Nafarroa

Autonomous community within the Spanish state historically populated by the Basque people, referred to by them as Nafarroa Garaia

Naíscoil

Irish-medium early years school

Partido Nacionalista Vasco-Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea

Basque Nationalist Party

Saol trí Ghaeilge

Life lived through the medium of the Irish language

Taca

Meaning support, a fundraising organisation supporting Irish-medium education

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1. Introduction

The concept of peacebuilding was first proposed by Johan Galtung when he suggested the development of apparatus to promote lasting peace by concentrating on the underlying causes of conflict¹ with the aim of establishing a lasting and stable state of peace in a given society and addressing the needs of those affected by the conflict.² However, it has been noted that often, liberal peacebuilding projects seek to prioritise political and economic reforms in the aftermath of conflict meaning that cultural, social and linguistic justice are often overlooked.³ Galtung's notion of peace can be understood as positive or negative in relation to violence.⁴ Peacebuilding refers to the process of the creation of positive peace within which both direct and personal violence has ceased but also structural violence no longer inhibits the society; Galtung alludes to these two tenets of peace as akin to sides of a coin.⁵ Efforts in peacebuilding therefore, at least in the Western notion of liberal peace theory, while often successful at creat-

¹ Johan Galtung, 'Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking, and Peacebuilding' (1976) 25 *Impact of Science on Society* 282.

² Simon Lawry-White, 'Review of the UK Government Approach to Peacebuilding and Synthesis of Lessons Learned from UK Government Funded Peacebuilding Projects 1997-2001' <[https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/peacebuilding_orientation.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/67945/ev646s.pdf#:~:text=The%20study%20concluded%20that%20peacebuilding%20comprises%20a,relationships%20between%20governments%2C%20local%20and%20international%20NGOs.> accessed 19 March 2025; United Nations, 'UN Peacebuilding: An Orientation' (Peacebuilding Support Office September 2010) < accessed 17 March 2025.

³ Oliver P Richmond, 'The Problem of Peace: Understanding the "Liberal Peace"' (2006) 3 *Conflict Security and Development* 291.

⁴ Johan Galtung, 'Violence, Peace, and Peace Research' (1969) 6 *Journal of Peace Research* 167.

⁵ *ibid.*

ing negative peace ‘in which law and order prevail’,⁶ do not always achieve the abiding aim of creating social justice and equity after the cessation of overt violence.

The liberal peace framework must be understood as a fractured theory within which four major strands of thought are present, each complimentary of the next and at times contradictory. The four strands are the victor’s, institutional, constitutional and civil⁷ with the United Nations (UN) report, ‘An Agenda for Peace’,⁸ focusing on providing post-conflict states with aid to pursue the institutional peace. This report was intended to capacity build for the UN to further enable it to achieve the aims set out in the UN Charter which include ‘social progress and better standard of life in larger freedom’.⁹ It is, however, the civil peace with which this thesis is chiefly concerned, without negating the need for economic and political institutions to flourish in the post-conflict setting, the construction of a civil peace, comprised of direct action, civil society organisations and the promotion and protection of human rights, is often an underachieved final step towards lasting and stable peace in post-conflict contexts. Galtung’s understanding of peacebuilding and the combination of negative and positive peace as the ultimate goal of peacebuilding leads to a state of existence for a society which he names ‘social justice’.¹⁰ This encompasses the core of what this thesis seeks to understand.

1.1 Research background

Minority communities in post-conflict societies often experience exclusion in the newly brokered peace, particularly regarding the fulfilment of their economic, social and cultural rights and the specific area of rights fulfilment at hand is the language rights of those affiliated with minority language communities. The freedom to learn and use one’s language is fundamental to an individual’s cultural identity and from a society-wide perspective it is imperative to social inclusion, this is protected under article 27 of

⁶ Richmond (n 3).

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, ‘An Agenda for Peace’ Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to the statement adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council on 31 January 1992 (United Nations 1992).

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Galtung, ‘Violence, Peace, and Peace Research’ (n 4).

the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).¹¹ This thesis will focus on examining whether protection and promotion of minority language rights has been left behind in the peacebuilding processes of the North of Ireland¹² and Euskal Herria,¹³ two regions with distinct language identities and histories of ethno-political conflict under the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom, and France and Spain respectively.

The rights of individuals affiliated with minority communities is relevant to peacebuilding processes worldwide as the exclusion of these individuals from the peacebuilding process only serves to prolong the structural violence perpetuated against the community as a whole and delays the achievement of positive peace. The maintenance of a group's existence outside of a dominant position deepens societal divisions in the post-conflict space and widens the cleavages felt at a local level between involved parties. Peacebuilding in multicultural societies adds another wrinkle of complexity to an already fraught process. Kymlicka writes extensively about peacebuilding in diverse contexts and contends that the fear that exists in states relating to minorities leads to a reluctance to endow these communities with power and resources due to an assumption that minorities are potential allies of neighbouring states¹⁴ who in some contexts are kin-states to the minority community. In contemporary liberal-democratic states this fear among the dominant community has been heightened as minorities were viewed as proponents of dissimilar political ideals to that of the dominant community and thus, an assumption grew that a level of self-governance afforded to minority communities would be implemented with the exclusive goal of persecuting or expelling those in the majority group. However, these fears were founded in racist ideologies regarding minority groups, and it is now

¹¹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171 (ICCPR).

¹² Hereafter, the North of Ireland refers to the six historical counties in the north of the island of Ireland: Armagh, Antrim, Derry, Down, Fermanagh and Tyrone. The use of the North of Ireland in place of Northern Ireland is to acknowledge the contested nature of the statelet's identity and political status, in line with the views of participants in this research. While 'Northern Ireland' is the officially recognised name within the United Kingdom, the North of Ireland will be used throughout except in reference to official names of institutions.

¹³ Hereafter, Euskal Herria is in reference to the entire historical territory comprising seven regions under both Spanish and French authorities.

¹⁴ Will Kymlicka, 'Multicultural Odysseys' (2007) 6 *Ethnopolitics* 585.

widely accepted that there is profound consensus across all ethnic groups that the ideals of liberal democratic values and an acceptance for human rights are respected,¹⁵

Given the shift away from the illiberal and colonialist attitudes of domination and forced integration of minority groups, states involved in peacebuilding now seek to citizenise minority communities both vertically, through their relations with the state, and horizontally, in their interactions with other communities within the state.¹⁶ One of the more common solutions to political peacebuilding in diverse contexts has been power-sharing administrations though they often tend towards dysfunctionality and a hyperfocus on the perpetual ethnicisation of politics¹⁷ and lead to minimal success where building cross community engagement is concerned. It is clear, therefore, that alternative solutions are needed to ensure befitting minority representation in the politics of post-conflict societies.

Language is central to the identity of communities and for minority communities this sentiment that it is at the core of their existence is amplified, thus, it has been the flash point of many conflicts throughout history. Nowhere more so than in the United Kingdom where the eradication of minority languages such as Gàidhlig, Cymraeg, Gaeilge, Kernewek and Gaelg was the official policy of the British Government and the domination of the English language was used as an implement of coercive state power against those affiliated with minority communities.¹⁸ This led to identity-based conflicts in the state and still remains a point of enmity in some circles. Contemporarily however, there has been a shift in policy, not just in the British context, to the use of language policies as tools of reconciliation and unity building rather than of domination and annihilation. The question that must be asked therefore is, can the case studies of the North of Ireland and Euskal Herria offer an insight into how language rights policy has been integrated or neglected within broader peacebuilding efforts in the respective regions, and if they have been neglected, how has this affected cultural, ethnic and linguistic identity for those affiliated with the two communities still living under the control of the British, Spanish and French states?

¹⁵ Kymlicka (n 14).

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Florian Bieber, 'Moving the Power-Sharing Debate Forward' (2019) 19 *Ethnopolitics* 1.

¹⁸ Robert Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism* (OUP 1992).

The purpose of this section is to provide an outline and examine existing research in the fields of peacebuilding and minority rights in addition to an understanding of state obligations under the language and minority rights policies to which they are party, and additionally, to identify gaps in existing literature relating to minority language rights in post-conflict peacebuilding. As such it will be structured in the following manner: the theoretical foundation of the research will be defined under the notion of peacebuilding, its approaches and its development from original conception to contemporary schools of thought. This will be followed by tying in the rights of minority communities in the peacebuilding process, why these matter and challenges to their inclusion.

Liberal peacebuilding has been criticised by many scholars as failing, bar in a few isolated cases, to build the kind of durable positive peace described by Galtung for a variety of reasons including the blockade that political priorities have over all other avenues of peacebuilding¹⁹ and what has been noted as the naivety of institutionalised liberal approaches.²⁰ In contrast to the liberal approach, proposals from the school of hybrid peacebuilding call for the involvement of local actors such as civil society organisations in the peacebuilding process and a notably more grassroots led process which focuses on the issues which impact the day-to-day lives of citizens on the ground.²¹ This is in comparison to the top down approach of liberal peacebuilding where political and economic institutions are installed and, as critics claim, little else is done and an assumption is made that, in essence, all other wrinkles will iron themselves out under the preceptorship of a liberal democratic state apparatus.²² Local peacebuilding efforts have been shown to represent human rights and social justice more eq-

¹⁹ David Chandler, 'Peacebuilding and the Politics of Nonlinearity: Rethinking "Hidden" Agency and "Resistance"' (2013) 1 *Peacebuilding* 17; Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver P Richmond, 'The Local Turn in Peacebuilding: A Critical Agenda for Peace' (2013) 34 *Third World Quarterly* 763; Mark Sedra, *Security Sector Reform in Conflict-Afflicted Areas: The Evolution of a Model* (Routledge 2017) <<https://www.book2look.com/embed/9781317390800>> accessed 21 March 2025.

²⁰ Roland Paris, 'Peacebuilding and the Limits of Liberal Internationalism' (1997) 22 *International Security* 54.

²¹ Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver P Richmond, 'Where Now for the Critique of the Liberal Peace?' (2015) 50 *Cooperation and Conflict* 171.

²² Yuji Uesugi and others, *Operationalisation of Hybrid Peacebuilding in Asia: From Theory to Practice* (Palgrave Macmillan 2021) <https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-67758-9_2> accessed 19 March 2025.

uitably.²³ An additional level of complexity to peacebuilding comes when the society in which the conflict has occurred is multicultural and in this context, hybrid peacebuilding provides further focus on the horizontal relationships at the citizen level between members of individual communities, ensuring that resilience and reconciliation are fostered in the forging of such a relationship.²⁴ While liberal peacebuilding centres its focus on political and economic institutional reform, even hybrid models, taking a bottom-up approach with an emphasis on reconciliation, often overlook the language rights of communities emerging from a conflict.

In a society newly emerging from a protracted conflict, it is imperative for those at the centre of the peacebuilding operation to endeavour to construct a society which caters to all citizens equally, nowhere is this more true than in multicultural societies where the civil, political, economic and social rights of several groups come to the fore, and a balance must be struck which allows all individuals the full and complete enjoyment of the society. Synthesis of multiple cultures into a functional state is critical to ensure this and the role identity, culture and language play in the coexistence of different communities must not be under-represented. It is for this reason that scholars argue on the effectiveness of the most prevalent form of governance in multicultural post-conflict societies, power-sharing. Some scholars argue that the persistence of power-sharing governmental structures through tumultuous periods of political stalemate, almost despite the system itself, is enough to consider the arrangement a success; however, this considers an incredibly low threshold for success.²⁵ Furthering critiques of liberal peacebuilding theory regarding the imposition of institutions, the arrangement of a power-sharing executive should not be seen as ‘a panacea in deeply divided societies’²⁶ as it lacks intersectionality which negates the glaring class implications of the fluidity of ethnic, cultural and linguistic iden-

²³ Mac Ginty and Richmond, ‘Where Now for the Critique of the Liberal Peace?’ (n 21); Andried Odendaal, *A Crucial Link: Local Peace Committees and National Peacebuilding* (United States Institute of Peace 2013) <<https://www.usip.org/publications/2013/09/crucial-link>> accessed 21 March 2025.

²⁴ Kymlicka (n 14).

²⁵ Bieber (n 17).

²⁶ Joanne Mc Evoy, ‘Power-Sharing and the Pursuit of Good Governance’ in Alison McCulloch and John Mc Garry (eds), *Power-Sharing: Empirical and Normative Challenges* (1st edn, Routledge 2017) <<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/edit/10.4324/9781315636689/power-sharing-allison-mcculloch-john-mcgarry>> accessed 21 March 2025.

tity that in certain cases are intrinsically connected with the socio-economic class of those affiliated with minority groups.²⁷ Identity as a concept which can be context dependent is largely ignored in literature on power-sharing and the arrangement can often insist upon community membership, be that ethnic, cultural or linguistic, as a central tenet of a given societies political structure, which weakens the possibility of ‘biodegradable’ solutions.²⁸

It is clear therefore that power-sharing is an imperfect solution to governance in multicultural post-conflict societies as it is incapable of accounting for the very situation which calls for its existence. The fervent delineation of communities leads to a major focus on resolving political stalemates and allows little space for social, cultural or linguistic progress. This is akin to the causes of critique for liberal peacebuilding model and highlights how the protections which should be established for minority communities are often sidelined for what appear to be more pragmatic conversations surrounding governance and security, and the compromises necessary to overcome obstacle after obstacle for a power-sharing executive. In order to fully consider the concerns and ensure the best implementation of rights for individuals associated with a minority community in a power-sharing arrangement it is argued that their representation be disproportionate in a calculated manner, for which there exists ample precedent.²⁹ Optimising functionality of power-sharing in an equitable manner for minority groups may have to involve a nuanced version of democracy which accounts for the intersection of identities from culture and language to gender and social class³⁰ and, as far as the literature shows, thus far this goal is yet to be fully realised.

Language has long been understood by governments as a demarcation between communities, ethnic groups and, anachronistically, between social classes and this meant language became central to the exertion of European colonial power over those cultures which they conquered, occupied and often attempted to, successfully or otherwise, eliminate. Language policy as it relates to those affiliated with minority communities or speakers of ‘dominated languages’³¹ was exactly as described, it was an overt effort

²⁷ Bieber (n 17).

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ Phillipson (n 18).

by occupying states to eliminate the use of these languages entirely with the French and English imposing the dominance of their own language both at home and in colonial possessions. Speakers of those dominated languages forming a social and cultural out-group or 'other' led inevitably to conflicts throughout history as their mere existence was seen as in contention with the existence of the dominant state. Language therefore can be seen as a tool of exercising power over a populus and of exclusion of specific groups, with the latter still being the case in many former colonial states in Africa where knowledge of the colonial language is essential for upward social mobility and access to certain social circles,³² thus continuing to exclude the working classes post-independence, and maintaining a linguistic and cultural hegemony for former colonisers long after pragmatic colonialism had ended.

The policies of states are an important consideration when linguistic justice comes into question with examples worldwide where minority languages have been banned including Euskara and Gaeilge at differing points in history. In both contexts this was an attempt at what Calvet called glottophagie where the dominant language eats the dominated.³³ In several contexts the justification for this was the inherent link of language to an ethno-political identity and a historical fear of unification of the minority community in the violent overthrow of the occupying state. What it could be argued amounted to linguistic genocide was maintained as a policy of control for states in order to, in their view, preserve the status quo of the state's existence; however, this fear has largely subsided. Policies inhibiting the proliferation of minority languages did not subside and, despite various protections from the international community, minority languages continue to lack practical support in education and public life.

That is not to say that language exists solely, in this sphere, as a form of division. In post-conflict societies the proliferation of language rights can be used as a tool to contribute to reconciliation among communities. In contexts where the conflict occurred across ethnic, cultural or linguistic divisions, oftentimes the two sides in the conflict spoke different languages to each other and to successfully build peace in these contexts social relations between groups must be normalised. Language policy can often be the key

³² Phillipson (n 18).

³³ *ibid.*

to this, equalising sociolinguistic relations and opening the opportunity to communicate effectively and understand another language can encourage previously conflicting communities to try to understand areas of the other group's culture which relate to their own. With that in mind, balanced linguistic policies and acceptance of a multilingual society is a tool to display a commitment to reconciliation of other forms and a lasting peace.³⁴ Adoption of multilingualism also promotes addressing past injustices which is the most feasible path forward to peaceful coexistence of communities and avoids the clean slate approach which can lead to the reproduction of those injustices.³⁵ In this manner, it is clear that adoption of appropriate and proportionate language policies can transform the role of language from often being a flashpoint for initial conflict to playing a vital role in post-conflict peacebuilding, transitional justice and reconciliation.

1.2 Research purpose and research questions

Within the study of post-conflict peacebuilding, minority rights often find themselves as a secondary priority to political and economic institutional stability and even under power-sharing models where the minority group is represented, there exists a demonstrable failure to fully integrate cultural and linguistic rights by an executive. It is clear that language has historically been a key area of conflict and instrumentalised to exclude and isolate, however, within post-conflict societies it has the potential to serve as a mechanism for reconciliation and social cohesion.

To speak on the two case studies, the North of Ireland and Euskal Herria, it is apparent that despite decades of commitments and statements of support, the implementation of rights for Gaeilgeoirí or material assistance for the language institutionally has been slow and politically contentious. On the other hand, while Euskara has received greater institutional support within Euskadi,³⁶ the Spanish state continues to be resistant to policies

³⁴ Gareth Price, 'Language Policy and Transitional Justice: Rights and Reconciliation' (2020) 19 *Language Policy* 485.

³⁵ Pablo de Greiff, 'Theorizing Transitional Justice' in Melissa S Williams and John Elster (eds), *Transitional Justice: NOMOS LI* (New York UP 2012).

³⁶ Hereafter, Euskadi refers to the Basque Autonomous Community established by the Gernika Statute (1979). Euskadi is used as this is the name used to refer to the region in the Gernika Statute.

they perceive as promoting Euskara or other minority languages at the same level as Spanish³⁷ which limits the realisation of true equity for Euskara.

The literature does not assess how the implementation of language rights affects peacebuilding efforts across the broad temporal scope within which peacebuilding operates. Additionally, there is limited understanding of the practical proliferation of linguistic justice in post-conflict societies as well as an existing need for research on how policies of multilingualism can foster reconciliation and promote a sustainable and durable peace.

Future peacebuilding frameworks could benefit from the integration of linguistic justice models, especially in multicultural societies to give added depth to the understanding of the society within which they work. In addition, there is a call for comparative research regarding different models of minority language rights implementation in post-conflict governance which could seek to build a universal framework which caters to the priorities of those affiliated with minority communities as well as those who previously saw this community and their language as a threat or part of an 'other'. Finally, it could be useful to consider an exploration of how different language policies can deepen divides or contribute to reconciliation efforts in divided societies in both a symbolic and practical sense.

All in all, it appears that a gap has been identified in the literature for further research into whether language policy can be seen as a forgotten or underprioritised area of post-conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation, especially in such societies that continue to exist under what some within the society would consider a state of occupation. It may be interesting to consider whether language policy in states whose minority communities have never been perceived as posing a threat to the existence of the state in its current form differ to those adopted and implemented by the British, Spanish and French Governments.

³⁷ Hereafter, 'Spanish' and 'Castellano' will be used interchangeably in reference to the standardised language official in the territory of Spain. 'Castellano' will be used where it is referenced as the name of the language such as the Spanish Constitution (1978).

1.3 Structure and methodology

This section outlines the plan for the research to be undertaken. Following the introduction, the thesis will be accompanied by the following chapters: theoretical framework which will detail the prevalent theories on peacebuilding, minority rights and the conceptual framework and operationalisation at hand, historical contextualisation which will outline the sociopolitical and linguistic histories of the North of Ireland and Euskal Herria, empirical analysis within which source analysis and interview response coding will be described and, finally, a discussion and conclusion chapter reviewing the findings of this research and possible further research which can be completed.

The research is designed to comprise two sections: document analysis and semi-structured interviews, thus compiling a comparative qualitative study into the peacebuilding processes in the North of Ireland and Euskal Herria to determine whether minority language rights protections were appropriately proliferated and promoted or if those affiliated with the respective minority language communities were left behind in the peace process. The combination of methods will allow for a detailed understanding of the legal and political obligations on the British, Spanish and French states to act as a launching point for the semi-structured interviews which will give a pragmatic insight into the implementation of these policies and the effects of the peacebuilding process on the language rights of those affiliated with the communities at a local level. By its very nature this study requires a comparative approach as the analysis of a single case study holds no relevant weight in the broader school of peacebuilding studies and can only speak to the specific context of interest whereas a comparative study gives insight into the interplay of peacebuilding, minority rights and language policy in a manner which can contribute to the peacebuilding process going forward by highlighting successes and failures across contexts and lay the groundwork for a universal framework for minority language rights in future peacebuilding projects.

A comparative study is a useful method for this research as it provides an invaluable opportunity to understand the dynamics of the peacebuilding process in a cross-cultural manner which, in turn, can aid in the understanding of how peacebuilding led to the emergence and functioning of the systems protecting, promoting

and regulating minority languages in these contexts. A comparative study also allows for a representation of how different policies and approaches play out in the distinct but comparable chosen case studies. When undertaking a comparative study, it is important to select appropriate cases for comparison and in this vein, it is important to justify the selection of the North of Ireland and Euskal Herria as the cases at hand. The justification will be further expounded; however, they both exist as historical regions with a distinct ethnolinguistic identity under the governance of one or more dominant state apparatuses.

In all, 13 interviews were conducted with fluent Gaeilgeoirí and Euskaldunak as part of this research. In the case of Gaeilgeoirí, interviewees came from backgrounds in five of the six counties which make up the North of Ireland and had a broad age range. These interviewees were selected to ensure a variety of perspectives in the research and to include voices from urban and rural backgrounds, people who lived much of their lives through the conflict and those who were born towards its end and as such were less directly affected by overt violence. It was also important to include voices from both men and women with four men and three women contributing their experiences.

The Euskal³⁸ interviewees are representative of lived experiences in each of the three areas which make up Euskal Herria today to ensure contributions spoke to the differing systems in Euskadi, Nafarroa³⁹ and Iparralde. Interviewees also had a wide range of ages allowing the research to understand how experiences have changed over time, however, it was not possible to interview anyone who had lived through the Franco regime as many in these generations do not speak English. Of the Euskaldunak interviewed, there were two women and four men.

All interviewees were informed prior to their participation regarding the content of the research and the topics about which they would be asked. Their participation was entirely voluntary, and they were free to refuse to answer any question which they did not feel comfortable answering and had the opportunity to ask

³⁸ Euskal is the adjective form of Euskara, also translated to English as Basque; however, the distinction between Euskara the language and Euskal the adjective is important.

³⁹ Hereafter, Nafarroa refers to the historical territory of Nafarroa Beherea.

questions regarding the research before they agreed to take part. Each interviewee signed a consent form attesting to that which has been outlined above.

This research aims to contribute to literature on both peacebuilding and minority language rights. As established, the prevailing literature across peacebuilding approaches fails to address the question of minority rights in the peacebuilding process and minority language rights while well-established across a variety of international and regional treaties, frameworks and charters as well as within state specific documents. These have varied levels of fulfilment across states and have been shown to take a back seat to political and economic institution construction in post-conflict contexts.

The research will be based on a conceptual framework covering a variety of academic disciplines and integrates established theories from the school of linguistic human rights (LHR). This will provide the lens through which the legal, sociopolitical and cultural dimensions of minority language rights will be analysed in the chosen post-conflict societies. Furthermore, this framework has shaped the selection and analysis of documentation while also speaking to the framework analysis to be undertaken of interview responses from native Euskaldunak and Gaeilgeoirí.

LHR theory posits the notion that the right to a first language is already a protected human right⁴⁰ and fundamental to fulfilment as a human being. Supporters of the theory argue that linguistic discrimination, therefore, equates to social and political marginalisation⁴¹ and when orchestrated intentionally by a state constitutes a form of sophisticated racism which they dub ‘linguicism’.⁴² The chapter details a series of examples of states not affording appropriate protections to minority languages which leads to the loss of languages entirely and the assimilation of its speakers into the dominant language community.

For the purposes of this thesis, LHR theory will be deployed in the document analysis to gauge whether the selected treaties provide adequate protection for the linguistic rights of Euskaldunak and Gaeilgeoirí in addition to an evaluation of the im-

⁴⁰ Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson, ‘Linguistic Human Rights, Past and Present’ in Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson (eds), *Language Rights* (vol 1, Routledge 2017).

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *ibid.*

plementation of the commitments made by Britain, Spain and France as state parties to these treaties to understand if the states' actions align with LHR. Subsequently, the obligations and commitments of states will come under scrutiny for their practical application and implementation through the semi-structured interviews in which theoretical notions outlined by Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson⁴³ will be grounded in real-life experiences of Euskaldunak and Gaeilgeoirí. The concepts in question will be access to education,⁴⁴ use of minority language in public life,⁴⁵ institutional support,⁴⁶ discrimination,⁴⁷ intergenerational language transmission, and language and identity.⁴⁸

In order to analyse these interviews, a framework will be utilised to aid in 'ordering and synthesising the //interview// data'.⁴⁹ The interview responses will be analysed in methodological parallel to that devised by Ritchie and Spencer⁵⁰ and as such, a matrix of analysis has been drafted. Interviews will be analysed, data tagged and subsequently sorted by LHR theme.⁵¹ The responses will fill the matrix resulting in a singular matrix which will serve to inform the discussion chapter of this thesis. In conclusion, the analytical framework to be used is a framework method analysis constructed in alignment with key themes identified in LHR theory.

⁴³ Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (n 40).

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Jane Ritchie, Liz Spencer and William O Conner, 'Carrying Out Qualitative Analysis' in Jane Ritchie and Jane Lewis (eds), *Qualitative Research Practice* (1st edn, SAGE Publications 2003) <https://mthoyibi.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/qualitative-research-practice_a-guide-for-social-science-students-and-researchers_jane-ritchie-and-jane-lewis-eds_20031.pdf> accessed 12 April 2025.

⁵⁰ Jane Ritchie and Liz Spencer, 'Qualitative Data Analysis for Applied Policy Research' in Alan Bryman and Robert G Burgess (eds), *Analyzing Qualitative Data* (1st edn, Routledge 1994).

⁵¹ *ibid.*

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Peacebuilding

As briefly outlined, peacebuilding was first conceptualised by Norwegian scholar Johan Galtung in bilateral terms of negative and positive peace.⁵² Negative peace is merely an absence of overt and direct violence, a basic conception of peace. However, positive peace, and the construction of it, is a process across a large temporal window in which those in the society must fully enjoy structural justice. It relies on broad social participation and the relationships between all involved parties.⁵³ Furthering Galtung's initial conception, the notion was institutionalised in the aforementioned 'An Agenda for Peace' which laid the groundwork for a UN framework which emphasised the reconstruction of societies in the wake of conflict and was further described by the UN as involving 'a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels' which will pave the way for viable and durable peace with each context requiring a tailored and prioritised series of actions entirely owned and undertaken by the nation in which the conflict has occurred. Further developments in defining peacebuilding came from Lederach⁵⁴ who critiqued the UN's definition and gave a broader view that it included 'the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict towards

⁵² Johan Galtung, 'Violence, Peace, and Peace Research' (1969) 6 *Journal of Peace Research* 167.

⁵³ John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (3rd edn, United States Institute of Peace 1997) <[https://www.defence.lk/upload/ebooks/John%20Paul%20Lederach%20-%20Building%20Peace_%20Sustainable%20Reconciliation%20in%20Divided%20Societies-United%20States%20Institute%20of%20Peace%20\(1998\).pdf](https://www.defence.lk/upload/ebooks/John%20Paul%20Lederach%20-%20Building%20Peace_%20Sustainable%20Reconciliation%20in%20Divided%20Societies-United%20States%20Institute%20of%20Peace%20(1998).pdf)> accessed 19 March 2025.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

more sustainable, peaceful relations'⁵⁵ and further again by Paris who suggests peacebuilding is a far narrower concept maintaining it should not be confused with notions of development and human security but focused on the prevention of a reemergence of widespread violent conflict.⁵⁶

This conception of peacebuilding falls under the liberal peace theory school of thought which is often criticised for its prioritisation of economic and political reforms⁵⁷ and has been challenged by contemporary academics who advocate for hybrid peacebuilding models. The approach to peacebuilding championed by the UN has been criticised as 'naïve and false', doubling down on the fact that successful peacekeeping requires much more than solely the economic liberalisation and political participation⁵⁸ touted by international organisations under the guise of liberal internationalism. One element of liberal peacebuilding which Paris can see no alternative to however is the dependence on free-market capitalism which scholars have shown is not imperative by drawing on the example of the Chinese economy as well as post-conflict economies with close trade links to China which highlight that the free-market does not have to be the only option for post-conflict states as they develop economies in the wake of conflict.⁵⁹

As an alternative to liberal peacebuilding, due to its limited success in achieving sustained peace,⁶⁰ calls have been made for hybrid models of peacebuilding which focus on interactionalism and relations between involved local parties under the name of critical peacebuilding which submits that the installation of liberal institutions in a post-conflict society without paying sufficient attention to the context of said society is central to the failures

⁵⁵ Lederach (n 53).

⁵⁶ Alina Rocha Menocal and Kate Kilpatrick, 'Towards More Effective Peacebuilding: A Conversation With Roland Paris' (1 November 2005, Roland Paris) <<https://www.rolandparis.com/single-post/2005/11/01/towards-more-effective-peace-building-a-conversation-with-roland-paris>> accessed 23 April 2025.

⁵⁷ Oliver P Richmond, 'The Problem of Peace: Understanding the "Liberal Peace"' (2006) 3 *Conflict Security and Development* 291.

⁵⁸ Roland Paris, 'Peacebuilding and the Limits of Liberal Internationalism' (1997) 22 *International Security* 54.

⁵⁹ Neil Cooper, Mandy Turner and Michael Pugh, 'The End of History and the Last Liberal Peacebuilder: A Reply to Roland Paris' (2011) 37 *Review of International Studies* 1995.

⁶⁰ Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver P Richmond, 'The Local Turn in Peacebuilding: A Critical Agenda for Peace' (2013) 34 *Third World Quarterly* 763.

noted in liberal models in sustaining long term peace.⁶¹ Thus, contemporary notions of peacebuilding spearheaded by Mac Ginty and Richmond call for what they call a ‘local turn’ which proposes a connection with relevant actors in the conflict⁶² as well as civil society organisations in the affected society.

Peacebuilding was initially associated with Galtung who conceived the notion of peace and was a prominent peace scholar. His conceptual definition was devised as an *a priori* notion, grounded in academia rather than the practical implementation of a process. However, he understood a biphasic rationale to the notion of peace in which both positive and negative peace combine to fulfil the whole not dissimilar to Berlin’s understanding of liberty.⁶³ Galtung described the negative peace to be an absence of direct or overt violence and positive peace as existing when structural violence no longer transpires within the given context.⁶⁴ Subsequently, he suggested the enforcement of apparatus aimed to construct a sustainable peace by dismantling the root causes of conflict in the context.⁶⁵ This was later institutionalised as a specified political process by the UN in their report, ‘An Agenda for Peace’,⁶⁶ which academically gave rise to the liberal peacebuilding school of thought, which can be viewed as the traditionalist approach.

Contemporary approaches to peacebuilding, due to their engagement on the local level and more fervent insistence on national ownership of the process, now include governance reforms, reconciliation between afflicted communities and a higher prioritisation on social justice in the manner envisaged by Galtung. Reconciliation is a valuable tool for the construction of a stable and lasting peace with culture and language holding the possibility of being a key to cross-community reconciliation attempts. Language

⁶¹ Yuji Uesugi and others, Operationalisation of Hybrid Peacebuilding in Asia: From Theory to Practice (Palgrave Macmillan 2021) <https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-67758-9_2> accessed 19 March 2025.

⁶² Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver P Richmond, ‘Where Now for the Critique of the Liberal Peace?’ (2015) 50 *Cooperation and Conflict* 171.

⁶³ Isaiah Berlin, Two Concepts of Liberty (OUP 1958) <https://www.cooperative-individualism.org/berlin-isaiah_two-concepts-of-liberty-1958-oct.pdf> accessed 21 March 2025.

⁶⁴ Galtung, ‘Violence, Peace, and Peace Research’ (n 52).

⁶⁵ Johan Galtung, ‘Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking, and Peacebuilding’ (1976) 25 *Impact of Science on Society* 282.

⁶⁶ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, ‘An Agenda for Peace’ Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to the statement adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council on 31 January 1992 (United Nations 1992).

rights can of course be the source of boosted societal inclusion but there too exists a risk of exacerbating inter-group tensions, especially in the immediate aftermath of a conflict.

In order to construct Galtung's positive peace it is essential that elements greater than political stability and human security are part of the peacebuilding process. Social and cultural rights contribute to the durability of the peace constructed and nowhere is this more relevant than in deeply divided societies such as those as the core of this research. Lederach brings this notion to the fore with his triphasic actor pyramid model⁶⁷ where the initial cease-fire element or 'negative peace' is implemented by top leadership, followed by middle-range leadership who focus on conflict resolution, and, finally, the grassroots leadership who work on local arrangements and the reduction of prejudice between communities. There is an emphasis placed on the role of middle-range actors such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), educators, religious leaders and community actors for the maintenance of the peace negotiated at the top level arguing that the largest proportion of those affected by conflict are at the grassroots level and the peacebuilding actors at this level have the most intimate knowledge of that which has affected these people.⁶⁸

In addition to community-led approaches in divided societies, the cultural differences between populations are an essential element to be addressed, including linguistic differences. Lederach maintains that the 'greatest resource for sustaining peace in the long term is always rooted in the local people and their culture',⁶⁹ suggesting that regardless of cultural and thus linguistic differences, it is essential that those most afflicted have their culture recognised and respected in order to prevent the dominance of one culture over another and that the cultural resources available to each community be instrumentalised in the construction of sustainable peace for the benefit of all in society.⁷⁰ In this way, Lederach argues against the exclusion or marginalisation of minority communities such as Gaeilgeoirí and Euskaldunak in the post-conflict space as essential to not only sustainable peace but equity and the full enjoyment of human rights and dignity for any member of society.

⁶⁷ Lederach (n 53).

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

The notion that the mere recognition of language rights as part of a liberal peacebuilding model is not sufficient is supported by Mc Dermott and Nic Craith⁷¹ who submit that the recognition of language rights at a governmental level alone can further disjoint language communities if cross-community dialogue is not also integrated as part of the recognition process⁷² and that effective recognition is rooted in community engagement rather than legal doctrine.⁷³ That is not to say that legal recognition inevitably leads to a return to armed conflict but rather, as all things in post-conflict societies, language recognition is a fraught process which must be inclusive of all communities at a local level rather than exclusively through political debate and both intracommunity and intercommunity dialogue is essential for the stability of language equality⁷⁴ as a fundamental element of post-conflict reconciliation and the construction of harmonious future communities, in line with the goals of hybrid peacebuilding.

It must be noted that in the two regions of study in this research, peacebuilding has unfolded in a vastly different manner with the North of Ireland being subject to a more comprehensive and structured peacebuilding project than Euskal Herria.

In the context of the North of Ireland there exists a formal peace agreement between the state and conflict parties which outline greater than top level plans for the society post conflict including the implementation of social, cultural and linguistic rights for the minority community. The Good Friday Agreement (GFA) contains provisions recognising firstly the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)⁷⁵ as a standard which the agreement upholds. Additionally, the agreement gives a broad role to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission which includes the recognition of identity and ethos of all communities as ‘part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland’.⁷⁶ There is a further commitment to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) in the context of Gaeilge wherein the British Gov-

⁷¹ Philip Mc Dermott and Mairead Nic Craith, ‘When Language Rights Are Not Enough: Dialogue for Reconciliation in Post-Conflict Settings’ (2022) 46 *Language Problems and Language Planning* 1.

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ The Good Friday Agreement (signed on 10 April 2008) <<https://assets.ireland.ie/documents/good-friday-agreement.pdf>> accessed 21 February 2025.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

ernment commits to upholding the rights of Gaeilgeoirí under the Charter.⁷⁷ In this sense, there is a concrete commitment from GFA parties to, within the peacebuilding process, uphold and promote the rights of Gaeilgeoirí and the status of Gaeilge in the post-GFA society of the North of Ireland. Whether this commitment is followed by action will be determined in Chapter 4 of this research.

In the context of Euskal Herria, the legal and political basis for peacebuilding is vaguer. While the Spanish Constitution⁷⁸ paved the way for the autonomy of Euskadi and allowed for many of the social and cultural rights of Euskaldunak to be self-prescribed within Euskadi there existed no formal peace agreement between Euskal independentists and the Spanish state until 2011. The Gernika Statute⁷⁹ is, legally speaking, where the majority of language rights were outlined as pertaining to Euskara with the Constitution⁸⁰ exclusively recognising Euskara as official within Euskadi and not in Navarre where it is also spoken,⁸¹ however, all non-Castellano languages are accepted as part of Spain's cultural heritage.⁸² Article 6.1 of the Gernika Statute⁸³ deals exclusively with Euskara defining the language as co-official within Euskadi and recognising Euskadi as a bilingual community affording the rights of all therein. Therefore, in both the contexts of the North of Ireland and Euskadi as part of Euskal Herria the status of the respective languages have been recognised by the state to some extent; however, within Euskadi due to the level of self-governance and the homogeneity of the community Euskara is guaranteed greater protections. The extent to which such legal and political instruments have been implemented will be examined in Chapter 4.

In summary, it is pertinent that peacebuilding as a broader societal process goes beyond political settlements between conflict parties and must incorporate cultural and linguistic inclusion, especially in such societies as the North of Ireland and Euskal Herria which are internally divided or isolated from the state at large. This refers once again to Galtung's positive peace

⁷⁷ The Good Friday Agreement (n 75).

⁷⁸ Spanish Constitution (1978, revised 2011) <https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Spain_2011> accessed 27 February 2025.

⁷⁹ Gernika Statute.

⁸⁰ Spanish Constitution.

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ Gernika Statute.

where true peacebuilding cannot be achieved without inclusion and equity, and the absence of violence is merely the first step on the road to sustainable peace. It is clear that language is far from neutral, it is a marker of an individual's identity and in the cases of Gaeilge and Euskara has historically been a symbol of resistance to colonisation and marginalisation within one's native lands. With this in mind, having a tailor-made and culturally sensitive programme for peacebuilding is essential.⁸⁴ This reinforces the idea that if language rights, as an essential element of culture, are ignored it can undermine the peacebuilding process as a whole and reinforce the exclusion of those in the minority group. Within the post-conflict context, it is important to resolve the issue of language rights as without this, cultural grievances can persist, something which has been seen in the North of Ireland particularly with such debates as those over public signage and the Identity and Language Act.⁸⁵

The North of Ireland and Euskal Herria then can be seen as distinct but intrinsically comparable examples where language has played a fundamental role in the politics of identity which emerged in the wake of conflict wherein both languages were subject to state-imposed linguistic marginalisation. These contexts will be explored in the frame of their emergence from marginalisation as their language policies differ following peace agreements and the devolution of power.

Under this guise, LHR theory will be implemented as an analytical framework with which to assess the inclusion of meaningful cultural rights for minority language speakers within the peacebuilding processes. LHR theory is the most appropriate lens through which to conduct this research as it will explore rights at a level deeper than their existence on legal or political agreements. The research intends to utilise the lived experiences of individuals to understand the transferral of commitments on paper into real-world practical implementation.

⁸⁴ Lederach (n 53).

⁸⁵ Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act 2022 <<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/45/introduction>> accessed 21 February 2025.

2.2 Minority rights and linguistic human rights theory

The rights of those affiliated with minority communities is a field of international law which developed during the 20th century as with much of the international human rights framework which was developed in the aftermath of the Second World War. While it had been loosely discussed in previous international treaties it rose to prominence at this time. Minority rights became relevant as it was deemed necessary to protect groups who did not fit neatly into the prevailing nation-state world order which to this day remains prominent.

With this in mind, the first notable mention of minority rights within the international human rights framework came in 1966 when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the IC-CPR wherein article 27 affirms those affiliated with ‘ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities’ are afforded their cultural, religious and linguistic rights.⁸⁶ This initial recognition on the global stage of the existence of rights for minority communities is the underpinning of further treaties which go further in specifying the rights protected by international law for minority communities. The wording of article 27 has come under some scrutiny and while this could easily be dismissed as pedantic, there is an important distinction to be made between a negative and positive right in this case as the basis within which further minority rights are rooted. The language used regarding the rights of minorities is that they ‘shall not be denied’⁸⁷ which prevents the state from taking discriminatory action against an individual identifying with a minority community; however, it places no requirement on states to act to ensure those individuals are free to use their language, for example.⁸⁸ Lack of obligation on behalf of the state is also likely to be exasperated by the implication that linguistic minorities are protected ‘in community with other members of their group’⁸⁹ thus narrowing the protection to those communities concentrated in a single area. While a milestone in the international legal framework, the ICCPR practically represents a negative right spe-

⁸⁶ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171 (ICCPR).

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ Carol Zhang, ‘Linguistic Minorities with Disabilities and the Right to Native Language Instruction’ (2021) 22 *Chicago Journal of International Law* 335.

⁸⁹ ICCPR.

cifically defined which obliges states solely to avoid the regulation of minority language use within the existing minorities established linguistic community.⁹⁰

Within the European framework however, which is most relevant for this study, national minorities were recognised earlier, with the ECHR specifically prohibiting the discrimination on the grounds of belonging to a national minority to the full enjoyment of the rights laid out in the Convention under article 14.⁹¹ The Council of Europe (CoE) has since become the main vessel through which minority rights are protected within Europe. In 1992, the ECRML was adopted which furthered protections of regional and minority languages in Europe for those recognised as such by state parties. The existence of such a comprehensive regional treaty has helped to ensure the promotion and protection of minority language rights across Europe. It is intended to protect such languages as a part of European cultural heritage and aid in the construction of Europe as a democratic and culturally diverse region preventing the domination and extinction of languages which are not afforded official status within a state. Additionally, the implementation of the Charter within state parties is monitored by a group of independent experts.

This Charter together with the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM)⁹² are implemented to highlight the CoE's commitment to the protection of prescribed national minorities. The FCNM is a more comprehensive document ensuring a broader range of rights and freedoms for those affiliated with national minorities and most importantly is a legally binding instrument which ensures the right to free expression of the minority identity, freedom from discrimination and the right to free assembly and full participation in cultural, social and economic life.⁹³ Similar to the ECRML, states' commitments are monitored on a five-year rolling cycle where state reports are submitted highlighting achievements in relation to the Convention. The specificities of such texts will be further analysed with relevance to obligations to protect Gaelige and Euskara in Chap-

⁹⁰ Zhang (n 88).

⁹¹ Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights, as amended) (ECHR) 1950.

⁹² Council of Europe, 'Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities and Explanatory Report' (February 2005) <<https://rm.coe.int/16800c10cf>> accessed 21 February 2025.

⁹³ *ibid.*

ter 4; however, within the international human rights framework there exist legal protections for these languages and their native speakers.

In the first half of the 20th century, minority rights were not a prominent part of human rights with the development of defined commitments and a well-adjusted monitoring system in Europe to ensure state signatories are not making empty promises in relation to treaties coming later. While some treaties give vague protections, the ECRML is specifically angled towards linguistic minorities and is the most detailed document protecting languages regionally. The existence of such treaties also shows a broader European commitment to the protection of minorities especially those who have traditionally inhabited an area or continue to in substantial numbers.⁹⁴

At this point, it is important to introduce the broader theory informing this research, that being LHR theory, posited by Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson,⁹⁵ firstly, by introducing the core ideas of the theory and the arguments set forth relating to minority language speakers.

LHR theory is pertinent to the right of an individual to identify with and use their first language⁹⁶ which they define as ‘the language(s) one has learned first and identifies with’.⁹⁷ This means any individual should not be impinged in the learning, use and transfer of this language. However, across the globe, a proportion of minority language speakers are structurally denied access to education and full participation in public life by reason of these spheres of society being inaccessible to an individual speaking their first language. Academics have observed this to be the case even in such contexts where the state is comprised of multicultural communities due to the imposition of fervent state mono-

⁹⁴ European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (4th edn, October 2024) <<https://rm.coe.int/collected-texts-charter-4th-edition-en/1680b26fa0>> 21 February 2025.

⁹⁵ Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson, ‘Linguistic Human Rights, Past and Present’ in Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson (eds), *Language Rights* (vol 1, Routledge 2017).

⁹⁶ Hereafter, ‘first language’ will be used to refer to the language a person learned first in their life or the language they speak most fluently and use most frequently. Historically this was known as a person’s ‘mother tongue’; however, the use of this term is no longer considered best practice due to its ambiguity and the possibility of it perpetuating inequalities pertaining to language acquisition. It can imply a language being tied to a specific cultural identity, which is not reflective of contemporary multilingual communities.

⁹⁷ Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (n 95).

lingualism, a blatant violation of LHR.⁹⁸ Education is a key area in which such violations are seen to occur with state education often being instrumentalised for assimilation into the dominant national culture and minority language education being unavailable and in some cases corporal punishment being employed when the minority language is spoken within formal education such as the example given of Kurdish children in Turkey.⁹⁹ Such punishment along with a total dismissal of the non-dominant language can result in social, economic and psychological harm with the effects ranging from ‘forced inclusion’¹⁰⁰ to some even noting it to amount to cultural and linguistic genocide.¹⁰¹

As previously discussed, there are a variety of international human rights covenants and treaties which deal with the rights of minorities however most fail to explicitly address or guarantee LHR offering articles merely guaranteeing non-discrimination with article 27 of the ICCPR going a limited step further.¹⁰² Throughout these international treaties the rights afforded minority languages lack perspicuity in their description of discrimination and remain ‘covert/ly/ assimilation/ist’¹⁰³ in their approach to education especially where the right to use the first language in private is protected but should not be brought into the classroom. The authors’ analysis of legal instruments comprises a grid model in which the explicitness of language rights in education and their degree of promotion are mapped to contextualise how well an instrument protect access to minority language education.¹⁰⁴ The existence of these rights on paper, however vague they may seem, encounter structural barriers to implementation and one of the most prominent is again related to the legal jargon of such documents where phrases such as ‘where necessary’ and ‘as far as possible’¹⁰⁵ are commonly used and, more worryingly, are open to interpretation. This vagueness of these declarations is compounded by a widespread lack of funding for minority language education.

⁹⁸ Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (n 95).

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

Failure to uphold LHR is described using the term ‘linguicism’ which entails a contemporary racism designed to uphold the status quo and prevailing social hierarchy of a state.¹⁰⁶ In place of this, Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson argue that there should be an overt ‘maintenance-oriented’¹⁰⁷ promotion of minority language education rather than symbolic steps toward inclusion.

The most commonly levelled critique of LHR theory is that it frames rights from a top-down narrative in which policy changes will trickle down resulting in normative practical change at the grassroots level and that there exists insufficient engagement with human agency or practical experiences and an overreliance on legal frameworks, a critique which Skutnabb-Kangas recognises and agrees with.¹⁰⁸ This thesis attempts to bridge the theory practice gap by framing the research from both a top-down perspective, through the document analysis, and a bottom-up perspective, through practical engagement with minority language speakers. The introduction of qualitative data based on practical experience with minority language is in an effort to ground the theory in reality and limit doubts regarding the empirical base of the study.

LHR is particularly relevant in the context of post-conflict societies as it finds its theoretical base in the promotion of multilingualism and respect for culture. This is pertinent in post-conflict societies where the aim is to reconstruct a harmonious society in which historical intercultural cleavages are mended and there is respect for the language and culture of both or all groups. LHR advocates for equity and opportunity for the minority community and the balance of rights, directly opposed to the domination of one language over another. In contexts historically rife with linguicism, it is an important perspective not to seek the reversal of this domination but instead for the languages to stand on equal footing and be mutually accepted and facilitated in all facets of daily life. The implementation of language rights policies can be a driver of peace and renewed hope for a society emerging from conflict however, if not implemented carefully and appropriately, es-

¹⁰⁶ Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (n 95).

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, ‘Multilingual Education for Global Justice: Issues, Approaches, Opportunities’ in Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and others (eds), *Social Justice Through Multilingual Education* (Cromwell Press Group 2009).

pecially with highly politicised languages such as Gaeilge and Euskara the policies can serve to deepen divisions and reignite past tensions.

In the contexts of the North of Ireland and Euskal Herria, both Gaeilge and Euskara have historically been politically charged. To this day, opponents to the promotion of these languages seek to baselessly affiliate speakers with paramilitary organisations. For this reason, language policies are often politically contentious and run the risk of further alienating two sectors of society from one another. LHR runs the risk of making the assumption that policy changes will fix such problems; however, through careful engagement with the context this thesis will extrapolate the reality of language policy and its effects on the lives of native speakers without giving in to the casuistry touted by those politically opposed to language equality which seeks to group uninvolved language speakers with conflict parties.

2.3 Operationalisation of concepts

The purpose of this section is to outline the plan for the research to be undertaken while wrapping in the conceptual framework under which the research will be conducted. The research is designed to comprise two sections: document analysis and semi-structured interviews, thus completing a comparative qualitative study into the peacebuilding processes in the North of Ireland and Euskal Herria to determine whether minority language rights protections have been appropriately proliferated and promoted or if those affiliated with the respective minority language communities have been left behind in the peace process. In this vein, the theory of note, LHR, will be employed and this chapter seeks to translate the abstract theoretical concepts at play into pragmatically evaluable variables which will be applied to this study.

The combination of methods will allow for a detailed understanding of the legal and political obligations on the British, Spanish and French states to act as a launching point for the semi-structured interviews which will give a rational insight into the implementation of these policies and the effects of the peacebuilding process on the language rights of those affiliated with the communities at a local level. This speaks to the relevance of LHR

theory, which highlights such elements as right to education, access to public services and language maintenance as essential to the fulfilment of LHR. These elements are core to addressing the research question at hand.

A comparative study is a useful method for this research as it provides an invaluable opportunity to understand the dynamics of the peacebuilding process in a cross-cultural manner which in turn can aid in the understanding of how peacebuilding led to the emergence and functioning of the systems protecting, promoting and regulating minority languages in these contexts. In addition to the comparative element, the dual method of study comprising legal document-based and participant-driven data is essential to ground the study in reality and practical experience. This approach will allow for the study to frame the rights which are claimed to exist on paper and compare this to implementation and effectiveness in the lives of language speakers as without fulfilment the document-based data highlights nothing more than false promises.

The operationalisation of these elements will be undertaken with a dual method approach. Firstly, the most pertinent legal and policy documents will undergo a structured content analysis to determine which commitments have been made by states to uphold, protect and promote the rights of Gaeilgeoirí and Euskaldunak within their territory. This content analysis will focus on the six concepts of LHR which form the focus of the research: access to education, use in public life, institutional support, discrimination, intergenerational language transmission and language-identity links, and the extent to which states have obliged themselves to such notions in relation to Gaeilge and Euskara.

Subsequently, interviews conducted with Gaeilgeoirí and Euskaldunak will be thematically coded into a framework matrix under the same six analytical concepts. Using the same analytical framework derived from LHR allows for systematic comparison between policy commitments and practical reality for those effected by such policies. The thematic dimensions of LHR hereafter will be defined, justified and an explanation of how it will be extrapolated from both the policy documents and interview responses.

2.3.1 Access to minority language education

As established, a denial of education through the medium of an individual's first language constitutes a violation of LHR,¹⁰⁹ thus within the case studies ease of access to such education will indicate an efficient policy. For the purposes of this study this concept can be defined as proximity to and availability of bilingual primary and secondary education or that exclusively in the first language. In legal and policy documents, mentions of bilingual or minority language medium (BMLM) education will be sought while in the interviews references to schooling, especially language acquisition through formal education, and the quality of BMLM education will be noted, especially with reference to the quality of BMLM education when compared to majority language education. It will also be noted if BMLM schools are readily available to all who seek them, especially outside of major urban hubs where educational institutions as a whole are less frequent due to demographic differences.

2.3.2 Use in public life

The ease of use of a minority language in public life is directly tied to LHR concerning seamless access to public services such as local government, the judiciary and the courts, as well as ability to use the minority language in healthcare or consume minority language media with no cost at the point of use. Clauses relevant to this concept may be found in documents referring to guaranteeing public service access in the minority language, training of or hiring bilingual public servants as well as provision of funding for bilingual or minority language media outlets such as television, newspapers, etc. During the interviews mentions of difficulties using the minority language to interact with local government or resistance or lack of respect when attempting to do so will be noted along with whether the interviewee has low or no cost access to media in their first language.

2.3.3 Institutional support for the minority language

This concept is defined as minority language promotion efforts made by governments and is relevant from a LHR perspective as the failure to protect and promote a minority language constitutes a violation of LHR. Institutional support can come in many

¹⁰⁹ Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (n 95).

forms such as minority language boards which monitor the proliferation of the language, budget allocations directed towards the promotion of the minority language and the construction of institutions or governance positions aimed at the protection of the minority language. In documentation, institutional support will present itself in the form of budget allocations and the creation of public service positions which support the minority language, while interviewees will explain their perception of institutional support for their language, its prevalence and credibility.

2.3.4 Discrimination or linguistic injustice

The effort to subdue a minority language and institute the dominance of the official or state language has been conceptualised as linguisticism, a form of contemporary racism.¹¹⁰ However, due to the specific nature of discrimination, in practical terms it can be hard to define in policy. Nonetheless, within the documents anti-discrimination articles will be searched for and the lack of such articles may be telling. For this concept, interview responses will give a more detailed insight into the prevalence of discrimination with personal anecdotes of mockery, exclusion or symbolic marginalisation within their own society. Due to the personal nature of such events, it is something which policy documents cannot fully encompass or resolve; however, it is still important that there is legislation which makes it known the state is opposed to linguistic discrimination.

2.3.5 Intergenerational language transmission

This is a central tenet of LHR theory and again refers to the concept of linguisticism where barriers to the transmission of a first language can become contributory factors to the loss of a language. This concept can be defined as the consistence of minority language learning across parent-child relations. While unlikely to be explicitly mentioned in policy documents, references to education policy and in-home language initiatives could be deemed relevant. Interviews will prove more useful in the measurement of this concept where questions will be asked regarding which language is spoken in the home and the community at large, as well as whether the interviewees' parents or children, if applicable, are also native speakers of the minority language.

2.3.6 Language and identity

This concept will be measured in an effort to connect LHR to cultural belonging and the feeling that one's language is a core element of them existing as part of their minority community, which can be understood through an individual's feelings towards the social relations afforded to them by speaking their first language through culture and community. This will not appear within legal and policy documents as an explicit right but rather the connection of language and identity will be notable as an underlying theme. In terms of interviewees, language-identity connections will become prevalent through their responses regarding their description of their linguistic identity, whether they are proud of their first language or not and how their experiences speaking the language make them feel navigating wider society.

2.4 Analytical framework

The lens through which the research views minority language rights has been clarified to be LHR and the key concepts which are to be examined through this lens have been defined and justified as to their inclusion. At this point, the tools of analysis are essential to further the research. For the purposes of such an analysis a framework has been co-opted and follows the same methodological direction as that devised by Ritchie and Spencer¹¹¹ which will be used to synthesise the data retrieved from policy documents and interviews.¹¹² The framework matrix has been constructed in accordance with the six key LHR analytical concepts and can be seen below (Table 1). The consistent use of the matrix across case studies ensures academic rigour and systemic and logical comparison between individual cases. Further to this, a matrix of this kind supports deductive and inductive analysis which makes it most suitable when including the implicit LHR through the doc-

¹¹¹ Jane Ritchie and Liz Spencer, 'Qualitative Data Analysis for Applied Policy Research' in Alan Bryman and Robert G Burgess (eds), *Analyzing Qualitative Data* (1st edn, Routledge 1994).

¹¹² Jane Ritchie, Liz Spencer and William O Conner, 'Carrying Out Qualitative Analysis' in Jane Ritchie and Jane Lewis (eds), *Qualitative Research Practice* (1st edn, SAGE Publications 2003) <https://mthoyibi.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/qualitative-research-practice_a-guide-for-social-science-students-and-researchers_jane-ritchie-and-jane-lewis-eds_20031.pdf> accessed 12 April 2025.

ument analysis and the addition of the interview responses which take the alternative perspective and connect practical realities to theoretical concepts.

Concept	LHR Element
Access to education in minority language	Right to BMLM education
Use of minority language in public life	Right to use language in dealing with courts, healthcare, media, local and national administration
Institutional support	State obligation to promote and protect minority languages (FCNM, ECRML, national policies)
Discrimination	Right to non-discrimination on linguistic grounds
Transmission across generations	Intergenerational language transmission as a right
Language and identity	Connection between language and self-perception of cultural identity

Table 1: Matrix for framework analysis synthesised based on Ritchie, O Connor, and Spencer (2003)

The framework matrix will prove a crucial tool for the completion of this research as its uniformity across case studies contributes to the consistency and coherence of the research. In the above matrix, the six core concepts of LHR which will be analysed are defined in terms of their relevance in post-conflict societies. The analysis of these six concepts, access to education, use in public life, institutional support, discrimination and injustice, intergenerational transmission, and language and identity through both legal and policy documents and interviews, will display the level to which LHRs are fulfilled for those linguistic minorities in the North of Ireland and Euskal Herria.

These concepts are relevant to both LHR and the research at hand which highlights the alignment between the theory being utilised, the methodology under which the theory will be implemented and the data sources which will be viewed through this theoretical lens. This speaks to the conceptual strength of the research design and provides the basis for replicability across other case studies due to the broader relevance of the chosen analytical concepts which can be found as conceptually relevant in many other post-conflict multilingual societies.

3. Historical contextualisation

The goal of this chapter is to provide a sociohistorical context to the relevant case studies from which the empirical analysis in Chapter 4 will find their base. The chapter will comprise two sections, one for each case study. Within these sections the broad historical context of the North of Ireland and Euskal Herria will be outlined which will delineate both contexts as post-conflict societies within which Gaeilgeoir and Euskaldun groups have traditionally existed in large numbers. Additionally, in order to link the history of both case studies to the research at hand, each LHR concept which was described in the previous chapter will be tied to historical developments within the society relevant to the concept with the aim of depicting the existence and development of such LHR issues in the North of Ireland and Euskal Herria across a broad temporal window, before, during and after the conflicts which occurred therein.

3.1 The North of Ireland

The North of Ireland is a statelet comprising the northeastern quarter of the island of Ireland created politically when the island of Ireland was partitioned by the British Government through the Government of Ireland Act 1920. The North of Ireland comprises six historical counties: Armagh, Antrim, Derry, Down, Fermanagh and Tyrone. Since its inception, it has been representative of a deeply divided society in which Britain's colonial rule is felt in every facet of daily life. The state has been divided internally along Unionist-Nationalist lines for its entire existence with Unionists being in favour of membership of the United Kingdom, and Nationalists seeking the reunification of the entire island of

Ireland. This led to a protracted civil war between from the late 1960s to 1998 known as The Troubles which arose from the violent repression of Nationalist civil rights campaigns by the British state apparatus. What began as riots and police brutality escalated into a guerilla war which formally ended in April 1998. Following the end of The Troubles and the decommissioning of paramilitary groups in the North of Ireland, a peace agreement was formulated following multilateral peace talks to formally end the conflict. The parties to the treaty were the Government of Ireland, the Government of the United Kingdom and the political parties in the North of Ireland excluding the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). This is known as the GFA and is the basis for the foundation of many of the institutions in the North of Ireland today. However, within GFA there are incredibly limited provisions for the support of language rights and many of the provisions therein are vague or have not been fulfilled over a quarter of a century later. There is full recognition of the ECHR which cannot be infringed upon¹¹³ as well as an obligation to ‘respect, on the basis of equality of treatment, the identity and ethos of both communities in Northern Ireland’,¹¹⁴ however, these commitments are vague and provide for little in the way of institutional support for Gaeilge. When specific language rights or protections are concerned, the GFA recognises ‘the importance of respect, tolerance and understanding in relation to linguistic diversity’ which it deems to be ‘part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland’.¹¹⁵ In this respect the British Government commits to promote Gaeilge, including the facilitation of its use in public and private life, the removal of restrictions to the maintenance or development of Gaeilge, the facilitation of Irish medium education and the provision of financial support for film and television production *as Gaeilge*.¹¹⁶ It is clear that the GFA, though an agreement which acts as the basis for institutions in the North of Ireland, has a distinct lack of concrete commitments to Gaeilge and those it does include indeterminate language which, it could be argued, has been used as a crutch by successive governments to avoid making material progress towards the commitments of the GFA.

¹¹³ The Good Friday Agreement (signed on 10 April 2008) <<https://assets.ireland.ie/documents/good-friday-agreement.pdf>> accessed 21 February 2025).

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*

The British Government's first material commitments to linguistic parity in the North of Ireland didn't come until the St Andrews Agreement in 2006¹¹⁷ which was brokered to break the political stalemate which had led to the suspension of the power-sharing assembly in 2002. In this agreement the British Government pledged the introduction of an Irish Language Act 'to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language'¹¹⁸ but even this commitment was not progressed upon until the New Decade, New Approach Deal in 2020,¹¹⁹ again brokered to restore the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly (NILA), where a commitment was made to appoint an Irish Language Commissioner¹²⁰ and to amend the Northern Ireland Act 1998¹²¹ with respect to language status for Gaeilge¹²² as well as repeal the Administration of Justice (Language) Act (Ireland) 1737¹²³ which banned the use of Gaeilge in the British judicial system.¹²⁴ Additionally, the deal amended existing laws to allow for the existence of an Irish Language Act.

The Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act was passed in 2022, over 24 years after official commitments had been made for support of Gaeilge in private and public life in the GFA. This paved the way for the proper implementation of the New Decade, New Approach Deal; however, implementation is slow and many of the provisions are yet to be completed. There are still ongoing political debates surrounding this Act regarding support, effectiveness and viability.

3.1.1 Access to minority language education

When the Northern statelet was established in 1920, 25% of Catholic managed primary education institutions offered Gaeilge as a subject and in secondary education institutions one in three employed a teacher of Gaeilge. By 1942, following a coordinated attack on funding for Gaeilge-medium education by the Stormont

¹¹⁷ Government of the United Kingdom, 'St Andrews Agreement' (2006) <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7b17bee5274a319e77cf89/st_andrews_agreement-2.pdf> accessed 21 February 2025.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Government of the United Kingdom, 'New Decade, New Approach Deal' (January 2020) <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5e178b56ed915d3b06f2b795/2020-01-08_a_new_decade_a_new_approach.pdf> accessed 24 March 2025.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

¹²¹ The Northern Ireland Act 1998 is the Act of Parliament in the UK which created the NILA as part of the implementation of GFA.

¹²² Government of the United Kingdom, 'New Decade, New Approach Deal' (n 119).

¹²³ Administration of Justice (Language) Act (Ireland) 1737 (c6 (Regnal 11 Geo 2)).

¹²⁴ Government of the United Kingdom, 'New Decade, New Approach Deal' (n 119).

Government, not a single student within the state was studying Gaeilge in any publicly funded institution. This, combined with unrestrained opposition to the language by Unionist politicians who refused to acknowledge the languages legitimacy dismissing it as a ‘foreign language’¹²⁵ in the very land where it has been spoken for centuries, meant that Gaeilge-medium education would have to be a community driven and funded endeavour to preserve the language.

Formal Gaeilge-medium education did not reemerge in the North of Ireland until 1971, two years after the establishment of Gaeltacht Béal Feirste, when a Gaeilge-medium primary school, Bunscoil Phobal Feirste (BPF), was established.¹²⁶ These projects of community-led education inspired the Gaelscoil¹²⁷ and Náiscoil movements which provided Gaeilge-medium primary and pre-primary education with community backing. Following a formidable effort from those involved in BPF the school received government funding in 1984.¹²⁸ During this phase of community driven expansion two major initiatives helped to streamline the Gaelscoil system, Comhairle Oideachais Gaeilge and Taca, which helped to standardise a curriculum for Gaeilge and provide financial support for newly established schools.¹²⁹

Historically, successive governments have failed to provide appropriate support or funding for Gaeilge-medium education with Unionist politicians showing complete disdain for the language. The turning point for Gaeilge-medium education where pledged support for education is concerned was the GFA which placed a duty on the Department of Education in the North of Ire-

¹²⁵ Seán Ó Cathail, ‘The Politics of the Irish Language Under the English and British Governments’ (Barra Ó Donnabháin Symposium, 2007) <[¹²⁶ Dónall P Ó Baoil, ‘Origins of Irish-Medium Education: The Dynamic Core of Language Revitalisation in Northern Ireland’ \(2007\) 10 *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 410.](https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/51247826/0111-0126_PoliticsOfTheIrishLanguage-libre.pdf?1483892132=&response-content-disposition=inline%3B+filename%3DBarra_O_Donnabhain_Symposium.pdf&Expires=1746799098&Signature=eya0g3uP7ruX8b24pxb-yCldi7XeHCzjSwIV028GJ06iBSlieuehJosaSMBhE3ZqEduP-uX9dao0A7gqCinDM5lVdLUVrAAt8oQFIVC5vxWgIk37Jx7EAAXGGjoEgsrcJU4Uco00K9jceECPDdHOUDUA7LkmhMooL07vAzpTuNJYloWMOiquxdP1Mp-jiUCm1cfcMnY3UnTKJy9vpcFEoHH5m0mC4Zug6EAMFkpf61-mVYVbzeBpnAljbeOMimcYFXTCloWn2kC6jEodDaX8qvE-H8EGwLWbDese9uMRH02QsCl07l3dquim-WUhrZwG2zo4QKEAELGgtH-db8q1za__&K ey-Pair-Id=APKAJLOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA> accessed 5 September 2025.</p>
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¹²⁷ Gaelscoil is the name for the Gaeilge-medium system of education but can also specifically reference Gaeilge-medium primary school and can be deemed synonymous to Bunscoil.

¹²⁸ Ó Baoil (n 126).

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

land to facilitate both Gaelge-medium education and cross-community integration.¹³⁰ While the Gaelscoil movement continues to expand, the onus remains on the state to provide reasonable access to Gaelge-medium or bilingual education and ensure barriers to access this education are minimised or removed, in contrast to historical trends within the state.

3.1.2 Use in public life

The use of Gaelge in public life is something which has deep historical roots across the entire island of Ireland; however, in the context of right to use the language in public, the story begins with the Penal Laws enacted in the 17th and 18th centuries. These were a series of laws designed to target the island's Catholic, and therefore Gaelgeoir, majority which banned the practice of the Catholic faith and any communication through Gaelge as both were deemed to subvert the authority of the British state in Ireland.¹³¹ This led to the creation of hedge schools where Catholic education would be provided covertly through Gaelge and in many places Catholic mass would be held on a mass rock. The most infamous of these laws is the Administration of Justice Act 1737 which banned the use of Gaelge in the British judicial system¹³² and this law remained on the British statute book until 2025 when it was finally repealed in the North of Ireland.¹³³ From the era of the Penal Laws there has been little in the way of legal guarantees for Gaelge from the British state and from a political standpoint any and all attempts to progress representation of the language have been met with resistance from Unionist politicians who view the use of Gaelge as a personal attack.

The use of Gaelge has historically been a symbol of resistance to British occupation within the Republican movement and was treated as such by the state who viewed its use as anti-British. This attitude remains in political circles where reasonable initiatives such as bilingual street signage or bilingual signage in Belfast's redeveloped Grand Central Station have been met with fer-

¹³⁰ The Good Friday Agreement (n 113).

¹³¹ Samantha Howell, 'From Oppression to Nationalism: The Irish Penal Laws of 1695' (2016) 14 *Hohonu: A Journal of Academic Writing* 21.

¹³² Ó Cathail (n 125).

¹³³ Robbie Meredith, 'Irish Language to Be Used in NI Courts with Repeal of 18th Century Law' (BBC News, 25 February 2025) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c1lpvn6369po>> accessed 5 September 2025.

vent opposition from Unionists.¹³⁴ The attitude among some of the public in the North of Ireland to this day is that Gaeilge should not exist in the public sphere and should be limited to private contexts.

Regarding the use of Gaeilge in public life, the most notable recent development comes in the form of the Identity and Language Act 2022 which contains guarantees regarding promotion of, and support for Gaeilge, however, the NILA was suspended due to disagreements regarding the Act and opposition from the DUP. This is indicative of the entire history of the use of Gaeilge publicly in the North of Ireland but the possibility of full and proper implementation of this Act could see a change in this long history of repression of Gaeilge.

3.1.3 Institutional support

Within the Northern statelet Gaeilge has proven itself as a point of political contention and this has led to institutional support for Gaeilge in turn becoming a hyper-politicised matter. Institutional support for Gaeilge has developed contemporaneously with the peace process as Unionist dominated governments prior to the GFA had no desire to promote the language. The GFA provided for the establishment of the North/South Ministerial Council¹³⁵ and the Council resultingly set up Foras na Gaeilge, an all-island body chiefly concerned with the promotion of Gaeilge and the provision of support to the language as well as undertaking an advisory role to administrations north and south of the border. Regarding the NILA, Foras na Gaeilge also advises the administration to ensure facilitation of Gaeilge is in line with ECRML. Foras na Gaeilge is the primary governmental body which provides institutional support for Gaeilge with the appointment of an Irish Language Commissioner currently pending, five years after initially being guaranteed under the New Decade, New Approach Deal. When the Commissioner is appointed, they will be responsible for the full implementation of the Identity and Language Act 2022. This will be the greatest level of tangible institutional support Gaeilge has received since the inception of the state.

¹³⁴ Jayne Mc Cormack and Finn Purdy, 'Bryson Legal Challenge Pauses Grand Central Irish Language Signs Work' (BBC News NI, 4 January 2025) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwy0lpzjxpro>> accessed 5 September 2025.

¹³⁵ The Good Friday Agreement (n 113).

However, achieving this level of support is not guaranteed and has proven a hard-won battle on the part of language activists. Due to the consociationalist power-sharing arrangement in place in the North of Ireland, Unionist politicians can place significant roadblocks before any legislation seeking linguistic equity. For this reason, along with the political contention surrounding the language, funding for support of Gaeilge in Stormont has been unreliable. Much of the opposition to the promotion of the language is in direct contravention to commitments made in the GFA, however, political semantics have proven sufficient to prevent funding from flowing in support of Gaeilge. Similarly to education, institutions have ultimately not met expectations regarding their provision of support and this funding and support gap has been bridged by grassroots movements. Organisations such as An Dream Dearg¹³⁶ have been supplementing promotional activities, a state responsibility which is not being fulfilled due to political stagnation and administrative inertia.

Historical support for Gaeilge from an institutional perspective has been almost non-existent with the language experiencing instead a protracted history of institutional suppression. This appears to be changing however; debates continue as to whether the support which is beginning to be provided will lead to substantive change or merely equates to a symbolic move as an exercise of political point-scoring.

3.1.4 Discrimination and injustice

Gaeilge has consistently been subject to structural discrimination in the North of Ireland as part of a broader cultural and political marginalisation of Gaeilgeoirí. Throughout the history of British rule on the island of Ireland the language was viewed by the state with suspicion and, from the British perspective, represented an intrinsic link with Nationalist and Republican movements. For this reason, Gaeilge was intentionally and systematically excluded from public institutions, education and legal rec-

¹³⁶ An Dream Dearg is an NGO in the North of Ireland that campaigns for language rights of Gaeilgeoirí.

ognition, all of which constitute elements of ‘linguicism’¹³⁷ which in this case was carefully orchestrated to reproduce inequality and marginalisation of the Gaeilgeoir community.

In the post-partition state there has been, until recently, a denial of access to public services and education through Gaeilge with any attempt at this requiring community funding. The reason such issues were allowed to persist can be explained through the framing of The Troubles as a religious or political conflict, during which these forms of discrimination were debated and took focus; however, language is a major axis of exclusion which was not discussed to the same level and, as a result, anti-discrimination protections specific to linguistic discrimination were largely absent.

Post-GFA, parties recognised ‘the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity’.¹³⁸ However, such a provision is vague and does not contain a commitment to action. The ambiguity of this statement left space for successive British Governments, along with local Unionist politicians to resist pragmatic legislation in relation to Gaeilge. The Identity and Language Act is exemplary of this as both the GFA and the St Andrews Agreement contain commitments to promotion of Gaeilge while the New Decade, New Approach Deal commits to the implementation of the Act yet progress in this regard has been minimal due to the continued politicisation of language rights which furthers the symbolic discrimination experienced by Gaeilgeoirí through the inaction of the legislature in both Britain and the North of Ireland.

At an individual level, Gaeilgeoirí are subject to hostility, ridicule and stigmatisation when using their native language in public spaces and through arts and media. There is a history of public figures being mocked for their use of Gaeilge in formal settings,¹³⁹ while the potential of bilingual signage has faced political back-

¹³⁷ Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson, ‘Linguistic Human Rights, Past and Present’ in Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson (eds), *Language Rights* (vol 1, Routledge 2017).

¹³⁸ The Good Friday Agreement (n 113).

¹³⁹ Conor Hallahan, ‘DUP Politician Censured for Mocking Irish Language’ (*Irish Examiner*, 11 April 2014) <<https://www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/arid-30649728.html>> accessed 13 May 2025.

lash from Unionists.¹⁴⁰ These examples highlight how LHR remain contested in the North of Ireland in the day-to-day lives of individuals as well as through legislation.

Linguistic discrimination is multi-faceted as language intersects with class and regional inequalities which affect the society as well. If a Gaeligeoir comes from a working-class Republican background they are more directly affected by linguistic exclusion and, as such, linguistic discrimination. Injustice is not an isolated issue but rather situates itself in broader issues of socioeconomic and ethno-political discrimination which is central to almost all debates in the North of Ireland. While language rights have made some progress in the post-GFA world, Gaeligeoirí continue to experience systemic, symbolic and practical discrimination which does not align with the post-conflict ideals of equality and inclusion and is yet another facet of peacebuilding which remain to materialise in the North of Ireland.

3.1.5 Intergenerational language transmission

For a language which receives such minimal institutional support and is as routinely marginalised as Gaelige, one of the major challenges in an ever more Anglophone world is to ensure continued transmission of the language to younger generations. During The Troubles, the in-home transmission of Gaelige was at its lowest point; however, in recent years, through community engagement projects and the popularisation of Gaelige in media and the arts, transmission and uptake of Gaelige have experienced a revival.

Artists such as Kneecap have played an instrumental role in mobilising the youth and instilling a level of cultural pride in the language which had been absent for many years. The youth have begun to recognise the importance of using their language in everyday interactions as part of preserving their own cultural heritage which for so long was subdued by colonial powers.

Where language transmission is concerned there are some barriers which prevent ease of learning such as the aforementioned lack of institutional support and the often-remarked lack of utility by anti-Gaelige media outlets and public personas who

¹⁴⁰ Caoimhe Quinn Mc Cullough, 'Sandy Row Protest over Irish Language Signs at Belfast Grand Central Station' (The Irish News, 14 April 2025) <<https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/sandy-row-protest-over-irish-language-signs-at-belfast-grand-central-station-5SRIVC2AZNA3DCNQ6UT3FVR5FE/>> accessed 13 May 2025.

often dismiss Gaeilge as a dead language and irrelevant in the interconnected modern world. Arguments are made that individuals should opt to learn modern foreign languages as opposed to the language native to their home. This has not stopped the revival of interest in Gaeilge however, especially among the youth.

3.1.6 Language and identity

Gaeilge is one of the core tenets tied to the question of identity in the North of Ireland, both cultural and political. For many within Republican communities, Gaeilge is and always has been a symbol of resistance against the colonial oppressor and cultural pride. The revival within the youth of learning, using and being proud of their ability to speak Gaeilge is often framed as more than just a linguistic movement, but also as a reclamation of the historically suppressed identity at odds with the British state.

Unionist communities often attribute Gaeilge with political intention and exclusively view it as anti-British sentiment and not an expression of cultural heritage. This helps explain the contestation of the status of Gaeilge and persistent opposition by Unionists to the promotion and use of Gaeilge.

While efforts have been made to depoliticise the language in the wake of conflict, many cross-community projects intended to frame Gaeilge as a shared cultural asset face resistance. Overall, however, within the context of the North of Ireland, Gaeilge is more than just a language, it is a symbol of identity, contested and reflective of the broader dynamics which frame the unique context of the North of Ireland, conflict, belonging and exclusion. The extent to which Gaeilge can flourish may be dependent on whether depoliticisation can effectively occur and if the language can become a vehicle of reconciliation or continue to be representative of a cleavage in an already divided society.

3.2 Euskal Herria

In the case of Euskara, during the Franco regime between 1939-75, a linguistic policy was followed based on the eradication of Euskara in which the use of the language was banned in public. This included the use of Euskal names for newborns, place

names or businesses.¹⁴¹ Under the Francoist dictatorship, resistance movements grew within Euskal Herria. There existed cultural resistance in which expressions of Euskal culture which were repressed by the regime were displayed showing a refusal to accept the regime, as well as the organisation of covert schools, known as *Ikastolak*, in which students could learn about their own language and culture. The more widely known resistance of this era was the violent resistance conducted by Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) who were a revolutionary independence movement formed in 1959 as a splinter group of the Partido Nacionalista Vasco-Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea (PNV-EAJ).¹⁴² ETA continued their violent resistance against the Spanish and French states through to the late 1990s when attacks lessened, and by 2006 a ceasefire was declared.

The pathway to post-Franco recognition for Euskara came with the Spanish Constitution 1978 when non-Castellano languages were given official status in the Autonomous Communities of Spain,¹⁴³ which was reaffirmed by the Gernika Statute 1979 making Euskara a co-official language in Euskadi and committing to

¹⁴¹ Iñigo Urrutia, 'Linguistic Policy in the Basque Country' in Pedro Ibarra Güell and Xabier Irujo Ametzaga (eds), Cameron J Watson (tr), *Basque Political Systems* (Centre for Basque Studies, University of Nevada, Reno 2011) <https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/62078455/Basque_Political_Systems20200212-104992-213rmv-libre.pdf?1581538962=&response-content-disposition=inline%3B+filename%3DBasque_Political_Systems.pdf&Expires=1742837736&Signature=cc2RlM8cj4jCkibag-cbEWJQz1UPo3OVCFz6XlycFM-NzoJeHAAaTjmjw-xjllazewBW5oaXMJINWVKJaYgH7mzO-txEZJ-7Re0JJAZwU6bCaOdqt4rqN1ACwrkjuH9jRVFG4NSezwsnEz2ShjiWgFHjj-LnyvXZennFS8gmjvJEezsJKVXvjJjC0mHID217LhYxtzPWglQvTnXgemW8AUSO1j9CTRUEzrJgnLNbIRBtj2EnhuS5MeVbzZgYxMtFRMFhpHTyyUcFh9DUziZLu3GCJgdIICerfa5Vxs--DbXBbGWhm5LlZiYKzDMDpQyS4BYvPbCI7RsZ681b2gXeA__&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJLOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA#page=126> accessed 24 March 2025.

¹⁴² Juan Cobarrubias, 'History of the "Normalization" of Basque in the Public Administration Sphere' in Gloria Totoricagüena and Iñigo Urrutia (eds), *The Legal Status of the Basque Language Today: One Language, Three Administrations, Seven Different Geographies and a Diaspora* (Centre for Basque Studies, University of Nevada, Reno 2008) 151 <https://www.eusko-ikaskuntza.eus/PDFAnlt/ene/2008_Legal%20Status%20Basque%20Language.pdf> accessed 14 May 2025; Francisco Letamendia, 'ETA: Political Violence, Its Historical Evolution, and Conflict Resolution' in Pedro Ibarra Güell and Xabier Irujo Ametzaga (eds), Cameron J Watson (tr), *Basque Political Systems* (Centre for Basque Studies, University of Nevada, Reno 2011) 186 <https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/62078455/Basque_Political_Systems20200212-104992-213rmv-libre.pdf?1581538962=&response-content-disposition=inline%3B+filename%3DBasque_Political_Systems.pdf&Expires=1747227404&Signature=MqU2NWl-GuBifshh-DD0s15mLrzCtvonc4MFuAC9gsEYywuQVSBzBvmujaLr-9m46fPnQIGWwtIuznZsbCTQ4oR-EaiHG-QdIRsrBFH-g8xw4kIbzT6onl9TVoAndsXZY0tG3UgLqcqrTa73CvZhdrl2VwBxdzauzrwHgm7DyrYK1Pf79XOVtzn8j3YZpCdR8ZARS56QEooZe1U767u-0KMr1jbZvJNCQsxcvwjK1E5gTCCkieorQZXfealFaE0diikUxRaStVwq2tCa5zfup587lyZ4tQaOa6IR--MVCamPawrc7CnMu62vybAuQRl-6MRCpq-a0360szfNq9g__&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJLOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA#page=186> accessed 14 May 2025.

¹⁴³ Spanish Constitution 1978 art 3.2.

non-discrimination on the basis of language.¹⁴⁴ In this sense of course, Euskara is only afforded minority language rights within Euskadi, however elsewhere, such as in Nafarroa there exists an Euskaldun community, as well as in Iparralde where no protections or rights exist for the community or language and there is no institutionalised recognition of minority languages of any kind.¹⁴⁵

One of the major developments for Euskara was the Basic Law on the Standardisation of the use of Euskara (LNE)¹⁴⁶ which unified the language under linguistic system of Euskadi in order to be used in education and public services in a manner which catered equally to speakers of all dialects of Euskara.¹⁴⁷ It has proven effective in the promotion of Euskara within Euskadi and contains within it the right to communicate in either co-official language with administrative services, education, media, the workplace or in any meeting,¹⁴⁸ as well as the provision for creation of Euskal Irrati Telebista which is the public broadcaster in Euskal Herria. Linguistic policy in Euskadi came under some scrutiny from the Spanish state whom declared that article 14.2 of the Gernika Statute, which mandates knowledge of both languages to work in the public administration, is in direct contradiction of its assertion against discrimination based on language as they felt it discriminated against monolingual Spanish speakers and thus the law was adjusted.¹⁴⁹ The core of this issue was the alleged nationalist implications of such a policy which led to fears of a revived conflict.

3.2.1 Access to minority language education

During the dictatorship of Franco, the Euskaldunak were deprived of the right to learn or speak their first language; however, this did not prevent the establishment of Ikastolak, Euskara-medium schools set up covertly to retain Euskaldunak under the oppressive regime. Beginning in 1960, the movement grew to 148

¹⁴⁴ Gernika Statute art 6.

¹⁴⁵ Thomas Pierre, 'Officializing Basque in France: From the Right to Difference to the Right to Equality' (2013) 145 *Langage et société* 103.

¹⁴⁶ Ley Básica de Normalización del Uso del Euskara 1982.

¹⁴⁷ Xabier Irujo Ametzaga and Iñigo Urrutia, 'The Basque Language in the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC)' in Iñigo Urrutia and Gloria Totoricagüena (eds), *The Legal Status of the Basque Language Today: One Language, Three Administrations, Seven Different Geographies and a Diaspora* (Centre for Basque Studies, University of Nevada, Reno 2008) <https://www.eusko-ikaskuntza.eus/PDFAnlt/ene/2008_Legal%20Status%20Basque%20Language.pdf#page=155> accessed 24 March 2025.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*

Ikastolak by 1976.¹⁵⁰ Since the autonomy of Euskadi, education has become gradually more institutionalised with the introduction of three models of instruction in state schools; A, B and D. Models A and B are bilingual models where instruction takes place through both Euskara and Spanish. In Model A the majority of instruction is through Spanish with three to four hours per week dedicated to Euskara aimed at students developing a ‘communicative competence to cope with daily routines’, while Model B aims to develop both languages equally. In Model D all instruction occurs through Euskara except for specific classes teaching Spanish, this model is most similar to the Ikastolak movement.¹⁵¹

This level of formalisation of Euskara-medium education is representative only of education in Euskadi. In Nafarroa and Iparralde however, there is enormous variation in language policy regarding education with Nafarroa recognising the right of all students to receive Euskara-medium instruction in Foral Law 18/1986 but continuing to oppose any policy guaranteeing this right or establishing Ikastolak.¹⁵² Euskara-medium instruction, therefore, is confined to small zones within the region and, as such, education is limited through Euskara. An analogous situation occurs in Iparralde where no formal recognition of the language is in place due to the centralist nature of French politics. The Euskaldun population is aging and not being replaced due to a lack of educational opportunities to learn Euskara. In recent years, the first Ikastola was established with the help of the Eusko Jaurlaritzia; however, this Ikastola is fee-paying and thus students in Iparralde have significant barriers to language adoption.¹⁵³

In summary, Euskara-medium education has come a long way within the Spanish state since the end of the Franco regime; however, outside of Euskadi, barriers remain in place and under

¹⁵⁰ Cobarrubias (n 142).

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*

¹⁵² Xabier Irujo Ametzaga and Iñigo Urrutia, ‘Basque in the Foral Community of Navarre (CFN)’ in Iñigo Urrutia and Gloria Toticagüena (eds), *The Legal Status of the Basque Language Today: One Language, Three Administrations, Seven Different Geographies and a Diaspora* (Centre for Basque Studies, University of Nevada, Reno 2008) <https://www.eusko-ikaskuntza.eus/PDFAnlt/ene/2008_Legal%20Status%20Basque%20Language.pdf#page=155> accessed 21 May 2025.

¹⁵³ Iñigo Urrutia and Gloria Toticagüena, ‘Introduction’ in Iñigo Urrutia and Gloria Toticagüena (eds), *The Legal Status of the Basque Language Today: One Language, Three Administrations, Seven Different Geographies and a Diaspora* (Centre for Basque Studies, University of Nevada, Reno 2008) <https://www.eusko-ikaskuntza.eus/PDFAnlt/ene/2008_Legal%20Status%20Basque%20Language.pdf#page=155> accessed 21 May 2025.

French jurisdiction these barriers are far greater. Immersion education is simply not available outside of Euskadi and thus Euskaldunak in these regions do not have the same access to Euskara-medium education as their counterparts in Euskadi.

3.2.2 Use in public life

Regarding use in public life, the position of Euskara is variable due to its use as a first language across three distinct territories. Within Euskadi, Euskara holds co-official status with Spanish since 1982 and this ensures bilingualism in public administration in Euskadi as well as the communication and reception of information publicly through Euskara.¹⁵⁴ In Nafarroa a quasi-co-official status is implemented whereby in regions in which Euskaldunak reside within Nafarroa, Euskara is recognised as co-official and Euskaldunak have their linguistic rights recognised in full, whereas in regions defined as having mixed populations there is less recognition but also limited prevention of use.¹⁵⁵ Similarly to education, the status of Euskara within the French state is one of non-recognition, this is not to say that Euskaldunak are structurally oppressed on the basis of their language; however, the French state does not recognise at any formal level Euskara as a language spoken by a portion of the population living within French territory and administrations reflect this with no access to Euskara public services.¹⁵⁶

There are ongoing debates regarding the implementation of LNE which mandates Euskara proficiency for public sector workers. This is a position which has grown in contention in recent years with nationalist politicians in Spain claiming the policy to be discriminatory against monolingual Spanish speakers and Euskal Autonomia Erkidegoko Justizia Auzitegi Nagusia ruling the requirement to be ‘disproportionate’ and ‘discriminatory’,¹⁵⁷ a de-

¹⁵⁴ Iñaki Lasagabaster, ‘The Legal Status of Euskara in the French and Spanish Constitutional Systems’ in Iñigo Urrutia and Gloria Totoricagüena (eds), *The Legal Status of the Basque Language Today: One Language, Three Administrations, Seven Different Geographies and a Diaspora* (Centre for Basque Studies, University of Nevada, Reno 2008) <https://www.eusko-ikaskuntza.eus/PDFAnlt/ene/2008_Legal%20Status%20Basque%20Language.pdf#page=155> accessed 22 May 2025.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ Mikel García Idiákez, ‘The High Court of Justice of the Basque Country Considers the Application of Euskera in Opposition to 34 Public Carers Illegal’ (Argia, 3 January 2023) <<https://www.argia.eus/en/albiste/34-zaintzaile-publikori-oposizioetan-euskara-eskatzea-legez-kanpokotzat-jo-du-eaeko-auzitegi-nagusiak/inprimatu>> accessed 22 May 2025.

cision widely criticised by Euskal activist groups. The debate is also relevant within Euskal Herria on whether the requirement is exclusionary of non-Spanish immigrants to the region given the complexity of adopting the language.

Finally, while there are no barriers to the use of Euskara in public life within Euskadi, within Spanish state operated areas of the public sector Euskara is used less than in the administration run by Eusko Jaurlaritza and this is mirrored in regional differences where prevalence of Euskara varies. Due to the deep ties of the language with the Euskal identity, its use can be seen to carry political weight including its presence in signage and official communications which can cause some practical challenges at a political level.

3.2.3 Institutional support

While there is broad institutional support for the use of Euskara from Eusko Jaurlaritza, this has not always been as widespread due to the historical factors previously outlined. The most prominent institution which promotes and regulates the language is Euskaltzaindia established in 1919 with the objectives of standardising the language across dialects and supporting the revival of the language.¹⁵⁸ The academy was inactive during the Franco regime; however, it was revitalised after his death and today is responsible for language planning.

Both Eusko Jaurlaritza and the Spanish Government hold legal obligations to promote Euskara in regional administration and education under ECRML which was signed by Spain in 1992 and ratified in 2001 recognising Euskara as a minority language¹⁵⁹ and this recognition on a European stage affords Euskara greater protections and institutional support. As mentioned, this does not result in the uninhibited flourishing of the language despite article 6.3 of the Gernika Statute declaring that ‘nobody can be discriminated against for reasons of language’.¹⁶⁰ Euskara’s growth

¹⁵⁸ Koldo Zuazo, ‘The Basque Country and the Basque Language: An Overview of the External History of the Basque Language’ in José Ignacio Hualde, Joseba A Lakarra and RL Trask (eds), *Towards a History of the Basque Language*, vol 131 (John Benjamins Publishing Company 1995) <https://api.pageplace.de/preview/DT0400.9789027285676_A24763210/preview-9789027285676_A24763210.pdf> accessed 22 May 2025.

¹⁵⁹ European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (4th edn, October 2024) <<https://rm.coe.int/collected-texts-charter-4th-edition-en/1680b26fa0>> accessed 21 February 2025.

¹⁶⁰ Gernika Statute art 16.3.

post-Franco has continued to face opposition at a state level such as when language rights are discussed not just for Euskara but also for other regional languages such as Catalá and Galego. In 2023, when these languages were first used in the state parliament the conservative People's Party expressed criticism and members of the far-right Vox party staged a walkout.¹⁶¹ Institutional support from the French state is non-existent.

3.2.4 Discrimination and injustice

Contemporaneously discrimination of Euskara is largely regionalised; however, historically the language was subject to criminalisation under the Franco regime for almost 40 years, a period in which speaking Euskara was confined to private life and 'the removal of all cultural and political vestiges that differentiated the Basque Country from the Spanish state' was pursued,¹⁶² including the banning of Euskal names for newborn babies, businesses and places. To this day, Euskara is marginalised in Iparralde under French control but not to a criminal extent as was the case under Franco. Nonetheless, Euskaldunak living within the French state find themselves excluded from broader French society and also alienated from the freedom of cultural expression enjoyed by their compatriots living within the Spanish state and this can be seen by a failure to transmit the language to new generations in some circles, with the hope of further integration into the French identity.¹⁶³

The discrimination suffered by Euskaldunak in modern Spain, especially linguistically, can be understood as backlash against the promotion of Euskara and its position as co-official within Euskadi which is viewed externally by some as unjust towards monolingual speakers of Spanish but internally is justified as a means of promotion and protection of a once subjugated language and culture. In more nationalist regions of Spain there re-

¹⁶¹ Sam Jones, 'Spain Grants Basque, Catalan and Galician Languages Parliamentary Status' (The Guardian, 19 September 2023) <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/19/spain-grants-basque-catalan-and-galician-languages-parliamentary-status>> accessed 22 May 2025.

¹⁶² Urrutia and Totoricagüena (n 153).

¹⁶³ Francis Jauréguiberry, 'The Basque Language in the French State' in Iñigo Urrutia and Gloria Totoricagüena (eds), *The Legal Status of the Basque Language Today: One Language, Three Administrations, Seven Different Geographies and a Diaspora* (Centre for Basque Studies, University of Nevada, Reno 2008) <https://www.eusko-ikaskuntza.eus/PDFAnlt/ene/2008_Legal%20Status%20Basque%20Language.pdf#page=155> accessed 22 May 2025.

mains a hangover of the ETA period in the minds of many Spaniards through which all Euskaldunak are labelled as ‘terrorists’ and ‘criminals’ due to the actions of the organisation, this is especially prevalent among Madrileños.¹⁶⁴

Some structural inequalities also exist such as the constitutional duty to know Spanish and the inability of Autonomous Communities to compel the same duty on their own citizens.¹⁶⁵ Additionally, in a reverse of historical trends knowledge of Euskara is now linked with greater employment opportunities and points to its knowledge as essential to gain stable employment in the region.¹⁶⁶

3.2.5 Intergenerational language transmission

Due to the considerable progress made in the education sector with formal integration of Euskara into the schooling system, intergenerational language transmission is rising. Language revival thanks to organisations such as Euskaltzaindia as well as the commitments of Eusko Jaurlaritza have ensured that every opportunity is given to new generations to adopt or retain Euskara. This is not universal however, in Nafarroa opportunities for many are confined to the private sphere due to educational arrangements and in Iparralde due to the lack of availability of formal education through Euskara and the aging Euskaldunak population transmission is decreasing.¹⁶⁷ It is not beyond saving, however, to have a language for whom so many fought to revive be at risk of faltering due to centralist government policies is disappointing.

Language transmission concerns much more than mere educational attainment, and the integration of Euskara into everyday life beyond education has enormously boosted in language transmission and community initiatives such as Euskaraldia, which is an 11-day initiative each year promoting the use of Euskara and urging Euskaldunak to reflect on their daily language usage in or-

¹⁶⁴ Ibai Atutxa, ‘Terroristas y otros bárbaros: Una crítica incivilizada de la modernidad en Euskal Herria’ (El Salto Diario, 8 June 2023) <<https://www.elsaltodiario.com/opinion/terroristas-otros-barbaros-euskal-herria-una-critica-incivilizada-modernidad>> accessed 30 June 2025.

¹⁶⁵ Irujo Ametzaga and Urrutia (n 152).

¹⁶⁶ Sara de la Rica and others, ‘White Paper on Employment in the Basque Country: Challenges and Projects for the Society That Will Be’ (ISEAK 2023) <https://iseak.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ing-lb-empleo-euskadi-digital-2023-02-15.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com> accessed 22 May 2025.

¹⁶⁷ Jauréguiberry (n 163).

der to bring Euskara into the mainstream.¹⁶⁸ Initiatives of this nature added to the educational language revival have played a crucial role in boosting rates of language transmission for Euskara. These efforts are reflective of a structural push to move Euskara out of the classroom and weave it into the fabric of daily life in Euskal Herria.

3.2.6 Language and identity

Euskara is and has long been central to the national identity of Euskaldunak and this is reflected in article 6 of the Gernika Statute.¹⁶⁹ Euskara is both a cultural and political marker and has sustained so long as a language isolate refusing to be absorbed into the dominant linguistic culture of Spain or France, maintaining its distinctiveness. This has meant the language came to symbolically and pragmatically represent resistance and cultural survival deeply entrenched in the wider struggle for autonomy and political recognition.

In the post-Franco era, following the revival of the language Euskara came to be celebrated as symbolic of collective self-determination and this continues with more contemporary efforts seeking to depoliticise Euskara and frame it as part of the shared cultural heritage of the region attempting to dissolve external notions of connection to ETA and promoting the language in a manner which transcends political affiliation. Euskara is alive and each generation continues to reinterpret its use to maintain relevance in the modern world.

However, the dynamics of the Euskaldun identity are not singular. In Nafarroa and Iparralde the links between the language and identity were shaped differently due to legal, political and demographic factors which complicated efforts to intrinsically link the language to a civic identity.

¹⁶⁸ University of Deusto, 'Deusto Joins Euskaraldia 2025: Eleven Days of Engagement to Promote the Use of Basque throughout the University' (2025) <<https://www.deusto.es/en/home/campus-life/news-events/news/deusto-joins-euskaraldia-2025-eleven-days-of-engagement-to-promote-the-use-of-basque-throughout-the-university/noticia>> accessed 22 May 2025.

¹⁶⁹ Gernika Statute art 6.

LHR concept	The North of Ireland	Euskal Herria
Access to education	Historically excluded Revival since 1970s through Gaelscoileanna	Banned under Franco Ikastolak emerged covertly and subsequently institutionalised
Use in public life	Minimal protection pre-GFA Rarely used in public services Signage and use in court politicised	Suppressed under Franco Widespread use in Euskadi post-autonomy Regional disparities in Nafarroa and Iparralde
Institutional support	Foras na Gaeilge Resistance in NILA to Language Act	Strong institutional backing in Euskadi Euskaltzaindia No recognition in France
Discrimination and injustice	Associated with Republican identity Mocked or excluded from public life Lack of enforcement against discrimination	Repressed under Franco Continued marginalisation in Iparralde
Intergenerational transmission	Major 20th century decline Recent gains via Gaeilge-medium education Still fragile in some communities	Near loss in 20th century Strong revival in Euskadi Disparities with Nafarroa and Iparralde
Language and identity	Strongly tied to Republican identity Contested in Unionist communities Efforts to depoliticise	Central to national identity Widely embraced in Euskadi Links to identity fragmented in Nafarroa and Iparralde

Table 2: Summarised historical contextualisation of Gaeilge and Euskara

4. Empirical analysis

This chapter seeks to examine the alignment of official policy commitments made by the British, French and Spanish states to minority language rights with the lived experiences of minority language speakers in the two post-conflict societies in question. In doing so the chapter will first examine the alignment or disparity which occurs with Gaeilgeoirí in the North of Ireland deciphering if policy commitments are mirrored in their lived experiences accessing Gaeilge-medium education, support from state institutions for Gaeilge, use and presence of Gaeilge in the public domain, discrimination against Gaeilgeoirí or injustice faced as a result of being a Gaeilgeoir, intergenerational transmission of the language and the sense Gaeilgeoirí have about the languages connection to their identity. Subsequently, this will be mirrored for the experiences of Euskaldunak in Euskal Herria.

The research for this chapter comprised the completion of 13 interviews with fluent Gaeilgeoirí and Euskaldunak. Of those, six interviewees are Euskaldunak and seven are Gaeilgeoirí with ages ranging from mid-20s to early 70s. The interviews took place between 3 June and 17 June 2025, on Zoom and via written responses. Some interviewees did not feel comfortable conducting long-form interviews on Zoom through English and felt more confident providing written responses to the same set of questions and this was accepted to ensure clarity of response and comfort of the participants. The Gaeilgeoirí interviewed were born or lived in five out of the six counties which make up the North of Ireland and the Euskaldunak came from backgrounds in Euskadi, Nafarroa and Iparralde. This geographical spread was important to include a variety of perspectives and experiences. In the same vein, interviewees in both cases came from a mix of urban and rural backgrounds, had a variety of levels of educational attainment and included both

male and female interviewees. Additionally, all interviewees reported a high-level of fluency having been raised in either Gaeilge or Euskara or learned it in later life to a level at which it is their chosen first language.

4.1 The North of Ireland

4.1.1 Access to education and institutional support

Given the position of Gaeilge as a minoritised language within the North of Ireland, the British state has made legal and policy commitments to the protection and promotion of Gaeilge in education and state institutions beginning in 1998 with the GFA and subsequently with its ratification of ECRML, the St Andrews Agreement 2006 and the Identity and Language Act 2022. The commitments therein will first be analysed followed by insights into the experiences reported by Gaeilgeoirí in the education system and their interactions with state institutions.

The GFA obliges the Department of Education to ‘encourage and facilitate Irish medium education in line with current provision for integrated education’¹⁷⁰ as well as interstate cooperation between British and Irish Governments and the newly formed NILA on education.¹⁷¹ Strand Two of the Agreement paves the way for the establishment of the North/South Ministerial Council under which Foras na Gaeilge was subsequently established, an organisation tasked with ‘facilitating and encouraging its //Gaeilge// use in speech and writing in public and private life in the south and, in the context of Part III of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, in Northern Ireland where there is appropriate demand’¹⁷² and Foras now serves in a consultative role to both governments north and south.

Furthering these commitments, in July 2001 ECRML came into force in the United Kingdom with regards to Gaeilge which obliged the Westminster Government to ‘allow, encourage or pro-

¹⁷⁰ The Good Friday Agreement (signed on 10 April 2008) <<https://assets.ireland.ie/documents/good-friday-agreement.pdf>> accessed 21 February 2025.

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*

¹⁷² Foras na Gaeilge, ‘About Foras Na Gaeilge’ <<https://www.forasnagaeilge.ie/about-foras-na-gaeilge/?lang=en>> accessed 23 June 2025.

vide teaching in or of Gaeilge¹⁷³ should demand justify it at all stages of education. This was mirrored in the St Andrews Agreement in 2006 where provisions were put in place to develop Gaeilge¹⁷⁴ and was widely understood to be a commitment to an Irish Language Act by the British state.

This commitment was delayed however, and reaffirmed in the New Decade, New Approach Deal which laid the foundations for the final act¹⁷⁵ which came in 2022. The major development of this deal was a commitment to repeal the last Penal Law which would allow judicial proceedings to take place through Gaeilge.¹⁷⁶ The Identity and Language Act was a major breakthrough for the recognition of the rights of Gaeilge and Gaeilgeoirí in the North of Ireland and the most comprehensive piece of legislation to date regarding the language. Gaeilge-medium education provisions were recognised¹⁷⁷ as well as a commitment to appoint an Irish Language Commissioner,¹⁷⁸ whose role includes the provision of best practices standards for public authorities without affecting the status of the English language, ensure provision of public services through Gaeilge and monitor bodies compliance with standards set by the Commissioner on a quinquennial basis. To date, a Commissioner has not been appointed. The experiences of Gaeilgeoirí will next be analysed considering these commitments made by the British state.

Interviewees had mixed experiences with education with younger interviewees or those from urban areas having the opportunity to attend Gaelscoileanna at the primary level¹⁷⁹ with those who did not have this opportunity learning limited Gaeilge in English-medium schools.¹⁸⁰ However, it was generally agreed that in English-medium education there was little emphasis placed on

¹⁷³ European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (4th edn, October 2024) <<https://rm.coe.int/collected-texts-charter-4th-edition-en/1680b26fa0>> accessed 21 February 2025.

¹⁷⁴ Government of the United Kingdom, 'St Andrews Agreement' (2006) <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7b17bee5274a319e77cf89/st_andrews_agreement-2.pdf> accessed 21 February 2025.

¹⁷⁵ Government of the United Kingdom, 'New Decade, New Approach Deal' (January 2020) <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5e178b56ed915d3b06f2b795/2020-01-08_a_new_decade__a_new_approach.pdf> accessed 24 March 2025.

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act 2022 <<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/45/introduction>> accessed 21 February 2025.

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ Interview with GA003 (16 June 2025); Interview with GA006 (17 June 2025); Interview with GA007 (17 June 2025).

¹⁸⁰ Interview with GA001 (3 June 2025); Interview with GA002 (12 June 2025).

the language and the curriculum was boring and grammar focused¹⁸¹ and taught very little communicative Gaeilge.¹⁸² Only one interviewee was afforded education in a Meánscoil Gaeilge¹⁸³ with GA007¹⁸⁴ having the option but choosing English-medium due to friends attending that school. Those who did attend Gaelscoileanna were proud of their schools despite these schools receiving no state funding while they attended with parents having to ‘shake buckets at [Gaelic Athletic Association]¹⁸⁵ matches’¹⁸⁶ to fund teachers’ salaries and to this day when state funding has been secured 60% of Gaelscoileanna are housed in temporary accommodation.¹⁸⁷ Interviewees reported their pride lay in a sense of passive resistance within the community.¹⁸⁸ Cúrsaí Gaeilge¹⁸⁹ in Gaeltacht areas were commended by interviewees as a means to experience ‘saol trí Ghaeilge’¹⁹⁰ and highlight to them that Gaeilge was more than just a school subject and for those who attended English-medium schools it was an enormous help in improving their fluency.¹⁹¹ One interviewee credited their fluency to time spent in the H-Blocks Internment Camp¹⁹² and one to a university foundation year in Gaeilge.¹⁹³ The overarching sentiment among interviewees was that Gaelscoileanna were the most effective means of Gaeilge-medium education and that in their time in education this was all provided through community funding in spite of the state. Problems continue with funding for Gaeilge-medium education being entirely dependent on which political party holds the education brief in the NILA with Unionist parties reluctant to engage with Gaelscoileanna.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸¹ Interview with GA002 (n 180).

¹⁸² Interview with GA001 (n 180).

¹⁸³ Interview with GA003 (n 179).

¹⁸⁴ Interview with GA007 (n 179).

¹⁸⁵ The Gaelic Athletic Association is an Irish sporting organisation which organises and promotes traditional Irish games such as Gaelic Football and Hurling, in this context the interviewee explains their fundraising approach at sporting events.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with GA006 (n 179).

¹⁸⁷ Interview with GA003 (n 179).

¹⁸⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Cúrsaí Gaeilge here refers to two to three week residential educational courses which take place in Gaeltacht areas across the island of Ireland. It is common for young people to attend Cúrsaí Gaeilge during the Summer break from school.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with GA003 (n 179).

¹⁹¹ Interview with GA001 (n 180); Interview with GA004 (16 June 2025).

¹⁹² Interview with GA002 (n 180).

¹⁹³ Interview with GA005 (17 June 2025).

¹⁹⁴ Interview with GA002 (n 180).

At an institutional level, interviewees reported a variety of issues with one of the most common being the issue of recognition of their names. All interviewees have names in Gaeilge, and many of their names include fadas¹⁹⁵ over some letters which are an accent mark indicating intonation. When dealing with public administration interviewees reported having their names misspelt, removal of the fada and official documentation displaying improper spelling of names which those in the administration had no desire to correct¹⁹⁶ and blamed it on system errors though many other languages have similar accent marks in other countries.

Similar issues were noted in healthcare where some parents are told that raising their children through Gaeilge is inhibiting their development and healthcare workers are incapable of catering to Gaeilgeoir children.¹⁹⁷ Systems and institutions are not designed with Gaeilge in mind and any positive experiences with the public administration are dependent on individual efforts of sympathetic staff who work in a system which is not designed with Gaeilge in mind.¹⁹⁸ Any efforts made to offer service through Gaeilge have been described as clunky, inefficient,¹⁹⁹ disjointed²⁰⁰ and emotionally laborious.²⁰¹ Even the most ardent language activists would not use the services currently provided through Gaeilge as they are not up to standard²⁰² and just because Gaeilgeoirí don't use a badly designed service does not mean they don't want it.²⁰³ The hope is for a public service which implements the 'active offer' principle akin to that which is implemented in Catalunya whereby the first question asked is the language in which you would like the service to be provided.²⁰⁴ Some were hopeful that the appointment of an Irish Language Commissioner would change this experience;²⁰⁵ however, there was an overall unhappiness with the contents of the 2022 Act though it is seen as a good

¹⁹⁵ A fada is the name of an accent mark on a vowel in Gaeilge like accent marks used in many languages. It is also the word for 'long' in Gaeilge as a vowel with a fada is elongated when pronounced.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with GA001 (n 180); Interview with GA002 (n 180); Interview with GA004 (n 191); Interview with GA006 (n 179).

¹⁹⁷ Interview with GA006 (n 179).

¹⁹⁸ Interview with GA002 (n 180).

¹⁹⁹ *ibid.*; Interview with GA007 (n 179).

²⁰⁰ Interview with GA006 (n 179).

²⁰¹ Interview with GA001 (n 180).

²⁰² Interview with GA003 (n 179).

²⁰³ *ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *ibid.*; Interview with GA007 (n 179).

starting point.²⁰⁶ All interviewees had much greater praise for the work of community organisations than for that of the state submitting that the revival of the language is something which was not aided from the top down but rather ‘emanated from below’²⁰⁷ and all progress made for Gaeilgeoirí was in spite of state efforts not because of them.²⁰⁸

With such obstacles in place, what limited service is available through Gaeilge is rarely utilised due to its inefficiency and many Gaeilgeoirí are not even afforded to proper recognition of their own names which is protected by FCNM,²⁰⁹ the most basic identifying marker for any person. Access to education and support from public institutions is not meeting the needs of Gaeilgeoirí; however, strong community bonds and work at the grassroots level is what ensures the prosperity of the community in these domains.

4.1.2 Public use and discrimination

Within domestic policy documentation there exists only vague wording regarding the use of Gaeilge in the public sphere and prevention of linguistic discrimination such as the GFA which recognises ‘the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity’²¹⁰ and asserts that the British Government will ‘take resolute action to promote the language’.²¹¹ However, such wording lacks legal enforceability or definition of what is meant by ‘promotion’ or ‘resolute action’. This has given the state considerable leeway in their implementation of action and the ambiguity was used to justify delays in the development of the Identity and Language Act and frame its implementation as a legal concession rather than an obligation to which they had already committed. Domestically, this reflects the disparity between symbolic commitment to change and practical action. Gaeilgeoirí are however protected by FCNM which guaran-

²⁰⁶ Interview with GA004 (n 191); Interview with GA007 (n 179).

²⁰⁷ Interview with GA003 (n 179).

²⁰⁸ *ibid*; Interview with GA007 (n 179).

²⁰⁹ Council of Europe, ‘Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities and Explanatory Report’ (February 2005) <<https://rm.coe.int/16800c10cf>> accessed 21 February 2025.

²¹⁰ The Good Friday Agreement (n 170).

²¹¹ *ibid*.

tees their equality before the law, ability to develop their language, access Gaelige-medium media and information and use of Gaelige in public.²¹²

Due to the vague nature of domestic policy and political tensions in the North of Ireland interviewees report difficulties using Gaelige in public and some instances of discrimination. The most pertinent issue in the North of Ireland currently revolves around bilingual signage in public spaces with the recent £341 million regeneration project at Belfast Grand Central Station including English only signage despite engagement from the Gaeligeoir community since 2021 who advocated for bilingual signage. Protests upon completion of the project resulted in a switch to bilingual signage at additional cost²¹³ which could have been avoided had the community been listened to in the planning stage. This issue is mirrored in communities across the region with An Ceathrú Gealtachta in West Belfast having bilingual road signs²¹⁴ as well as the city of Derry²¹⁵ and many signs erected by the Mid-Ulster Council also being bilingual.²¹⁶ This is not without issue however, as often the section of the sign that appears in Gaelige is spraypainted over by those seeking to discriminate against Gaelige.²¹⁷ Visibility of the language is perceived by some in the Unionist community as threatening but Gaeligeoirí attribute this to a lack of understanding of the language and have engaged in outreach programmes to try to educate those with no knowledge of the language²¹⁸ and today the largest provider of Gaelige classes on the island of Ireland is the Turas project in the historically Unionist area of East Belfast.²¹⁹ All interviewees do their best to incorporate Gaelige into their interactions in shops and restaurants; however, most reported that they are aware of who the Gaeligeoirí are in their area and when not engaging with other Gaeligeoirí they are required to switch to English.²²⁰

²¹² Council of Europe (n 209).

²¹³ Interview with GA003 (n 179).

²¹⁴ Interview with GA007 (n 179).

²¹⁵ Interview with GA005 (n 193).

²¹⁶ Interview with GA006 (n 179).

²¹⁷ Interview with GA002 (n 180); Interview with GA006 (n 179).

²¹⁸ Interview with GA002 (n 180); Interview with GA005 (n 193).

²¹⁹ Interview with GA007 (n 179).

²²⁰ Interview with GA001 (n 180); Interview with GA003 (n 179); Interview with GA006 (n 179).

The option to speak Gaeilge in shops is a recent development as it is now quite natural to hear it spoken in all settings and the prominence of the language would have been unthinkable to people during The Troubles.²²¹ During that time and to a lesser extent today Gaeilgeoirí were subject to discrimination in the streets and the fight against ‘apathy and ignorance’ continues.²²² Some interviewees report that hate comments made by Unionist politicians boost engagement with Gaeilge²²³ and that when they are recognised as Gaeilgeoirí they are met with people asking what their English name is or told that nobody speaks Gaeilge²²⁴ or in the past having to use a false name when going to the city centre to avoid being recognised as a Gaeilgeoir for their own safety.²²⁵ The use of a name in Gaeilge also meant one interviewee was subject to harassment by British troops during The Troubles.²²⁶

While the situation has changed in recent years, ‘oppression, intolerance, and colonialism still leaves footprints’²²⁷ in the day to day experiences of Gaeilgeoirí and the way they seek to combat this is through increased visibility for the language, not above English but to a level of parity. All were keen to point out that Gaeilge does not belong to just one sector of society but rather is free to be used by all who choose to. The implication that Gaeilge is exclusively for the Nationalist or Republican communities was said to be a misconception and a myth²²⁸ fabricated by the British state’s oppression of the language and imposed politicisation which sought to attribute the language solely to members of the IRA in an effort to discourage its use.²²⁹

While it is still challenging to have ‘saol trí Ghaeilge’,²³⁰ the community is seeking nothing more than linguistic equality and parity hoping the future of the North of Ireland to be a bilingual one in which both languages are equally used and respected and neither are feared by anyone or symbolically excluded.

²²¹ Interview with GA005 (n 193).

²²² Interview with GA002 (n 180).

²²³ *ibid*; Interview with GA003 (n 179); Interview with GA007 (n 179).

²²⁴ Interview with GA002 (n 180).

²²⁵ Interview with GA003 (n 179).

²²⁶ Interview with GA005 (n 193).

²²⁷ Interview with GA007 (n 179).

²²⁸ *ibid*.

²²⁹ *ibid*.

²³⁰ Interview with GA001 (n 180); Interview with GA007 (n 179).

4.1.3 Intergenerational transmission of Gaelige and language-identity links

While once again there exists no domestic legislation protecting the right of transmission of Gaelige to the next generation, Gaeligeoirí and those choosing to identify as such have ‘the right to learn his or her minority language’²³¹ as a means of asserting and preserving their identity²³² which is protected by the British states’ ratification of ECRML. As outlined, there has been minimal state support for the proliferation of the language and interviewees are adamant that the revival which has occurred has been entirely community driven and fought for by volunteers and language activists.

In the wake of The Troubles, attitudes towards Gaelige changed in the North of Ireland and those younger generations less effected by the conflict have a more positive outlook and are willing to fight for what is theirs.²³³ While only two interviewees had fluent Gaeligeoirí in the home growing up and were raised through the language,²³⁴ those who didn’t are determined to raise their children with a ‘saol trí Ghaeilge’,²³⁵ despite challenges they currently or may in the future face. The reasoning behind this desire is historical, there is a sense that transmitting Gaelige to the next generation is part of a wider process of decolonisation²³⁶ and that the last fluent Gaeligeoirí in interviewees family trees lived not that long ago. They feel a connection to an ‘unbroken linguistic chain that went back thousands of years ... we’re trying to re-link that chain ... heal that wound from the past’.²³⁷

Additionally, the transmission of Gaelige is more than just intergenerational, there exists significant support for the transmission of the language outside of historical communities by creating welcoming hubs of Gaelige throughout the region as a means of unravelling the historical gatekeeping of the language.²³⁸ There is a shared sense that the growth of the Gaeligeoir community requires work outside of formal education and all interviewees feel

²³¹ European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (n 173).

²³² *ibid.*

²³³ Interview with GA001 (n 180); Interview with GA007 (n 179).

²³⁴ Interview with GA006 (n 179); Interview with GA007 (n 179).

²³⁵ Interview with GA001 (n 180); Interview with GA002 (n 180); Interview with GA003 (n 179); Interview with GA004 (n 191); Interview with GA005 (n 193).

²³⁶ Interview with GA002 (n 180); Interview with GA003 (n 179).

²³⁷ Interview with GA003 (n 179).

²³⁸ *ibid.*

that time spent in a state of language immersion in Gaeltacht areas is essential for this as well as youth clubs, sports and other extra-curricular activities through the medium of Gaelge.²³⁹

Where the relationship between Gaelge and identity is concerned, interviewees repeatedly submitted that Gaelge makes them feel connected to the land through place names of which over 90% come from Gaelge²⁴⁰ and were Anglicised historically by the British state but the understanding of the meaning of place names reinforces feelings of indigeneity.²⁴¹ There is also a sense that the minoritised status of the language as well as the historical oppression of the people inspires a sense of solidarity with other oppressed peoples across the globe with mentions of Euskaldunak, Palestinians, Mohawks in North America and indigenous communities throughout the world who are being affected by climate collapse as communities with whom Gaelgeoirí felt a connection based on shared struggles²⁴² and, as one interviewee put it, with communities who have felt what it's like to be 'under the cosh'.²⁴³

While the question of identity is indeed a deeply emotional and personal one there is hope for the future of Gaelge among interviewees yet a recognition of the long journey ahead to fully reclaim the language. State support is essential but the proof of communities doing more than can be expected from them to revive the language can already be seen.²⁴⁴ Going forward one Gaelgeoir has a simple expectation for the British state – 'beart do réir briathar'²⁴⁵ – which translates to keep your word, implement the promises of the Identity and Language Act, improve institutional support for the language and allow it to thrive.

²³⁹ Interview with GA001 (n 180); Interview with GA003 (n 179); Interview with GA005 (n 193); Interview with GA006 (n 179).

²⁴⁰ Interview with GA007 (n 179).

²⁴¹ Interview with GA001 (n 180); Interview with GA003 (n 179); Interview with GA005 (n 192); Interview with GA006 (n 179); Interview with GA007 (n 179).

²⁴² Interview with GA001 (n 180); Interview with GA002 (n 180); Interview with GA003 (n 179); Interview with GA005 (n 193); Interview with GA006 (n 179).

²⁴³ Interview with GA002 (n 180).

²⁴⁴ Interview with GA003 (n 179).

²⁴⁵ Interview with GA007 (n 179).

4.2 Euskal Herria

4.2.1 Access to education and institutional support

Due to the autonomy of Euskadi, co-official status of Euskara is enjoyed²⁴⁶ and access to Euskara-medium education is widespread with state schools operating two education models in which Euskara is the main language of instruction or is balanced with Spanish while in the third model students still have the opportunity to learn Euskara. Additionally, the Ikastola system continues to this day and many still operate through community funding outside of the state system while still forming an integral part of the education system within all of Euskal Herria. Further to this, Eusko Jauriaritza funds the Helduen Alfabetazte eta Berreuskalduntzerako Erakundea system for adult education which provides classes for those who did not have the opportunity to learn Euskara in school.

Those Euskaldunak resident in Euskadi have a much more promising relationship with their regional government than those in Nafarroa or Iparralde where even Ikastolak are less prominent. Euskara does not have the same legal status in these regions of Euskal Herria and thus Euskaldunak are not protected. This is reflected by Spain's signature of ECRML in relation only to Euskadi and Nafarroa whose residents are afforded language protections in education, public services and the judicial system.²⁴⁷

Eusko Jauriaritza, within its jurisdiction at least, provides Euskara-medium education to all who seek it and within the same jurisdiction as well as Nafarroa. The Spanish state provides protections under ECRML, however, in Iparralde no legislation exists protecting the historical Euskaldun community.

According to those interviewees who were educated within Euskadi, the promise of Euskara medium education is largely fulfilled and education was available either through the D Model²⁴⁸ or Ikastolak,²⁴⁹ however, in Nafarroa the interviewee was also able to avail of Euskara-medium education which was rare.²⁵⁰ In Iparralde the situation is entirely different where the interviewee received

²⁴⁶ Gernika Statute art 6.

²⁴⁷ European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (n 173).

²⁴⁸ Interview with EUS001 (5 June 2025); Interview with EUS002 (6 June 2025); Interview with EUS004 (12 June 2025).

²⁴⁹ Interview with EUS005 (3 June 2025); Interview with EUS006 (13 June 2025).

²⁵⁰ Interview with EUS002 (n 248).

formal education solely through French but spoke only Euskara in the home which led to ‘a state of total sociolinguistic incomprehension’ growing up.²⁵¹

Interviewees reported generally positive experiences with Model D schools though it was reported that Euskara is ‘instrumentalised in education’ whereby it is taught as something needed for school but the wider context of why it is important to learn the language was not prioritised.²⁵² The Model D school building is sometimes also home to a Model B or Model A school²⁵³ and these students often could not hold casual conversations in Euskara outside of the classroom due to teachers not using enough Euskara in the classroom or caring enough about the language.²⁵⁴ EUS001 insisted that there exists a wealth of different educational experiences across regions but also between Model B and D schools, and Ikastolak²⁵⁵ which maintain their historical roots in resistance to Spanish occupation and the continuity of the Euskaldun identity which is a great sense of pride.²⁵⁶

Institutional issues persist for Euskaldun however, especially in the healthcare sector where often there are very few Euskaldun doctors in a clinic²⁵⁷ and some struggle to explain the health issues they have properly to a Spanish speaking doctor²⁵⁸ despite Euskara’s co-official status in Euskadi. This leads to narratives being pushed, such as asking ‘do you want a good doctor or a Basque doctor?’ when what Euskaldun really want is a doctor who understands them²⁵⁹ and the fact that these things are not mutually exclusive. Other narratives aim at disparaging the learning of Euskara suggesting that Euskal Herria will struggle to attract talented workers if they require them to speak Euskara, but one interviewee remarked ‘if they’re so talented they can learn Basque’.²⁶⁰

Trying to deal through Euskara with the public administration is difficult also and Euskaldunak hear constant replies of ‘sorry, but in Spanish, sorry, but in French’.²⁶¹ One interviewee de-

²⁵¹ Interview with EUS003 (10 June 2025).

²⁵² Interview with EUS001 (n 248).

²⁵³ Interview with EUS004 (n 248).

²⁵⁴ Interview with EUS001 (n 248).

²⁵⁵ *ibid.*

²⁵⁶ Interview with EUS005 (n 249).

²⁵⁷ Interview with EUS001 (n 248).

²⁵⁸ Interview with EUS004 (n 248).

²⁵⁹ Interview with EUS001 (n 248).

²⁶⁰ *ibid.*

²⁶¹ Interview with EUS002 (n 248).

scribed being jostled by a Spanish public servant as a child when seeking to renew his passport as he did not know the Spanish term for index finger²⁶² and experiences of this nature make Euskaldunak feel as though they are secondary within society.²⁶³ In Iparralde it is impossible to deal with public institutions through Euskara.

There were also some more enthusiastic opinions on Spanish institutions within Euskal Herria admitting that the feeling amongst the community is that ‘they hate all Basque things’ and they only seek to retain control of Euskal Herria for economic reasons due to the region’s industry.²⁶⁴ It appears to some that the goal of Spanish institutions is not only to erase Euskara and integrate Euskaldunak²⁶⁵ but to cause confusion among the populus in the furtherance of imperialism.²⁶⁶

4.2.2 Public use and discrimination

While the use of Euskara in public is protected in Euskadi,²⁶⁷ experiences differ in other regions of Euskal Herria and Euskaldunak are still subjected to both structural and symbolic discrimination in a variety of societal spheres. From a policy perspective, in recent years the Gernika Statute has been called into question by Spaniards living within Euskadi who claim that article 35 is discriminatory against them and unfairly privileges Euskaldunak for jobs in the public sector. This is refuted by interviewees due to Euskara’s co-official status.²⁶⁸

Experiences using Euskara in public vary depending on two factors, the region and whether the situation is in an urban or rural area. Regionally, those who live in Iparralde struggle the most where they must alter their lives to use shops, restaurants and cultural events they know employ Euskaldunak to avoid negative reactions²⁶⁹ and despite a strong community in certain instances such as larger supermarkets, staff will respond with ‘hablame en Cristiano’,²⁷⁰ not only that Euskara isn’t welcome but that the lan-

²⁶² Interview with EUS004 (n 248).

²⁶³ Interview with EUS003 (n 251).

²⁶⁴ Interview with EUS004 (n 248).

²⁶⁵ *ibid*; Interview with EUS005 (n 249).

²⁶⁶ Interview with EUS005 (n 249).

²⁶⁷ Gernika Statute art 6.

²⁶⁸ Interview with EUS001 (n 248).

²⁶⁹ *ibid*; Interview with EUS002 (n 248); Interview with EUS003 (n 251).

²⁷⁰ Interview with EUS001 (n 248).

guage is ungodly and should not be spoken. Interviewees do ensure to always greet in Euskara with ‘kaixo’ or ‘egun on’, however, they report a response to this greeting is more often in French.²⁷¹ Some Euskaldunak are also private about their language in work due to fear of ridicule.²⁷² Furthermore, in Iparralde, there have been efforts made in recent years to encourage people to learn Euskara, especially staff in the public sector but this effort has been community driven.²⁷³

In Euskadi the situation is only a little better with media being available through Euskara as a conclusion to the normalisation of the language there and there is a sense that it is important to write about current affairs in a professional manner to show the world that it is a living language.²⁷⁴ Once again however, simple daily activities such as ordering a coffee in Euskara are not always a success and sometimes receive a negative reaction²⁷⁵ and for those non-Euskaldun who live in Euskadi there is a general aversion to learning even basic phrases to complete a transaction which interviewees find disrespectful as if an individual moved to any other country in the world they would make the minimal effort to learn these phrases.²⁷⁶

Despite changed attitudes since the Franco era, and a far higher number of speakers throughout Spanish-occupied Euskal Herria, discrimination is still rife despite the ICCPR protection of linguistic minority groups to enjoy the use of their own language in community with others.²⁷⁷ Euskaldunak feel as though there is a wider attitude in society that using Euskara positions them low on the social hierarchy²⁷⁸ and derogatory comments are often made when people hear them speak Euskara despite this being less and less frequent in recent years.²⁷⁹ One interviewee had some particularly distressing experiences regarding his treatment by neighbours in his childhood and supposed jokes made about

²⁷¹ Interview with EUS002 (n 248); Interview with EUS003 (n 251).

²⁷² Interview with EUS003 (n 251).

²⁷³ Interview with EUS001 (n 248).

²⁷⁴ Interview with EUS004 (n 248).

²⁷⁵ Interview with EUS003 (n 251); Interview with EUS004 (n 248).

²⁷⁶ Interview with EUS004 (n 248).

²⁷⁷ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171 (ICCPR).

²⁷⁸ Interview with EUS001 (n 248); Interview with EUS004 (n 248).

²⁷⁹ Interview with EUS001 (n 248); Interview with EUS002 (n 248); Interview with EUS004 (n 248).

the length and complexity of his and other Euskaldunak names.²⁸⁰ Those who work in the Euskara sector are also structurally disadvantaged according to interviewees with those working in the sector generally having precarious employment²⁸¹ and lower salaries²⁸² compared to their Spanish speaking counterparts.

In their interactions outside of the community, particularly with Spanish people, Euskaldunak are subjected to stigma and questions about ETA as well as implications of connections to ETA which are unfounded. Spaniards and French people alike also have a folkloric notion of Euskaldunak as mystical mountain people²⁸³ and if this isn't the case there is little recognition that they exist at all as a unique ethnolinguistic group in which people lead their lives through Euskara and learn it as a first language.²⁸⁴ Only one interviewee said this need to explain the culture and language to others didn't bother him.²⁸⁵

In summary, the general sense among Euskaldunak is that while public use of Euskara has grown it is still often looked down upon and receives backlash upon promotion. Discriminatory incidents seem to be decreasing but that is not to say that it is easy or welcomed by others to proudly speak Euskara but that does not stop the strong community from taking pride in their language and speaking Euskara to the world regardless of the world often speaking Spanish back.²⁸⁶

4.2.3 Intergenerational transmission of Euskara and language identity links

While neither the Spanish nor French states have domestic policies to promote the transmission of Euskara to the next generation, the practice is still protected in Euskadi and Nafarroa by both Eusko Jaurlaritza²⁸⁷ and ECRML.²⁸⁸ Additionally, a variety of language revitalisation and public visibility campaigns take

²⁸⁰ Interview with EUS004 (n 248).

²⁸¹ Interview with EUS003 (n 251).

²⁸² Interview with EUS004 (n 248).

²⁸³ Interview with EUS001 (n 248).

²⁸⁴ Interview with EUS004 (n 248).

²⁸⁵ Interview with EUS006 (n 249).

²⁸⁶ Interview with EUS004 (n 248).

²⁸⁷ Gernika Statute art 6.

²⁸⁸ European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages art 7(1)(g) (n 173).

place in Euskal Herria such as Euskaraldia in an effort to grow the language community but these are not sponsored by Spanish or French Governments.

In Iparralde the lack of autonomy and state support for Euskaldunak has led to lower rates of transmission and today in Baiona only around 8% of the population are Euskaldunak and less than 1% speak Euskara daily.²⁸⁹ EUS001, EUS002, EUS003, EUS004 and EUS005 all had Euskaldunak parents and used Euskara in the home growing up²⁹⁰ with some of these parents being the product of Ikastolak²⁹¹ or the now defunct Gaueskolak.²⁹² One interviewee did not come from a home where Euskara is spoken but raises his children through Euskara now.²⁹³ Many interviewees took pride in the struggles of their parents and grandparents to maintain Euskara through the repression of the language²⁹⁴ and feel fortunate to live in an era where this is no longer the case. There is an attribution to social justice causes of transmitting Euskara in Iparralde and Nafarroa more than Euskadi due to the precarious nature of the community in regions where the language is less widespread.²⁹⁵ However, in all regions of Euskal Herria, interviewees reported that reviving, transmitting and maintaining the language is tied to political convictions²⁹⁶ with one interviewee feeling as though he was born independentist.²⁹⁷

Euskaldunak also feel a responsibility to maintain the language due to an understanding of the oppression previous generations faced and nowadays, there is a desire not to let down the next generation and to pass the language on so as not to be the last generation of Euskaldunak.²⁹⁸ This is challenging as Euskara exists at the crossroads of two of the most dominant global languages and, in Iparralde more than other regions, more non-Euskaldunak move to the area and refuse to learn the language.²⁹⁹ Additionally, each new generation who learn Euskara as children

²⁸⁹ Interview with EUS001 (n 248).

²⁹⁰ *ibid*; Interview with EUS002 (n 248); Interview with EUS003 (n 250); Interview with EUS004 (n 248); Interview with EUS005 (n 249).

²⁹¹ Interview with EUS005 (n 249).

²⁹² Interview with EUS001 (n 248).

²⁹³ Interview with EUS006 (n 249).

²⁹⁴ Interview with EUS001 (n 248); Interview with EUS002 (n 248); Interview with EUS004 (n 248); Interview with EUS005 (n 249).

²⁹⁵ Interview with EUS001 (n 248).

²⁹⁶ *ibid*; Interview with EUS004 (n 248); Interview with EUS005 (n 249).

²⁹⁷ Interview with EUS004 (n 248).

²⁹⁸ *ibid*.

²⁹⁹ Interview with EUS001 (n 248); Interview with EUS005 (n 249).

run the risk of losing their language in their teenage years as happened to EUS006³⁰⁰ and was noticeable in the youth of others who felt that Euskara was viewed as uncool among their friends.³⁰¹

The language is deeply rooted in the Euskaldun identity also fostering an intense sense of community among speakers.³⁰² Interviewees also submitted that their language is at the core of their culture at large and is connected to festivals, rituals, literature, music and art.³⁰³ Although it remains a choice every day to continue speaking the language, Euskaldunak, through their connection to struggle and resistance, find it impossible not to live through Euskara³⁰⁴ and describe it as ‘a whole life lived’³⁰⁵ and that the language gives them a sense of belonging.³⁰⁶ Though the outlook varied on the future for their people, interviewees had one core message about the revival of their language, they will continue to fight for the next generation and for their cultures survival, ‘those of us who want to protect what’s ours will continue to shout loud and clear: all occupying forces out of the Basque Country!’.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁰ Interview with EUS006 (n 249).

³⁰¹ Interview with EUS001 (n 248); Interview with EUS004 (n 248).

³⁰² Interview with EUS001 (n 248); Interview with EUS004 (n 248); Interview with EUS006 (n 249).

³⁰³ Interview with EUS003 (n 251).

³⁰⁴ Interview with EUS001 (n 248).

³⁰⁵ Interview with EUS002 (n 248).

³⁰⁶ Interview with EUS004 (n 248).

³⁰⁷ Interview with EUS005 (n 249).

5. Discussion and conclusion

The broader purpose of this thesis was to discover if minority communities' language rights have been left behind in the peace-building process in the North of Ireland and Euskal Herria. This chapter will offer a synthesis and interpretation of the findings covered therein in an effort to construct a comprehensive answer to the research question.

The research has been conducted through a biphasic methodology which comprised comparative document analysis of domestic, regional and international policy documents pertaining to the controlling states of the two territorial case studies in question followed by semi-structured interviews completed with fluent speakers from the Euskara and Gaeilge speaking linguistic communities within these territories under the guidance of LHR theory presented by Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson.³⁰⁸

Across the Gaeilgeoir and Euskaldun communities there arose several commonalities to the situations regarding education and institutional support, most prevalent of which was the strong, community-led, grassroots revival of the language through education both during and after governmental bans on their respective languages public use. Gaelscoileanna and Ikastolak were movements set up in the mid-20th century to educate a populus in their native language run without financial or infrastructural support from the state which at that time still actively repressed both languages. These movements remain widespread and successful despite the lack of institutional support.

³⁰⁸ Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson, 'Linguistic Human Rights, Past and Present' in Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson (eds), *Language Rights* (vol 1, Routledge 2017).

Another similarity is the uneven levels of institutional support which is entirely dependent on political will and administrative decentralisation. Within Euskal Herria it is clear that the community within Euskadi is privy to greater freedoms and rights than those Euskaldunak in Nafarroa or Iparralde due entirely to the autonomy of Euskadi while in the North of Ireland the disparity in support can be seen in the urban-rural divide as well as different policies regarding such things as public signage across local council areas with varied policies. In both cases the political fight for the rights of the community have been pivotal in advances made but this is on a largely local scale due to a lack of an overarching language plan in either region.

That is not to say that the situation in the North of Ireland and Euskal Herria is identical, the most obvious difference being that within Euskadi due to its autonomous status within the Spanish state there exists more comprehensive and integrated support for Euskara which is enshrined in the Gernika Statute³⁰⁹ which allows the language activist community to focus on other promotional activities. This is not mirrored in Nafarroa or Iparralde where Euskaldunak must fight for visibility within the wider community and struggle to have their rights as a community upheld.

Within the North of Ireland, it was reported that any effort made by Gaeilgeoirí to garner support for their language is politicised and contested by Unionist political parties, especially in the area of education where progress for Gaeilge-medium education is entirely dependent on which party controls the Department of Education at a given time. This is a wider issue than just education however, where it is clear that since the GFA both the British Government and the NILA have failed to implement linguistic policy commitments in a timely manner due in large part to the political stalemate which appears to be built into the region's institutions.

The most prominent commonality reported by interviewees across both contexts is the experience of linguistic exclusion and discomfort using their first language in public settings. Despite improvements in recent years, neither context is representative of universal acceptance of languages which have been spoken in these regions long before the arrival of British, French or Spanish state apparatus' with every interviewee reporting adverse reactions to their language by members of the public at some point in

their life. The reasons behind this according to interviewees are externally imposed politicisation and historical oppression which is built into the fabric of daily life.

Another issue common across both contexts is visibility. While this varies across regions in Euskal Herria the consensus is that a lack of knowledge surrounding the community is due to a lack of visibility of the language, most notable in Iparralde. This too remains one of the most significant challenges for Gaeilgeoiri in the North of Ireland with bilingual public signage being a small demand made by the community which has been met with substantial political and media backlash and areas in which Gaeilge is commonly spoken being isolated but strong communities.

As far as public use of a language the status of Euskara as co-official in Euskadi protects it there while the situation in Iparralde could not be more different due to the French state's complete lack of recognition of Euskaldunak which leaves them the most marginalised group of speakers in all of Euskal Herria.

This is different to the case of Gaeilge where vague legal language in policy documents and peace agreements has facilitated the delay of obligations on the part of the British state, further marginalising the language in public spaces, the only sphere of life which active and motivated community groups cannot infiltrate and bring about change. That is not to minimise the success of these groups whose protest movements have seen success in forcing through change.

Descriptions of the meaning of language to native speakers were similar in both the North of Ireland and Euskal Herria who described the language as being at the core of their personal identity and linking them to their culture through sport, literature and the arts. Speakers also felt connected to the land through their language and their speaking of it was an act of reclaiming a stolen heritage and connecting themselves to past generations of Gaeilgeoiri and Euskaldunak.

While transmission of both languages is increasing and the community of speakers continues to grow this is being negated by the influx of Spanish and French speakers in the case of Euskal Herria and in the North of Ireland the further growth of the community is dependent on further support within the education system and social visibility of Gaeilge as a living language rather than one which is confined to the classroom.

Support for the proliferation of Euskara, within Euskadi at least, is not an ideological issue when compared to the North of Ireland where support for Gaeilge remains largely divided down historical political lines. There is hope for the future however, as younger generations, less scarred by the brutal conflict which engrossed the region, are softening these boundaries and cross-community interactions increase while ignorance of other communities decreases.

Language	Gaeilge	Euskara
Education	Funding politicised	BMLM widely available
Institutional support	Pushback to promotion Still politicised	Varied support regionally Euskadi most integrated
Public use	Subpar public services Inefficient and not at same level as English	Regional differences from impossible in Iparralde to welcomed in Euskadi
Transmission	Relinking a millennia old linguistic chain	Some regions at risk of losing transmission
Discrimination	Lessened in daily life Still structurally apparent in signage and politics	Daily discrimination still present Ill-perceived by Spanish
Identity	Connected to land, ancestors and other minority communities globally	Language at the core of identity

Table 3: Framework matrix overview of interview responses

LHR theory has been critical to the explanation of the gaps between legal commitments made by states and the lived experiences of Gaeilgeoirí and Euskaldunak. It has been particularly influential in revealing institutional and structural forms of linguistic exclusion from a top-down perspective as well as connecting the right of a population to speak a language to their dignity and equality within broader societal structures.

One of the major strengths of LHR lies in its stepwise perspective on language rights which outlines a progression from basic protections to active promotion on the part of the state. However, the most prominent critique of the theory comes from its legalistic, top-down orientation which can overlook the real-life experience of individuals and their language rights. To address this, interviews with Gaeilgeoirí and Euskaldunak were conducted. By

focusing on how individuals navigate language in education, public, services, family and social life, this thesis has grounded LHR theory in the pragmatic realities of minority language speakers. This bottom-up perspective has helped to reveal the disparity between formal rights in policy and their implementation in practice, highlighting not only the presence or absence of legal protections, but also the cultural, emotional and structural impacts of that policy-practice, theory-implementation gap. In this way, the empirical data does more than just complement LHR theory, it challenges and refines it, offering a well-rounded holistic understanding of what linguistic justice as part of a broader peacebuilding process requires in post-conflict societies in order to construct the society of equity and social justice first posited by Galtung.

The institutional approach which LHR theory provides can fail to account for non-institutional forms of recognition which take place in daily interactions. It can also overlook the astute nuances of the identity politics which embroil the North of Ireland particularly. Furthermore, the community-led revival of both languages is something which LHR theory's institutional focus fails to consider, this was negated through the inclusion of interview data. Such oversights have been negated with the inclusion of primary empirical data from interviewees.

From a peacebuilding perspective it is clear that the broad temporal scope of both projects must continue. Positive peace has not been achieved in either context with cultural and linguistic rights being essential realisations before peacebuilding can be deemed complete, they are more than mere peripheral afterthoughts which will self-correct given the absence of overt violence. This has been proven through the accounts of Gaeilgeoirí and Euskaldunak and the failures of all three states to implement language rights for these communities in a meaningful manner serves to perpetuate symbolic injustices rooted deep in the history of both regions. This failure continues to undermine cross-community reconciliation to this day. The cases of the North of Ireland and Euskal Herria are testament to the fact that hybrid peacebuilding models must go beyond political power-sharing or partial autonomy which continues to stumble and it must also seek to include cultural equity for all parties involved to ensure parity of existence for every citizen alive during conflicts and for generations to come.

This research has highlighted two critical recommendations which bear weight for policymakers in both the North of Ireland and Euskal Herria. The first is that there is a dire need for a shift away from symbolic recognition of these historical communities who feel as though they are being paid lip service by states which have long ignored them to enforceable commitments such as effective and timely service provision in the language of a person's choosing and bilingual signage to increase the visibility of languages which have been revived in spite of government efforts to marginalise them. The second is the need for context-specific, depoliticised language planning frameworks which cover all facets of society in both regions which once again include achievable goals and practical support in the form of resources and financing.

This thesis has demonstrated that linguistic rights are central to peacebuilding, not auxiliary to it. The persistent disconnect between symbolic recognition and lived linguistic equality in both the North of Ireland and Euskal Herria highlights a blind spot in contemporary peacebuilding frameworks. The findings herein call for a fundamental shift in how international organisations intervene in post-conflict settings. Peace agreements and minority protection frameworks under the CoE and UN need to expand on procedural guarantees and include enforceable, measurable commitments to linguistic inclusion. This should include the addition of language rights to periodic monitoring mechanisms, funding community-led language revitalisation as part of reconciliation programmes and ensuring language policy is designed with the meaningful input of grassroots actors. If the shortfalls of the peacebuilding projects highlighted in this thesis are not learned from, peace in other similar contexts will remain partial and incomplete. A peace process that fails to safeguard cultural and linguistic dignity is liable to reproduce the historic exclusion and marginalisation which fuelled the initial conflict.

Academically, this thesis is but a starting point for future studies which could incorporate other theoretical frameworks such as reversing language shift theory, postcolonial theory, ethnolinguistic vitality theory and social identity theory to further examine the experiences of minority language speakers through peacebuilding. There is also space for a study on the long-term impacts of bilingual policy reform in the wake of conflict which could monitor how a society heals going forward. The North of

Ireland and Euskal Herria are representative of a broad library of similar cases globally and the comparison with non-European cases is also of interest.

Across both contexts it is clear that state forces are not fulfilling their roles in the promotion of Euskara or Gaeilge. In the North of Ireland, Gaeilge continues to be marginalised and is subject to externally opposed politicisation from the state and reactionary Unionist communities. In Euskal Herria, while some regions are afforded a greater level of language integration, the community as a whole is in a state of disarray under the jurisdiction of two states with broadly differing approaches to Euskaldunak and within Spanish territory the community exists within two different regions which adds another layer of complexity, none of which appears to be managed with a broader plan for Euskaldunak as a whole. While attitudes have shifted among those external to the linguistic groups, that does not stop instances of discrimination and pushback wherever linguistic promotion is of concern. The Spanish state appears to believe autonomy for a section of Euskal Herria is sufficient to support the community while the French state does its best to ignore their existence. Eusko Jauriaritza as a result is left to manage autonomy for a portion of the population of Euskaldunak while still entirely unfree to strive for the good of all Euskal Herria while the North of Ireland remains a politically tumultuous society wherein Gaeilgeoirí are seeking extraordinarily little and being rewarded with even less. Nonetheless, neither approach is effective for Gaeilgeoirí nor Euskaldunak as their communities, thanks to strong bonds and consistent fighting for their right to exist and thrive.

Implementation gaps appear in both communities, and they are working internally to fill the gaps left by governments who have historically sought to oppress and eliminate them. Both languages have been heavily politicised by external actors and attempts made to tie the language to paramilitary organisations rather than a community of speakers with a unique linguistic identity who have existed in these regions for millennia. Despite both regions suffering through brutal regimes and violent conflicts which cost the lives of many, Gaeilgeoirí and Euskaldunak remain determined to ensure the survival of their community. Peacebuilding may have been a success in some aspects; however, when the linguistic rights of historical communities come into question, British, French and Spanish states have failed to fully implement their

linguistic human rights and maintain the colonial control over regions, populations and languages for whom they have shown little respect. Who could blame Gaeilgeoirí or Euskaldunak for failing to trust promises made to them?

For both Euskal Herria and the North of Ireland, real peace demands linguistic dignity, not just the absence of overt violence but the presence of durable cultural justice.

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Appendix A



Map of the nine counties which comprise the province of Ulster in the North of Ireland

Appendix B



Map of Euskal Herria depicting the seven historical regions.



Europe
South East Europe
Latin America-Caribbean
Asia-Pacific

Central Asia
Caucasus
Arab World
Africa

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The present thesis - ***Lost for Words. The Silence of Peacebuilding on Minority Language Rights in the North of Ireland and Euskal Herria*** written by **Ben Lyons** and supervised by Faris Kočan, University of Ljubljana - was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the European Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation (EMA), coordinated by Global Campus Europe.

