

Institution: University of Aberdeen

Unit of Assessment: UoA 23 - Sociology

Title of case study: Addressing Intra-State Conflict: Civil Society Initiatives

1. Summary of the impact

Research carried out by the Department of Sociology at the University of Aberdeen into the nature and extent of communal division in societies emerging from conflict – particularly in Northern Ireland - has directly benefitted policy makers and community leaders through personal briefings and exposure on influential electronic media. The research findings have also benefitted action groups, peace practitioners, churches and other civil society groups in Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka and elsewhere through workshops and training materials; and they have raised awareness and understanding and stimulated debate through the purposeful use of online media outlets.

2. Underpinning research

Intra-state conflicts have emerged as the most frequent and deadly form of warfare in late modernity – with Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka providing just two recent examples. As these conflicts have proliferated so too have international efforts to resolve them via peace agreements. A team based in the Department of Sociology at the University of Aberdeen, led by John Brewer (Professor of Sociology at Aberdeen 2004-13) and Bernadette Hayes (Professor of Sociology at Aberdeen since 2005), has built a well-established reputation for research in this area.

Much of the team's research has focused on the conflict in Northern Ireland. In 2009, Hayes and Ian McAllister (Professor of Political Science at Australian National University) examined the impact of segregated and integrated education in Northern Ireland on attitudes towards community relations among the adult population. The results suggested that individuals who had attended an integrated school were significantly more likely to have friends and neighbours from across the religious divide, and a more optimistic view of future community relations. [3.1]

Another study, jointly produced by Hayes and Lizanne Dowds of Access Research Knowledge (ARK) examined religious affiliation in Northern Ireland and how it relates to church attendance. Published in 2010, the research found that since the early 1990s, weekly church attendance has declined sharply, particularly among the Catholic community, with nominal adherence – i.e., having a religious affiliation without going to church every week – now the norm. This work was further developed in a monograph by Hayes and McAllister (2013) focusing on the role of religious affiliation in terms of the socio-political dimensions of the conflict over a 50-year period. [3.2]

Building on earlier work by Brewer (2010) pointing to the neglected social dimension of peace processes, including the rights of victims [3.3], a further study (Brewer and Hayes, 2011) examined the relationship between conceptions of perpetrators and victims. Using the 2004 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, Hayes and Brewer found that those who claim a victimhood status are notably more likely than others to identify the 'other side' as the group mainly responsible for the conflict. As a result, Brewer and Hayes suggest, it is problematic to hold up victims as 'moral beacons' in post-conflict societies. [3.4]

Another study by Brewer et al. focused on the role of the churches in peace building in Northern Ireland. Based on a series of in-depth interviews conducted between 1999 and 2002, the study points to the key role of churches in ameliorating the conflict via facilitating secret communications between politicians and paramilitary organizations. [3.5]

A further study by Brewer et. al (2013) examined the religious outlooks of ex-combatants in Northern Ireland. Based on a series of interviews with 29 ex-combatants, the study assessed the role of religion in their transition from a military to a political campaign. [3.6]

Supported by a grant from the Leverhulme Trust, the team is continuing to broaden its understanding of intra-state conflict through the 'Compromise after Conflict' project, which investigates a range of societies emerging from conflict, such as South Africa and Sri Lanka.

3. References to the research

Academic publications:

3.1 Hayes, B. 2009. Education as a Mechanism for Conflict Resolution in Northern Ireland. *Oxford Review of Education* 35: 437-450.

3.2 Hayes, B. and McAllister, I. 2013. *Conflict to Peace: Politics and Society in Northern Ireland Over Half a Century*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

3.3 Brewer, J. D. 2010. *Peace Processes: A Sociological Approach*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

3.4 Brewer, J. D. and Hayes, B. 2011. Victims as Moral Beacons: Victims and Perpetrators in Northern Ireland. *Contemporary Social Science* 6: 69-84.

3.5 Brewer, J. D., Higgins, G. I. and Teeney, F. 2011. *Religion, Civil Society and Peace in Northern Ireland*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

3.6 Brewer, J. D., Mitchell, D. and Leavey, G. 2013. *Ex-Combatants, Religion and Peace in Northern Ireland*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Supporting Grants:

Brewer, J.D. and Hayes, B. (2009-2014) *Compromise After Conflict*. Leverhulme Trust, £1,267,093.

Brewer, J.D. (2010-2011) *Religion and Ex-Combatant Prisoners in Northern Ireland*. NIAMH, £30,000 (with G. Leavey).

Hayes, B. (2008-2010) *Religion in Ireland: North and South*. ESRC, £47,840 (with G. Robinson).

Hayes, B. (2010) *2010 Northern Ireland General Election Survey*. ESRC, £10,615 (with J. Tonge and P. Mitchell).

4. Details of the impact

The research described in this case study has directly benefitted policy makers and community leaders, peace practitioners and civil society groups in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, as well as building knowledge and stimulating debate via online media.

Brewer and Hayes have briefed influential Northern Ireland policy makers, community leaders and opinion formers on their research findings. These include Paul Jordan, Director of Funding Programmes at the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council (2012-2013), who commended the research as being 'insightful' and showing 'a deep level of understanding of the causes and ongoing impact of conflict' [5.1]; Norman Taggart, former President of the Methodist Church in Ireland and Patron of the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE; 2010-2011) [5.2]; and Eamonn Mallie, a veteran political journalist (2013), who praised the team for challenging conventional and evolving thinking on aspects of compromise and has invited them to contribute to his influential website on several occasions (see below) [5.3].

Hayes's research on integrated education has been used by NICIE to argue in favour of educating children from different communities together. A leaflet quoting Hayes's work was re-posted on the NICIE website in 2012; several of her outputs are available on the site [5.4].

Brewer and Hayes have both translated their research findings into practical peace-building events and workshops for civil society groups. Brewer contributed to an international conference on Trauma and Spirituality held in Belfast during March 2011; it brought together

over 250 delegates (mostly health professionals and representatives of faith communities) from around the world. Brewer presented his findings on the role of church leaders in providing prophetic and practical guidance during the Northern Ireland conflict [5.5].

In June and November 2011, Brewer delivered a set of workshops based on his research to an international group of participants from Sweden, Ireland and Northern Ireland at Ballymena under the auspices of Mediation Northern Ireland, a peace-building NGO. The aim of these workshops was to build civic leadership through international dialogue [5.6]. This programme was coordinated with an event in July 2010, at which Brewer addressed a civil society audience at the John Hewitt International Summer School in Armagh.

In October 2012, Hayes presented her research findings on church attendance to a seminar run by ARK, which aimed to promote knowledge-based policy in Northern Ireland. The audience included people from the voluntary sector and churches [5.7].

In 2011, Brewer's research findings on religion and well-being among victims and ex-combatants were translated by the Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health (NIAMH) into a training DVD, *Journey towards Healing* [5.8].

Internationally, Brewer has used his research insights to devise peace-building workshops for civil society groups, which he rolled out in Sri Lanka via the Asian Institute of Missiology in August 2010 and February 2012 [5.9]. Following the latter, Brewer agreed with the Institute that he would engage in a small scale but active civil society peace-building project bringing together Sinhalese and Tamil widows and their children. He also addressed an audience of civil society peacebuilders in Houston, Texas, under the auspices of the Gulen Institute in September 2010.

In September 2012, a former student of Brewer's set up a charity in Scotland called *Enabling Women to Engage in Peace Processes*, acknowledging that this was due to Brewer's work on gender empowerment in peace processes.

Brewer and Hayes have also actively engaged with opinion leaders, peace-builders, and the public through online media [5.10]. They have a following of nearly 7,250 on their Twitter account, @compromisestudy, which focuses on the role of compromise after conflict. Followers include politicians such as Northern Ireland's First Minister, Peter Robinson, members of every political party in the UK, international organisations like the European Union, NATO and the White House, social movements and victim rights activists, and world leaders like Nelson Mandela. In 2012, representatives of the Northern Ireland Assembly contacted Brewer for advice on victims legislation as a result of his tweeting and other social media comments. The corresponding 'Compromise after Conflict' website had nearly 8,000 hits in the 12-month period up to 1st July 2011 until 30th June 2012, with 6,320 of those being unique visitors. Hayes's work has been quoted on the website of Presbyterian minister and former politician Ivan Foster, on Worldsecuritynetwork.com, an international foreign and security policy network, and on Northern Ireland's highly regarded political blog, sluggerotoole.com (2008). While impressive themselves, these figures were dwarfed by the establishment of a very successful blog based on research by Brewer and Hayes in July 2013 and a correspondingly dramatic increase in their work's social media presence [5.10].

Brewer's research is widely reported and quoted on influential blogs in Northern Ireland, including Eamonmallie.com, a platform for independent thought run by leading political journalist, Eamonn Mallie (most recently in 2012) as well as on sluggerotoole.com (2012).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Contact details for relevant stakeholders (letters from the following three are provided):

5.1 Community Relations Council for Northern Ireland Director of Funding Programmes

The Director of Funding Programmes has corroborated contribution of research as evidence base for solving communal conflict in Northern Ireland.

5.2 Former President of the Methodist Church in Ireland

The former President of the Methodist Church in Ireland has corroborated the importance of this research in building understanding of and potential for resolving long-term social conflict.

5.3 Journalist

This journalist (freelance) has corroborated the research's value in sparking public debate on the meaning of compromise in post-conflict societies.

5.4 See NICIE website (<http://www.nicie.org/>) for the leaflet, *Time for Change! Integrated Education Helping to Build a Shared Future for Northern Ireland*: <http://www.nicie.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/final-leaflet-fire.pdf>

5.5 International 'Trauma and Spirituality Conference', Belfast 9-13 March 2011.

<http://ireland.anglican.org/index.php?do=news&newsid=3570>

5.6 Mediation Northern Ireland

<http://www.mediationnorthernireland.org/cms/training.html>

5.7 ARK website (<http://www.ark.ac.uk/>) for seminar presentation and resulting Update publication: <http://www.ark.ac.uk/publications/updates/update65.pdf>

5.8 Training DVD used by NIAMH: *Journey Through Healing, Trauma and Spirituality: An International Dialogue*. See website: <http://morrowcomms.blogspot.co.uk/2011/08/journey-towards-healing-conference.html>

5.9 NGOs

Asian Institute of Missiology

The institute will corroborate Brewer's (research-based) peace-building workshops for civil society groups, held in Sri Lanka through the Asian Institute of Missiology in August 2010 and February 2012.

5.10 Web-based media impact: Leverhulme 'Compromise after Conflict' project: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/compromise-conflict/>

Social Media Outlets:

Twitter: Currently, 8,081 Twitter followers. A majority of the followers are news and media organisations, other academic institutions, governments, political parties, pressure groups and politicians, including many based in the White House and Downing Street.

Facebook: In September 2013, the Facebook account had received 586 'likes'. It was also in a network that reached 2,084 people; this figure rises weekly, with a positive impact on website hits.

Website: Between July 2012 and July 2013, there were 81,319 page views of our website, of which 14,757 were unique. (Figures provided by DIT, University of Aberdeen)