Dear Jessica,

Thank you for this e-mail.   I'll try to answer your two questions.

(a) HOW I PERCEIVED THE CONFLICT TO HAVE AFFECTED THE LGBT COMMUNITY AND THE MOVEMENT (or WHAT EFFECTS, IN MY OPINION, DID THE CONFLICT HAVE ON THE LGBT COMMUNITY AND ON THE MOVEMENT).

The IRA campaign had very little effect on the LGBT community.   For example, our venues and groups have always accepted everyone, of all creeds and classes, no questions asked.   (That was one of the factors that so puzzled Edwardian prosecutors and others about the gay world of Oscar Wilde, for example - how COULD an aesthete like him be interested in ill-educated post-office messengers?)   In fact, we were the only group to carry on socialising when the IRA started this (to all appearances, merely the latest in its periodic campaigns against Stormont) a lot of parish and other entertainments closed for a year or two.   Not so the LGBT scene - it was a well-known fact that the only people moving after hours inside the city security cordon were British soldiers or LGBT people.   For example, we kept the Europa Hotel going for the first couple of years, until the journalists discovered it (and then the hotel threw us out).

I don't know exactly when the young people of Belfast began to drift back into the city and to resume social life.   One IRA leader was so incensed that people were again starting to enjoy themselves, while "Ireland was still unfree", that he threatened to bomb the so-called Golden Mile (the entertainment axis of the city).   People had just grown tired of the whole mess, and were quietly resuming normal business.   New restaurants started to open up - even before the ceasefire.

There were several unsuccessful attempts to harness the LGBT world and liberation struggle to fit Sinn Féin's purposes.   I have long reckoned (but unfortunately never got the chance to gather statistics) that we have more cross-religious/community partnerships in our LGBT community than in any other group anywhere in Northern Ireland.   That is still a very noticeable characteristic of our community to this day - and racial discrimination is totally absent among us.

As we gained in visibility in the 90s, various political parties began to court us.   SDLP backed gay law reform as early as 1977 and 1979.   Sinn Féin adopted a very good policy document called Moving On, but took a long whiile to select openly LGBT candidates for even council seats.   The Alliance followed the Liberal Democrat line, although there were notable local refusuniks.

The DUP have always been, and remain, implacably opposed to any rights for LGBT people.   Given that, however, there are noticeable signs of softening among the younger members, leading to some surprising public gestures.

The nearest that the IRA campaign came to affecting our movement was probably during the Hunger Strikes, but by then the community was too strong to be manipulated by a small group.

(b) As to whether the Unionist or the Nationalist community was more supportive of us, that is really slightly irrelevant.   We have become big enough and powerful enough now to carry on with our own affairs.   For example, we have reached the point where we are managing to switch public attention away from the boring question of What causes people to be LGBT.   It is now almost accepted throughout the scientific world that LGBT individuals and couples can be found in almost every known species.   Homophobia, on the other hand, has been recorded in only one - the human race.   Secondly, Homosexuality is now accepted by every reputable scientists as a harmless natural variation, like left-handedness.   Homophobia, on the contrary, leads to hatred, violence and even death.

The obvious response is to switch scientific research to charting, analysising and describing Homophobia, with a view to either (a) finding a cure, or (b) at least alleviating the worst effects of this phenomenon.

I have seen your question taken further, cross-referencing the two national communities in Northern Ireland with Social Class, eg Are Working Class Protestants more homophobic than Middle-Class Catholics?

Belfast Pride (followed recently by other local prides) has successfully dispelled the myth that the vast majority of the general public in NI is homophobic.   It is quite clear that the prating homophobes form only a tiny, unpopular minority.   Year after year, despite bussing in supporters from rural towns and even from Great Britain, their "prayer meetings" can muster only one person for every hundred on our parade. numbers, not to mention the hundreds cheering us on from the pavements.

I hope these few random thoughts will be of some use to you, Jessica.   If you want anything clarified, please do not hesitate to ask.

Looking forward to hearing from you again, therefore, I remain,

Yours cordiallly,

P A

Date: Mon, 20 Aug 2012 18:46:18 -0500  
 From: JL-Toops@wiu.edu  
 To: alainlongchamp@hotmail.com  
 Subject: Re: Research  
   
 P A Lochlainn,  
   
 I appreciate your willingness to answer my questions. My apologies for the delayed response. I have been traveling and moving from apartment to apartment this month while still working on my research. The main reason I want to discuss my research with you and others is so that I will understand the perspective of a number of people from different walks of life who live in Northern Ireland. Discussing these ideas with different people helps me remain as open minded as possible and therefore I can better understand the topic I am researching.  
   
 My research focuses on how the unique situation in Northern Ireland has affected the gay rights movement there from the 1970s. Could you tell me a little about how you perceived the conflict to have affected the LGBT community and the movement? Do you believe that either the unionist or nationalist communities were more supportive of the LGBT community than the other?   
   
 Thank you for your patience and time,  
 Jessica Toops  
   
 ----- Original Message -----  
 From: "P A Mag Lochlainn" <alainlongchamp@hotmail.com  
 To: jl-toops@wiu.edu  
 Sent: Thursday, August 2, 2012 6:09:34 PM  
 Subject: RE: Research  
   
   
 Dear Ms Toops,   
 Thank you for this e-mail.   
 I am sorry to hear that we may not be able to meet.   
 I shall, of course, be quite willing to answer questions via e-mail or over the phone.   
 Looking forward, therefore, to hearing from you again, I remain,   
 Yours cordially,   
 P A MagLOCHLAINN   
   
   
 Date: Thu, 2 Aug 2012 01:40:29 -0500   
 From: JL-Toops@wiu.edu   
 To: alainlongchamp@hotmail.com   
 Subject: Re: Research   
   
 Mr. Lochlainn,   
   
 As it sounds like you will be busy during the rest of this week and I have been scheduling myself meetings up until the day that I leave, I may not be able to meet with you personally while in Belfast. Would you be willing to answer a few questions for me via email or over the phone instead?   
   
 Sincerely,   
 Jessica Toops   
   
 ----- Original Message -----   
 From: "P A Mag Lochlainn" <alainlongchamp@hotmail.com   
 To: jl-toops@wiu.edu   
 Sent: Wednesday, 1 August, 2012 12:12:28 AM   
 Subject: RE: Research   
   
   
 Dear Ms Toops,   
   
   
 Thank you for your e-mail query. We are of course quite glad to help with any research that sheds more light on the LGBT community in Northern Ireland.   
   
   
 Probably the quickest way to arrange a meeting is for you to ring me on 028 9066 5257. If you find my phone switched off during the next fews days, that is likely to be because I am attending a Belfsst Pride event. So keep on ringing, until we make contact.   
   
   
 Looking forward to meeting you, and to hearing all about your research project, I remain,   
   
   
 Yours cordially,   
   
   
 P A Mag LOCHLAINN   
 Hon President, NIGRA (NI Gay Rights Association).   
   
   
 Date: Tue, 31 Jul 2012 02:41:27 -0500   
 From: JL-Toops@wiu.edu   
 To: alainlongchamp@hotmail.com   
 Subject: Research   
   
 Dear Mr. Lochlainn,   
   
 I am a student at Western Illinois University and I am studying at the Queen' University Institute of Irish Studies Summer School. I am doing a bit of research on my own while I am in Northern Ireland on the gay rights movement here. I recently met with John O'Doherty from the Rainbow Project and he suggested I get in touch with you. I wonder if it would be possible for me to meet with you and discuss, or if that is not possible, for me to ask you a few questions via e-mail.   
   
 In solidarity,   
 Jessica Toops