Reconciliation and Peacebuilding:

The Integration of Theory, Policy and Practice in Northern Ireland

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Contents

Publications Submitted for Consideration

1. Hamber, Brandon and **Kelly, Gráinne** (2005). *A Place for Reconciliation? Conflict and Locality in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Democratic Dialogue. https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/en/publications/a-place-for-reconciliation-conflict-and-locality-in-northern-irel-3

2. Hamber, Brandon and **Kelly, Grainne** (2009) "Beyond Coexistence: Towards a Working Definition of Reconciliation" in Quinn, J. (ed). Reconciliation(s): Transitional Justice in Postconflict Societies. McGill-Queen's University Press: Montreal CA.

3. **Kelly, Gráinne** (2011). "Locating the Agreement in Evolving Conflict Theory" in Aughey, A. and Gormley-Heenan, C. Eds. *The Anglo-Irish Agreement: Re-thinking its legacy.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 143-157.

4. **Kelly, Gráinne** (2012). *Progressing Good Relations and Reconciliation in Post-Agreement Northern Ireland.* Derry/Londonderry: INCORE, University of Ulster. https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/en/publications/progressing-good-relations-and-reconciliation-in-post-agreement-n-3

5. Stanton, Emily and **Kelly, Gráinne** (2015). "Exploring Barriers to Constructing Locally Based Peacebuilding Theory: The Case of Northern Ireland", *International Journal of Conflict Engagement and Resolution,* Vol.3, No. 1, 33-52.

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6. **Gráinne Kelly** and Maire Braniff (2016) "A Dearth of Evidence: Tackling Division and Building Relationships in Northern Ireland", *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 442-467. https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/en/publications/a-dearth-of-evidence-tackling-division-and-building-relationships-3

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9. **Kelly, Gráinne** (2020, forthcoming). "Reconciliation and Peacebuilding" in Richmond, O.P. and Visoka, G. (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Peacebuilding, Statebuilding, and Peace Formation.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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Abstract

This thesis reviews the contribution of the author's listed publications to the improved understanding of the concept of reconciliation and its practical application in a society emerging from violent conflict. The outputs presented in part submission of a PhD by Published Work represent a body of empirical research conducted in Northern Ireland over a fourteen-year period (2004–2018), including the conduct of over 100 in-depth interviews with key change-makers in the society. The thesis establishes how the outputs submitted for consideration represent a significant and coherent contribution to knowledge in the interdisciplinary field of peace and conflict studies and outlines the importance of this work in terms of wider societal impacts. The thesis illuminates the author's explorations of two overarching research questions. Firstly, how has reconciliation been understood, designed, implemented and promoted within a society emerging from violent conflict, and how has the concept evolved within that society? Secondly, how can the field of peacebuilding seek to improve and enhance the relationship between theory, policy and practice for the explicit purpose of improving micro, meso and macro reconciliation processes? The thesis concludes with a call for the greater valorisation of a collaborative, integrated and multidirectional knowledge-generation process to ensure the enhancement of both peacebuilding theory development and peacebuilding policymaking and practice.

1. Introduction

1.1 Context

The end of the Cold War and the subsequent growth of intra-state conflicts precipitated what has retrospectively been termed an "era of peacebuilding" (Chandler, 2017, p.39). The international community responded to the growth in the number, frequency and duration of identity-based conflicts by significantly increasing the mandate and reach of their peace operations (Richmond, 2007). The rise in the number of peace agreements reached during the late 1990s and 2000s coincided with a growth in interdisciplinary scholarship which sought to interrogate both the assumptions on which peace interventions are made and the quality of the peace achieved (Cochrane, 2008; Richmond and Mac Ginty, 2015; Ryan, 2015). The liberal peace approach, which insists on the privileging of Western democratic systems, the elevation of free-trade policies and the promotion of a vibrant civil society, dominated. While the values of inclusivity and diversity in both reaching and implementing peace agreements continue to be defended by scholars and practitioners alike (Paris, 2010; Paris and Sisk, 2009), the liberal peace model has been accused of adopting an elite-focused and mechanistic approach to the transformation of conflict (Jackson, 2018; Jarstad and Belloni, 2012; Mac Ginty, 2011). In such contexts, the myriad peacebuilding tasks have become siloed, with the responsibility for effecting tangible political, economic and social transformation resting on individual institutions, agencies and inter-governmental bodies (Barnett et al., 2007), with little attention paid to the 'glue' that binds these individual processes together (Zelizer, 2013).

In his seminal book *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, John Paul Lederach (1997) called for a paradigmatic shift in how societies deal with conflict. He criticised the "rational and mechanical processes and solutions" used to address conflict as "not only ineffective but also in many settings irrelevant or offensive" (Lederach, 1997, p.24). Instead, he called for a

"movement away from a concern with the resolution of issues and toward a frame of reference that focuses on the restoration and rebuilding of relationships" (Lederach, 1997, p.24), placing reconciliation at the heart of long-term peacebuilding processes within deeply divided societies. Two decades on from Lederach's propositions, there has been significant development and evolution of the conceptualisation of post-conflict peacebuilding within the international policy arena since the top-down approach adopted by the United Nations in the 1992 *An Agenda for Peace* (UN, 1992). A 'local turn' in peacebuilding discourse, which seeks to prioritise the local context, local agency and partnership-working had gained increasing traction (Leonardsson and Rudd, 2015; Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013; Paffenholz, 2014) and is evident in contemporary peacebuilding policy decisions, which aim to take an integrated and 'whole of society' approach (Brunk, 2016; Call and Cousens, 2008; Martin, Bojicic-Dzelilovic and Benraïs, 2018; Tschirgi, 2004; Zelizer, 2013), with varying degrees of success. Lederach's early insistence that building sustainable peace requires engagement not only with the elite levels of society but also, crucially, with both the influential middle-range leadership and the 'grassroots' (Lederach, 1997, p.39) has now been fully integrated into peacebuilding theory, practice and policymaking (Paffenholz, 2014). In 2015, the *United Nations High Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations* review noted that peacebuilding not only requires broad and inclusive participation but "strong support for reconciliation and healing is also critical to preventing relapse into conflict" (United Nations, 2015b, p.xi).

The concept of reconciliation occupies a curious place in the uneven process of moving a society from violent conflict to sustainable peace. Alongside the United Nations' more prominent and frequent evocation of the term, reconciliation is now regularly cited in peace accords as an aspirational goal (Joshi and Wallensteen, 2018). It is also included in numerous lists of crucial peacebuilding priorities in various peace-focused compendiums, handbooks, peacebuilding training manuals and field guides (see, for example, De Coning and Senzwesihle, 2015; Mac Ginty, 2013a Reychler and Paffenholz, 2001; Salter

and Yousuf, 2016) and is prominently incorporated into the objectives of structural mechanisms, such as truth commissions, that are designed to address the legacies of past conflict (Fischer, 2011).

And yet, despite the increased acknowledgement of the importance of attending to the relational aspects of peacebuilding, reconciliation remains an under-theorised and under-researched topic within the wider peacebuilding literature (Cole, 2014). While much of the existing literature on reconciliation begins with an acknowledgement of its conceptual imprecision (Anstey and Rosoux, 2017; Hazan, 2009; Long and Brecke, 2003; Murphy, 2010), it is broadly understood as the component of peacebuilding that seeks to address conflictual and fractured relationships between individuals and groups in society (horizontal reconciliation) and citizens and state institutions (vertical reconciliation). As Bloomfield (2006, p.9) has argued, reconciliation is

> "an essential (and essentially political) ingredient in peacebuilding, just as central and just as necessary as economic reconstruction, legal reform and all other post-violence reconstructive and preventative measures".

The recognition of the fundamental importance of quality relationships to the sustainability of *all other* peacebuilding processes has hugely influenced the trajectory and focus of my research, which seeks to place reconciliation at the heart of conflict-related theory and practice discourses.

1.2 The Published Work Submitted for Consideration

The Published Work submitted for consideration in this thesis have sought to contribute to (i) a greater understanding of the relationship between reconciliation and wider peacebuilding processes, (ii) deeper insights into how a society emerging from violent conflict conceptualises and prioritises reconciliation, and (iii) the explanation as to why multidirectional relationship-building interventions should be validated and disseminated over time. Building on existing theoretical discourses, the empirical research which underpins these

publications was conducted in Northern Ireland, a society grappling with the multiple legacies of violent conflict and the persistently poor quality of both horizontal and vertical relationships. Within the wider field of conflict transformation, the Northern Ireland peace process was internationally lauded as an example of courageous political compromise and broad-based societal support that is worthy of emulation (O'Kane, 2010; White, 2013). As **Kelly (2011: Publication 3)** found, this was not previously the case, and the prior attempt to resolve the conflict via an elite-focused, inter-governmental approach (the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1995) is seldom included in peacebuilding literature as a significant example of the persistent attempts made prior to the achievement of an inclusive, multiparty peace accord in 1998. Framed within evolving conflict theory, this publication applies a retrospective lens to previous attempts to resolve the Northern Ireland conflict and outlines the often-overlooked contribution the Anglo-Irish Agreement made to the shaping of the more efficacious Belfast Agreement of 1998.

More than twenty years on from the Belfast Agreement, the fragility and tenuity of relationships at both political and communal levels is undeniable (Gray et al., 2018; Nolan, 2014) and there is still much to learn about the processes, decisions and investments that are required to address the persistent atmosphere of suspicion and distrust within the society. The individual Published Works presented in this thesis, which is a selection of a broader corpus of outputs by the author, each has its own primary research questions. However, when viewed collectively, they form a coherent and developing set of research inquiries focused on the challenges of transforming social and political relationships which interlock and build upon each other. References to those publications which form the substantive part of this thesis are highlighted in bold throughout the document.

1.3 Origins of the Published Work

The trajectory of my research inquiry over the past twenty years originated and developed from two, simultaneously held standpoints. Firstly, that there is intrinsic merit to be found in the rigours of theoretical and philosophical debate and the development of normative concepts as a means of advancing knowledge on a given topic. Secondly, that it is a wholly wasted opportunity not to attempt to apply knowledge gained to the realities of real-world policy and practice developments. As Steven R. Smith (2007, p.1) notes in his critical reflection on *Applying Theory to Policy and Practice*, "too often the business of theoretical and philosophical rigour and issues of detailed application are kept apart, to the profound detriment of both pursuits". Northern Ireland has proven to be an endlessly fascinating case study in which to advance theoretical debates about the multiple needs of a society emerging from violent conflict and to gather new empirical data that can contribute to the development of improved policy and practice outcomes for multiple societies grappling with deep and systemic division and mistrust. This thesis demonstrates the dual value of developing robust and high-quality research and thinking, and ensuring that academics take the opportunities afforded to them to publish in more accessible and user-friendly formats.

In 1997, I began my career as a Northern Ireland-based researcher working both within and outside university settings. Early research contracts at associate research institutes of the University of Ulster led to the publication of empirical research on the mediation of contentious parades disputes (Kelly, 1998) and victims/survivors of the Northern Ireland conflict (Kelly and Smyth, 1999). In both studies, the intersection of community-level experiences with public policy decisions was crucial to the research analysis undertaken and the dissemination approach adopted. Outside of the formal academic setting, I spent nearly a decade devising, implementing and disseminating rigorous empirical research studies on conflict-related topics within the policy think tank Democratic Dialogue (Kelly, 2004; Northern Ireland Civic Forum, 2002) and coordinating

an eight-country study on victim empowerment for the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (Foundations for Peace, 2008). As a consultant researcher, I produced policy-influencing reports for Belfast City Council on community engagement and good relations (Kelly, 2006) and reports for Healing through Remembering focusing on testimony and storytelling work (Kelly, 2005). From 2003 to 2008, I was engaged by Mediation Northern Ireland to accompany, observe and document their mediative interventions in Northern Ireland, the north of England and the Netherlands, with the explicit purpose of supporting reflective practice, sharing key insights and learning from the field. All of this work illuminated the inherent challenges of capturing transferable and usable knowledge without losing the essence of the particular location, culture and populations or betraying the trust and confidences built.

Taken together, these formative research experiences confirm the value of producing high-quality research which contributes not only to knowledge production but which also has the potential to advance social and policy change. The research submitted for consideration in this thesis was primarily generated subsequent to my return to academia in 2008, but was deeply influenced and underpinned by these formative research experiences gained while working within the non-governmental sector. I did not view my return to academia as a withdrawal to an 'ivory tower' position. On the contrary, I saw great value in the dual role of universities (and impact-oriented Ulster University in particular) when they seek to progress knowledge about important social issues while working collaboratively with those tasked with implementing changing ever-changing policies and practices on the ground.

1.4 Coherence of the Published Work

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate the *significant* and *coherent* contribution to knowledge of the Published Work submitted. Subsequent chapters will address the *significance* of this work in terms of the academic

contribution to knowledge, its wider societal impacts and the complex relationship between theory, practice and policymaking. The *coherence* of my body of publications is evidenced by the consistent intersection of three core areas, namely: the *thematic focus* of the research, the *subject focus* of the research and the *methodological approach* taken, which will be addressed in turn.

Firstly, a consistent leitmotif in my research has been the desire to better understand the nature of micro (interpersonal), meso (communal) and macro (state and citizen) relationships and how a society grapples with the paradoxes associated with addressing a violent and divisive past and building a shared and peaceful future. The publications submitted have been primarily concerned with enhancing understanding, and making *explicit*, the relational aspects of peacebuilding. This is best encapsulated through the discourse of 'reconciliation', which – as the research has demonstrated – is not, in itself, unproblematic. Viewed retrospectively, two overarching research questions have dominated my research and reflections over the past fifteen years, namely:

- How has reconciliation been understood, designed, implemented and promoted in a society emerging from violent conflict and how has the concept evolved over time?
- Within the study and implementation of peacebuilding, how can we improve and enhance the relationship between theory, policy and practice for the explicit purpose of improving micro, meso and macro reconciliation processes?

A second demonstration of coherence in the body of work submitted is the research focus on the singular case study of post-Agreement Northern Ireland. After 30 years of violent conflict, Northern Ireland reached a comprehensive, multiparty peace agreement in 1998. In large part, the content of the Agreement sought to repair and renew the horizontal relationships between the British and Irish states and the various political antagonists through the establishment of new institutional structures and arrangements. What the Agreement failed to explicitly address, other than in broad rhetoric, was the nature and quality of

intra- and intercommunal relationships within the society, vertical relationships between citizen and state, and the mechanisms by which a society acknowledges and deals with its violent past. Even prior to the peace accord reached, Darby (1997, p.157) observed: "It is difficult to imagine an ethnic conflict anywhere in the world which has been more thoroughly researched". In the past two decades, the quantity of research generated on the Northern Ireland conflict has not diminished, and there is a large body of work on the particular challenge of addressing intercommunal divisions within society within the disciplines of politics, sociology, psychology, education, community development and economics. However, there is limited work generated which has taken a holistic view of reconciliation in Northern Ireland for the express purpose of engaging in a broader debate within the wider international peacebuilding discourses, as will be evidenced in subsequent chapters.

Finally, a consistent methodological approach to the gathering of primary research data during the period 2004–2019 has been adopted, which demonstrates coherence in the Published Work submitted for consideration. Almost exclusively qualitative, this approach is reflective of my particular interest in documenting, exploring and valorising the explicit and tacit knowledge that is retained by practitioners, policymakers, academics and wider civic actors within the society. I have placed significant value on the engagement of research informants in in-depth discussions, using a semi-structured interview format, in order to tease out the areas of both agreement and discordance in people's knowledge, views and experiences of conflict. While I value and utilise available quantitative data from a range of sources – and have co-authored a recent study on the quality of the peace in Northern Ireland which relied heavily on statistical data and analysis (Gray et al., 2018) – I believe there is a quality to engaging directly with those in the field which adds depth and nuance to the research analysis. My work draws extensively on scholarly literature, but it is also informed by policy documents, practice guidelines, grey materials and wider media discourses in order to do justice to the complexities of the topic**.**

1.5 Significant Contribution to Knowledge: Thesis Structure

This thesis is based on an overarching puzzle and a premise. The puzzle is how a society emerging from conflict understands, engages with and participates in the process of reconciliation. The premise is that this matters, as the quality of relationships formed post-conflict may have a direct bearing on the long-term sustainability of peace agreements reached. In the chapters that follow, this thesis will demonstrate that the Published Work submitted represent an original and significant contribution to knowledge generated on this topic over the past fifteen years. This contribution is not confined to academic discourse, but has had both local and international reach and significance within both public policymaking and community-focused peacebuilding practice. Chapter Two begins by establishing that this work has made a significant contribution to scholarly knowledge, a traditional expectation within the academic community. It outlines how the building and testing of theory, and the gathering, analysis and presentation of new empirical data, has contributed to a growing academic discourse and body of knowledge on the mechanisms, challenges and opportunities of addressing relationships in a society emerging from conflict.

Chapter Three further outlines the important process by which the research-generated, theoretical and analytical knowledge created has been disseminated and integrated for the purpose of informing, developing and improving the fields of policymaking and practice. Chapter Four explores the relationship between theory (typically generated in academic contexts), policymaking and practice in greater depth, highlighting the value of working towards a more collaborative, integrated and multidirectional knowledge-generation process.

In a spirit of reflexivity, the thesis concludes with a consideration of my own positionality as an indigenous researcher to Northern Ireland and the inherent benefits and challenges this brings to the research process. It acknowledges the value of both working collaboratively and working as a sole researcher and

author. Reflecting on the platform the existing research has provided, the concluding chapter ends with an indication of a future research agenda to further develop my academic career within the increasingly influential interdisciplinary field of peace and conflict research.

2. Significant Contribution to Scholarly Knowledge

2.1 Effecting Scholarly Influence

The primary functions of academic publishing are to create a public record of your original contribution to knowledge, to enter into productive exchanges with other scholars working on similar topics and to expose your research and argumentation to wider public scrutiny. While those outside of academia may dismiss academic scholarship as impenetrable or indulgent, which is generated by the caricatured image of the '*Intellectual Impostures*' that Sokal and Bricmont (1998) sought to expose, this is rarely a fair or accurate criticism. The majority of scholars are motivated by a desire to develop new ways of thinking, improve practice, make positive social change within their given field and educate a new generation – and to do so in a manner which is both comprehensive and comprehensible. Leinhardt (2012, p.16) has argued that academic writing takes the form of an "asynchronous conversation" in which scholarly influence may be both swift and localised, but equally, may be slow and increment, taking the form of an "extended and internationally based dialogue" (Leinhardt, 2012, p.16). I would contend – and will go on to demonstrate – that the Published Work submitted in this thesis has been subject to both processes: the research undertaken has had a direct and immediate influence within both the scholarly literature and the policy and practice arenas and is also engaged in a more prolonged, but similarly significant, international conversation about the nature and purpose of post-conflict reconciliation within a wider peacebuilding discourse.

The purpose of this chapter is to identify and consider the gaps in knowledge that my research has contributed to reducing or closing and to evidence its influence on the intellectual debates within the sub-discipline of peace and conflict research. While a broadly chronological approach is taken to the publications referenced, this chapter is structured so as to identify and highlight a number of

specific contributions to academic knowledge and to relate them directly to individual publications submitted for consideration in this thesis. Four specific contributions are highlighted, which relate to (a) the review of existing literature, (b) the gathering and analysis of new empirical data, (c) the examination of policy and practice for reconciliation in Northern Ireland, and (d) the development and testing of a new theoretical framework for reconciliation in societies emerging from violent conflict.

2.1.1 Comprehensive review of local and international literature on post-conflict reconciliation

In the *A Place for Reconciliation?* research study **(Hamber and Kelly, 2005, 2009: Publications 1 & 2)**, an extensive review of existing and relevant international literature on post-conflict reconciliation generated a number of valuable observations which were of relevance to the scholarly study of reconciliation in violently divided societies. Firstly, in this earlier study, it was discerned that the concept of reconciliation was struggling to shake off its theological origins, which somewhat limited its acceptability and applicability in both the broadly secular discourse of peacebuilding and in societies without a dominant Judeo-Christian religious heritage (Hamber and Kelly, 2005, p.20). Secondly, it was evident that the concept of reconciliation was becoming increasingly coupled to, and conflated with, truth and justice processes, with the assumption that delivery of the latter would lead directly to the success of the former (Hamber and Kelly, 2005, p.21). At the time of writing, the empirical evidence to support this assumption was inconclusive (Gibson, 2004; Hayner, 2002). Thirdly, there was little consensus in the international literature as to the degree and quality of reconciliation possible in a deeply divided society. While the debates of most contemporary scholars at this time centred on coexistence as a realistic end-goal (Kriesberg, 2001; Sluzki, 2003; Theissen, 2004), others argued that this lacked ambition and that a more profound and comprehensive transformation of relationships was necessary to ensure long-term, sustainable peace (Lederach, 2001; Reychler and Paffenholz, 2001).

The study also undertook a review of the literature on reconciliation as it related to the Northern Ireland context. At that time, no comprehensive study had previously been conducted on the wider discourses on reconciliation within Northern Ireland society that encompassed the normative discussions of reconciliation and their practical implementation in addressing damaged relationships and the multiple legacies of past violence. This review of the limited literature available identified a dominance of theologically influenced work, which was perhaps unsurprising given the traditionally religious and church-attending society. What was evident was the reluctance of many researchers examining the practice of intercommunal relationship-building to use the term reconciliation to describe this work. This reflected the reality among community-based practitioners and public policy developers, who preferenced the arguably less challenging and more policy-aligning terminology of 'community relations', 'community cohesion' or, latterly, 'good relations'.

The 2010–2012 research study **(Kelly, 2012: Publication 4)** updated this literature review to include a more detailed desk-based examination of both the scholarly and the community-originating research studies which had been undertaken in Northern Ireland during a highly productive period of research outputs between 2004 and 2012.[1] In embarking on this comprehensive review, it was particularly advantageous to be a locally based researcher with wide networks and a detailed knowledge of the peacebuilding-focused research outputs being generated within the broad range of academic disciplines and community-based organisations.

In 2018, I was invited to critically examine the progress and direction of debates on reconciliation and their relationship to wider peacebuilding processes for the *Oxford Handbook of Peacebuilding, Statebuilding, and Peace Formation*

[1] There was a significant investment in research studies, particularly those focused on persistent areas of conflict and inter-communal relationships, by the PEACE Programme, Atlantic Philanthropies and other external funding sources during this period. Focusing on this time period allowed for a review of materials published since the previous review undertaken by **Hamber and Kelly (2005).** Other literature reviews on related topics have been undertaken by Gallagher (1995), Knox and Quirk (2000) and Conway and Byrne (2005).

(Richmond and Visoka, 2020) **(Kelly, 2020 accepted: Publication 9).** Edited by and including the work of leading academics in the field of peacebuilding and international relations, this handbook seeks to provide a systematic overview of the conceptual foundations and dominant intellectual discourses of key peacebuilding processes. Working on this publication was a welcome opportunity to revisit the widening literature on reconciliation and develop an overview of the discursive aspects of reconciliation in conflict-affected societies, including intra- and inter-group relations and local and international efforts to restore relations between individuals, groups, and state and non-state institutions. While this review of the contemporary debates on reconciliation confirmed the lack of consensus on the totality of reconciliation processes, it did identify a strengthening conviction among both scholars and practitioners about the centrality of relationship-building and 'dealing with the past' interventions within wider peacebuilding processes.

Taken together, these successive publications capture the development (and, at times, stagnation) of the local and international discourses on reconciliation, particularly in the post-Cold War era. These publications locate reconciliation within wider multilevel peacebuilding processes rather than accepting a limited, state-driven or person-focused understanding which is devoid of wider societal responsibility or impact.

2.1.2 Qualitative capture and analysis of diverse views on reconciliation in Northern Ireland

The motivation for the instigation of the initial research on the prospects of reconciliation in Northern Ireland, which culminated in *A Place for Reconciliation?* **(Hamber and Kelly, 2005: Publication 1)** was the observation that despite its increasingly common usage in political, policy and funding arenas, no consensus on its meaning was apparent, and resistance to its usage was perceptible within some communities and sectors. The literature search

conducted prior to the fieldwork undertaken identified no other study which sought to empirically examine both the concepts and the practices of reconciliation in post-Agreement Northern Ireland from the perspectives of those in positions of influence within the society. This empirical study sought to contribute to a greater understanding of how a cross-section of society (including political, civic and grassroots leaders) genuinely and honesty conceived of the term reconciliation and whether it had resonance in their own work and lives. The selection of informants was influenced by Lederach's (1997, p.41) assertion that middle-level leaders "are likely to know and be known by the top-level leadership, yet they have significant connections to the broader context and the constituency that the top leaders claim to represent".

The research study conducted 58 in-depth, semi-structured interviews and generated a wealth of new qualitative data on and insights into the contrasting ideological and practical views of reconciliation across traditional sectarian divisions, as well as across gender, age and social status. What emerged from the research was a unique insight into the challenging aspects of reconciliation and relationship-building for the research informants and concrete evidence of the opportunities and obstacles facing decision-makers tasked with its encouragement and promotion. The findings of this empirical research, and the wider issues it raised for the conceptualisation of reconciliation, were widely presented at traditionally academic and policy-focused conferences, roundtables and community workshops in Northern Ireland, particularly between 2005–2010, and are detailed in three additional chapters in edited volumes with significant international reach (Hamber and Kelly, 2005, 2008, 2009).

By the early 2010s, and more than a decade on from the 1998 Belfast Agreement which had included a public commitment to "dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust" (The Agreement, 1998, Declaration of Support), Northern Ireland remained a deeply divided society, with a sizeable percentage of the population continuing to hold negative perceptions of the political and social institutions, and those deemed as 'other'

(Morrow, 2012). With limited progress being made to instigate ambitious policy decisions to address the systemic and persistent nature of division, further research was required to more fully understand where progress had been made, what attention and intervention was still necessary and which issues warranted immediate prioritisation. The motivation for this study was the apparent siloing of policies and practices within distinct sectoral interests and government departments, resulting in a disjointed and unambitious set of programmes and interventions. A research proposal which would provide a qualitative and in-depth perspective on policy and practice priorities, and which would complement the statistical data already available, was submitted to the Equality Directorate Research Branch of the Northern Ireland Executive and a grant was awarded in 2010.

This two-year research study, which culminated in the publication of *Progressing Good Relations and Reconciliation in Post-Agreement Northern Ireland* **(Kelly, 2012: Publication 4)** gathered significant qualitative data which contributed to the existing knowledge on how respondents from the main political parties, key government departments, the civic and business sector and the community and voluntary sector felt that policy and practice interventions should be introduced or enhanced. In total, 31 qualitative interviews were conducted by the author and rigorously analysed for key themes, issues and meanings. As well as identifying a number of particular concerns, such as the disconnect between good relations and dealing with the past policy developments, the research also uncovered a deficit in the documentation and dissemination of good relations and reconciliatory practices, which was further explored in **Stanton and Kelly (2015: Publication 5)** and **Kelly and Braniff (2016: Publication 6)** and is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four of this thesis.

In 2017, an invitation to contribute to the ambitious four-country study *Challenging the Conventional: Making Post-Violence Reconciliation Succeed*, instigated by the Geneva-based Kofi Annan Foundation and Interpeace, led to a high-level international dialogue between scholars, practitioners and

policymakers. This research study provided an opportunity to revisit the persistent theme in my research, namely: how does a society which has been deeply affected by violent conflict conceptualise and operationalise the transformative process of reconciliation? The significant secondary data already identified and available for analysis was supplemented with the richness of 24 qualitative interviews with key political leaders, policymakers and practitioners in Northern Ireland which captured their views on reconciliation's achievements and setbacks, nearly twenty years on from the 1998 peace accord. The research data gathered in *Northern Ireland: Case Study* **(Hamber and Kelly, 2018: Publication 8)** provided new insights into Northern Ireland's progress (or lack thereof) towards reconciliation, as well as a valuable opportunity to engage with three other international scholars to compare the case study to three other societies (Guatemala, Democratic Republic of Congo and South Africa) emerging from periods of violent conflict and oppressive authoritarian regimes. The research conducted demonstrated the continued gap which exists between the ambitious language of reconciliation used in both policy and funding frameworks to address intercommunal relationships and the legacies of the past conflict and the realities of implementation within a political context deeply invested in the maintenance of ethnonational division. It also highlighted the continued tensions that exist between those who understand reconciliation as a profound and transformative process and those who view it as an unavoidable consequence of political compromise that is reluctantly engaged with to ensure that violent conflict is not reignited. A key finding of the empirical research conducted in completion of this case study was the ongoing incongruity that exists between those who view reconciliation as a meaningful and important concept to persist in promoting and those who are resistant to, or perplexed by, its continued elevation when progress to achieve it has been so protracted and uneven to date.

Taken together, the three empirical research studies **(Hamber and Kelly, 2005, Kelly, 2012, Hamber and Kelly, 2018)** on reconciliation in Northern Ireland which solicited the views and insights of 113 key change-makers within the

society over a 13-year period represent a substantive body of work which captures the deep, rich and often changing perspectives, conceptualisations and operationalisations of reconciliation in a shifting political and social post-agreement context.

2.1.3 Examination of practical developments in support of reconciliation in Northern Ireland

In the publications which sought to further understand the role and position of reconciliation within Northern Ireland society **(Hamber and Kelly, 2005; Kelly, 2012; Hamber and Kelly, 2018: Publications 1, 4 and 8)**, a review of the prior and existing policy and practice arrangements and processes was undertaken in each instance. While the policy and practice developments associated with community-focused relationship-building have been documented by others (Cochrane and Dunn, 2002; Hayes and McAllister, 2013; Nagle and Clancy, 2010; McCartney, 2003; Morrow, 2015; Tam et al., 2009), these three consecutive reviews paint an iterative and comprehensive picture of decisions taken to progress both the *past*- and the *future*-focused processes of reconciliation in the post-Agreement context. This 2005 study **(Hamber and Kelly, 2005: Publication 1)** also sought to highlight and problematise the diversity of reconciliation-related terminology ('community relations', 'good relations', 'community cohesion') which was being applied, often without further elucidation within the society, and flagged the potential for a misunderstanding of a process or outcome to emerge. This study provided an empirically grounded examination of the policy and practice programmes which had been initiated in post-accord Northern Ireland, highlighting both the significant focus on, and the investment in, people-to-people encounters and the worrying lack of urgency by the local political leadership to address the multiple legacies of the past. The follow-up publication (**Hamber and Kelly, 2009: Publication 2)** further reflected on the utility of developing an expansive definition of reconciliation

while recognises the paradoxes inherent in progressing one aspect while, often unintentionally, impacting negatively upon another.

Upon publication and dissemination of this study **(Kelly and Hamber, 2005: Publication 1)**, an issue commonly raised with the authors in both private discussions and public fora was the need to further specify and interrogate the policies and practices required to deliver on the ambitions of reconciliation. This drove an interest in developing a further study to examine the interventions required to progress reconciliation from a policymaking and practice-delivering perspective. The timeframe of the research (2010–2012) corresponded with a period of public policy stasis in addressing societal division in Northern Ireland. The two dominant political parties in the re-established Northern Ireland Executive had previously rejected the ambitious *A Shared Future* policy framework (OFMDFM, 2005) introduced during a period of direct rule from Westminster (2002–2007) but had failed to gain wider political or public support for the "anodyne" (Nolan, 2014, p.107) and unambitious *Cohesion, Sharing and Integration* consultation paper proposed as its replacement (OFMDFM, 2010). The research study **(Kelly, 2012: Publication 4)** generated a range of new insights and identified areas requiring ambitious decision-making and investment. At subsequent dissemination events and meetings, several public officials and political representatives indicated the value in having qualitative evidence to further complement and illuminate the statistical data provided by individual government departments and to inform the development of the new 'good relations' strategy, *Together: Building a United Community*, published in May 2013. As noted previously, **Hamber and Kelly (2018: Publication 8)** provided an additional opportunity to review the policy context in Northern Ireland as it pertained to both relationship-building and dealing with the past and to contribute to the development of a wider international discourse on reconciliation, based on case study research.

Central to the development of context-specific and effective policymaking and peacebuilding practice is the ability to learn iteratively from past interventions

and to draw on, triangulate and share the knowledge and insights which are held by theorists, practitioners and policymakers alike. This issue is initially raised in **Kelly (2012: Publication 4)** and explored in greater depth in **Stanton and Kelly (2015: Publication 5)** and **Kelly and Braniff (2016: Publication 6)**. Given that this thread of argumentation encompasses debates about existing theory–practice divides, as well as those which address gaps in policy–practice and practice–practice learning, this is explored in greater detail in Chapter Four of this thesis.

The **Hamber and Kelly (2016: Publication 7)** article on personal testimonies and archives explored a crucial strand in the post-conflict reconciliation process: the ability of a society, the state and its citizens to acknowledge and deal with its violent past. To date, Northern Ireland has taken an uncoordinated and piecemeal approach to the past (Lawther, 2018; McEvoy, 2013), relying heavily on existing or extraordinary judicial structures to secure justice, on community-based and statutory-led processes to support victims and survivors of the conflict, and on a combination of bottom-up memorialisation and therapeutic processes to contribute to wider societal memory-making and healing. Directly informed by two empirical studies previously conducted on the extent and type of conflict-focused personal narrative and testimony-gathering processes taking place in Northern Ireland (Kelly, 2005, 2013), the 2016 article explored a specific proposal contained within the *Stormont House Agreement* (Northern Ireland Office, 2014) to establish an Oral History Archive as a central repository for individuals to "share experiences and narratives related to the Troubles" (Hamber and Kelly, 2016, p.5). The failure to establish an acceptable mechanism to deal with the legacies of the region's violent past has proven to be a major stumbling block in its ability to progress reconciliation. While many scholars have explored the wider processes in detail, the proposals to establish a repository of conflict-related narratives had attracted little attention, despite the complexities and challenges which such a structure would raise. Building on the previous empirical research (Kelly, 2005, 2013), long-term engagement with community-based storytelling projects and experience as research lead on the *Accounts of the Conflict* project that aimed to establish an online repository of conflict-related

testimonies, this article sought to review the scant detail contained in the policy proposals and highlight the areas which required further consideration and elaboration in any viable policy implementation. Additionally, it contributes to the growing international debates around the role and purpose of archives in societies emerging from conflict (Riano-Alcala and Baines, 2011; Toma, 2005; United Nations, 2015b; Wallace et al., 2014).

In summary, the cumulative explorations of the pragmatics of *implementing* reconciliation processes in a society emerging from violent conflict represent a valuable scholarly resource which tracks progress, setbacks and possible next steps for Northern Ireland's political classes and wider society alike. International scholars and practitioners can (and do) draw on these studies to further understand the realities of translating normative ideas and political rhetoric into concrete practical arrangements in the context of fragile, post-accord societies.

2.1.4 Developing and field testing a theoretical framework for post-conflict reconciliation

As previously noted, there is now broad agreement on the need to attend to both vertical and horizontal relationships in any process of building peace following violent conflict (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, 2011; Schaap, 2008; Simpson, 2014), albeit it has lacked the prominence given to the more mechanistic and measurable processes of state-building, security sector reform, economic development and promoting the rule of law (Anstey and Rosoux, 2017; Brouneus, 2007; Call and Wyeth, 2008). A review of the existing scholarly literature on peacebuilding and reconciliation in 2004 (**Kelly and Hamber, 2005**: **Publication 1)** found little precision in the ways in which the concept of reconciliation was understood or applied in practice. Various reasons for this were explored, including the following: that its theological roots lack relevance or resonance for many policymakers and practitioners; that it operates at multiple

levels and thus generalising its applicability can be challenging; and that it can be viewed as either discrete and limited or society-wide and transformative (Kelly and Hamber, 2005, pp.41-53). While efforts have been made to identify the various stages and levels of reconciliation (Bloomfield, 2006; Huyse, 2003) and its abstract intended outcomes (Kriesberg, 2004; Lederach, 1997), no systematic attempt to review the existing literature, extract the key elements and develop an accessible definition of reconciliation which would have policy and practice resonance had been attempted.

The lack of clarity in the international discourse was precisely mirrored in the context of post-Agreement Northern Ireland, which demonstrated an ambiguous relationship with the concept of reconciliation. As the research observed **(Hamber and Kelly, 2005: Publication 1)**, the concept of reconciliation was variously associated with political rhetoric, external funding interventions, victim-perpetrator encounters and abstract doctrinal teachings. Despite its continued citations in a range of contexts, it was still met with significant resistance and wariness as a result of this ambiguity and imprecision. Terminology such as 'community relations' and, later, 'good relations' were used to corral the work associated with relationships but were resisted by some because it placed undue emphasis on intra-communal (single-identity) and intercommunal (horizontal) relationships rather than on myriad and multidirectional relationships, including those between citizen and state (Belloni, 2010).

The significant scholarly contribution of this research output was in devising an accessible yet comprehensive and nuanced definition of reconciliation which was informed by a deep interrogation of the existing literature. Crucially, this five-strand definition **(Hamber and Kelly, 2005, p.38)** articulated the argument that reconciliation is both the *process* of addressing each individual strand but also the *paradox* of addressing the inevitable tensions which will arise from attempts to address each strand individually. As such, rather than proposing a simplistic, tick-box definition of reconciliation, the work sought to disaggregate the

processes for further illumination and comprehension while continuing to emphasize their interdependence and the tensions that exist between individual strands.

Importantly, this conceptualisation of reconciliation was not developed in isolation and disseminated without prior testing. Once drafted, an initial version was presented to and fine-tuned in collaboration with a research advisory group, made up of both academics and peacebuilding practitioners working in Northern Ireland. Subsequently, the working definition was utilised as a research tool in the semi-structured interviews conducted with the 58 research participants and tested for resonance, agreement and dissent. As the research findings outline, the response to the definition was overwhelmingly positive and its contribution to a more nuanced consideration of reconciliation was frequently highlighted. This use of theory-testing and theory validation in the field is an important contribution to methodological knowledge and speaks to the wider scholarly debates on the requirement to empower and support research participants' knowledge, capacity and agency in the theory development process (Jaccard and Jacoby, 2010; Lucas, 2003). The experience of explicitly soliciting and validating the tacit knowledge of non-academics is a thread of argumentation which is explored in greater detail in **Stanton and Kelly (2015: Publication 5)** and **Kelly and Braniff (2016: Publication 6)**, outlined in Chapter Four**.**

The **Hamber and Kelly (2018: Publication 8)** research study on reconciliation in Northern Ireland, which fed in to the wider international examination of reconciliation practices led by the Kofi Annan Foundation, provided another opportunity to test the working definition of reconciliation for applicability and resonance, nearly twenty years on from the Belfast Agreement. During the 24 interviews conducted as part of the study, all research participants were asked a series of questions about their prior knowledge of the working definition of reconciliation, their views on its utility and any additions or amendments they would suggest. While the detail of the responses is to be published in a journal article currently in preparation, an analysis of the responses provided indicated

that the majority (n=19) of respondents were familiar with the definition and indicated agreement and acceptance of its contents. Of those that felt the definition required some revision, the suggestions were for minor clarifications of concepts or the more *explicit* articulation of concepts such as justice and responsibility. The research findings and detail of the working definition were presented by the author at the high-level symposium on reconciliation convened by the former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the international peacebuilding organisation Interpeace in Bogota, Colombia, in October 2017.

2.2 The Collective Published Works and Evidence of Scholarly Impact

In their study of the *Impact of the Social Sciences*, Bastow, Dunleavy and Tinkler (2014, p.37) observe that the central form of measuring academic impacts of social science researchers is "for author B to cite an earlier author A's work, which implies that B has read the work and found it valuable in some respect". If, as they go on to say, "Academics very seldom cite other work that does not meet high professional standards or seems incorrect – they just ignore it" (ibid, p.37), then the following section provides substantial evidence of the level and reach of influence of the Published Work *within the academic literature*.[2] Chapter Three will focus specifically on the *wider societal impacts* of my research submitted for consideration in this thesis.

The Working Definition, published first as an Occasional Paper (Hamber and Kelly, 2004) and later in full in **Hamber and Kelly (2005: Publication 1)**

[2] All citations in this section below are from peer-reviewed journal articles, books and book chapters and include citations for works submitted for consideration as well as additional publications which disseminate the same research (Hamber and Kelly, 2005, 2008, 2009). I have not included references to PhD theses, of which there were many, including theses on reconciliation processes in Turkey, Rwanda, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Sierra Leone. A review of both undergraduate and postgraduate reading lists of modules on associated themes in peace and conflict studies and the Northern Ireland conflict indicates the frequent inclusion of **Hamber and Kelly (2005)** and **Kelly (2012)** in academic institutions in the UK and Ireland and in international academic institutions.

alongside the wider research findings, continue to be regularly cited within scholarly literature. Our original intention in developing this work was to progress the wider discourse on reconciliation within Northern Ireland, and there is ample evidence that the research has had visibility and resonance within the academic community *writing specifically about the Northern Ireland context*. Citations to our work have featured in articles, monographs and edited books on topics of direct relevance to reconciliation (Little, 2012; Morrow, 2016), segregation and community relations (Hassan and O'Kane, 2012; Hassan and Telford, 2014; Hughes et al., 2007; Knox and McCrory, 2018; McEvoy, McEvoy and McConnachie, 2006); social and economic development (Buchanan, 2014; Mitchell, 2010; Skarlato et al., 2016); human rights (Beirne and Knox, 2014); truth recovery (McEvoy, 2006); oral testimony work (Maiangwa and Byrne, 2015); conflict-related victimhood (Jankowitz, 2018); and the political transformation of former paramilitary prisoners (Shirlow et al., 2013). It has also been helpful in the development of argumentation on issues of public policy, including multilevel governance in Northern Ireland (Birrell and Gormley-Heenan, 2016); cross-border cooperation (Hayward, McCall and Damkat, 2011); political geography (Graham and Nash, 2006); education policy (Smith, 2011); and public policy and philanthropy in Northern Ireland (Knox and Quirk, 2016; Spencer, 2012)

Significantly, since publication, the research on reconciliation published by Hamber and Kelly (2004, 2005, 2006, 2009) has been cited extensively in *international academic literature*, and the theoretical framework of reconciliation has been considered in a range of geographical areas and thematic foci. Focusing on the wider post-accord context, the research has been cited within academic works which seek to conceptualise the processes and practices of peacebuilding and conflict transformation (Lederach and Lederach, 2010; Little, 2014; Maddison, 2015; Mitchell, 2009; Porter, 2007; Schneckener, 2016) and reconciliation (Bloomfield, 2006; Joyner, 2010; Little and Maddison, 2017). It has also been influential in the discussion of specific sub-themes around youth in conflict and peacebuilding (Kosic and Livi, 2012; Özerdem and Podder, 2015),

education and reconciliation (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo and Smith, 2017; Smith, 2010), and post-conflict victimhood (Bouris, 2007; McNeill, Pehrson and Stevenson, 2017). In many cases it is not merely a citation to our work which has been provided, but the five strands of reconciliation are quoted in full for the benefit of the readership. Examples include Maddison (2015); Novelli, Lopes Cardozo and Smith (2017), Muchemwa, Ngwerume and Hove (2013) and Morrow, Faulkner-Byrne and Pettis (2018).

This work has also contributed significantly to *the wider conceptualisations of post-conflict transitional justice processes and their intersection with reconciliation* (Aiken, 2013; Haider, 2011; Lambourne, 2016). The work has gained particular traction in debates on the implementation of top-down transitional justice mechanisms in the Balkans (Clark, 2009, 2014; Fischer, 2016; Jones, Parmentier and Weitekamp, 2012; Parent, 2015; Roter, 2015; Sverrisson, 2006), bottom-up mechanisms in Rwanda (Ingelaere, 2015, 2016; Sullo, 2018) and comparative studies, including an examination of truth and reconciliation processes in Sierra Leone and Peru (Friedman, 2017). A significant debate within some reconciliation literature rests on the centrality (or not) of forgiveness within the discourse on reconciliation. My own work in this area has argued that forgiveness is not fundamental to wider processes of societal reconciliation, although it may have some bearing on the quality of interpersonal processes. That said, the work of Hamber and Kelly (2004, 2005, 2006) has been regularly cited in these debates on reconciliation, theology and forgiveness (Doorn, 2011; Evans, 2018; Mander, 2009; Tombs, 2017), including case study research in Cambodia (Jeffery, 2014) and the Solomon Islands (Jeffery, 2017). Mander (2009, p.18) noted that

> "Hamber and Kelly (2004) have developed a thoughtful, comprehensive and influential list of the activities they consider essential to any process of reconciliation".

The Hamber and Kelly (2005) definition of reconciliation has also been cited in research on peacebuilding and reconciliation in a *diverse range of geographical*

regions affected by political or ethnic conflict, including South Africa (Abe, 2012; Bollaert, 2019; Metz, 2015; Sayed et al., 2016), the African Great Lakes region (Omeje and Redeker-Henner, 2013), Zimbabwe (Benyera, 2016; Rwafa, Mushore and Vhutuza, 2014) and Uganda (Jeffery, 2011). In South Asia, studies which have focused on ethnic violence in India (Rauf, 2011), the development of peacebuilding models in Southern Philippines (Andales-Escano, 2015), constitution-making in Timor-Leste and Bougainville (Wallis, 2014) and reconciliation and reintegration in Nepal (Upreti, 2010) have all cited this body of work. The research has also been cited in regional interrogation of the Europeanisation of conflict resolution (Stefanova, 2013) and in a review of 50 years of German–Israeli relations as a contemporary model for both inter-state and micro-level reconciliation (Wittlinger, 2018). In Latin America, which has experienced the legacy of the authoritarian regimes in several states, the work was cited in research on the reparative effects of human rights trials in Argentina (Figari Layús, 2017) and reconciliation-oriented leadership in Chile (Lieberfeld, 2011). It has also been influential in the debates on social reconciliation in Colombia (de Gamboa Tapias, 2010; Murillo Amaris, 2012). Illustrating Leinhardt's observation about the often slow and asynchronous nature of scholarly impact, nearly fifteen years on from its original publication, the reconciliation framework proposed has been recently cited in explorations of reconciliation initiatives in Syria (Khoury and Ghosn, 2018) and in an examination of pathways to reconciliation for Islamist groups in Mali and Lebanon (Gade and Bøås, 2018).

Transcending the narrower confines of the peacebuilding literature, which focuses predominantly on the aftermath of violent conflict or authoritarian regimes, the conceptualisation of reconciliation proposed has also been cited in relation to *decolonisation discourses and indigenous and aboriginal reconciliation and apology processes* (Clark, de Costa and Maddison, 2016) with particular focus on both Canada (Belanger, 2019; Nagy, 2017) and Australia (Auguste, 2010; Moran, 2006; Paradies, 2016). Moran (2006, p.113) wrote of the Hamber and Kelly definition (2005):

> "This working definition is useful, as it provides a basic yardstick against which Australian reconciliation can be assessed. It is also a way of considering whether reconciliation is the 'right' process for Australia at this juncture".

As anticipated, the Northern Ireland-focused research on good relations and reconciliation **(Kelly, 2012: Publication 4)** was subsequently cited in a range of academic publications specifically writing on this topic. The research study was cited in journal articles on sectarianism and the impact of inward migration to the region (Garvey and Stewart, 2015), the role of museums in dealing with the past (Bigand, 2017), attitudinal surveys on community relations (Devine and Robinson, 2014) and young people's perceptions of parading (Leonard and McKnight, 2015), as well as in monographs on immigration and population movement in Northern Ireland (McAreavey, 2017). However, it was also cited in wider peacebuilding discourses on the multilevel challenges of deeply divided societies (Maddison, 2015) and the influential empirical research on Everyday Peace Indicators (Mac Ginty, 2013b. While it is too early to track citations for more recently published articles, the altmetric evidence suggests that these works have been regularly accessed by other scholars in the field.

While the goal of the engaged social scientist is to have real-world influence beyond academia, the process by which scholarly contributions are recognised, examined, debated and validated by their academic peers remains essential. As demonstrated, the Published Work submitted in this thesis have been widely cited across both academic disciplines and territorial specialisms and continues to demonstrate utility in shaping new thinking and argumentation, leading to peer recognition of the status of the author as a researcher with an in-depth understanding of the challenges of the relational aspects of peacebuilding in a society emerging from conflict.

3. Significant Contribution to Societal Change

The societal impact of academic research – on government, civil society, business, media and culture – has grown significantly in the post-World War II era, and there is an increasing onus on researchers to demonstrate the role that knowledge development has in contributing to wider decision-making and social change (Bastow, Dunleavy and Tinkler, 2014). Having worked in both practice-focused and policy-influencing positions outside of academia, I am acutely aware of the demand for academic knowledge to be accessible and translatable for wider policymaking and implementation purposes. This chapter focuses on evidencing the influence of the Published Work in policy, practice and funding settings, both in Northern Ireland and internationally.

3.1 Impact on Reconciliation-Focused Policy and Practice Development in Northern Ireland

As noted previously, the origins of the two-year qualitative research study (2003–2005) which culminated in the publication of an occasional paper outlining a 'Working Definition of Reconciliation' (Hamber and Kelly, 2004) and a substantial research report (**Hamber and Kelly, 2005**: **Publication 1)** lay in the growing observation that, despite its increasingly common usage, the term 'reconciliation' was both ill-defined and contested within local and international literature and policy and practice discourses. The study had three key objectives: to explore and unpack the existing theorisation of reconciliation following violent conflict in the literature; to problematise its implementation within the Northern Ireland context; and to devise recommendations to make a practical contribution to policy and practice environs. In pursuit of the last objective, we were keen to engage directly with policymakers and practitioners to explore what we identified as a deficit in the local understanding and implementation of reconciliation: this objective had been forefronted not only in the 1998 Belfast Agreement but in the

priorities of substantial grant-makers in Northern Ireland over the previous decade.[3] While recognising that competing understandings of reconciliation exist in many deeply divided societies, this lack of conceptual clarity appeared particularly problematic in Northern Ireland, where its meaning appeared ambiguous and required further interrogation.

In the period subsequent to publication, the research findings and the theoretical framework for conceptualising the key strands of reconciliation were widely presented at hosted roundtable events, policy and practice fora, and private meetings with political parties, government officials and funding bodies. With few exceptions, the research findings were appreciatively received, and we were particularly encouraged by the response from the Special European Union Programmes Body (known as the PEACE Programme), as, like several other observers, we had been particularly critical of the lack of precision in the objectives of this substantial funding stream and the unspoken theories of reconciliatory change which drove particular funding decisions.

3.1.1 Impact on European funding practice

In 1995, the European Commission introduced a significant funding programme to Northern Ireland and the Border Region of the Republic of Ireland in an effort "to reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation" (European Structure Funds, n.d., p.31). However, mid-term reviews of its first iteration (1995–2000) found that funded organisations had difficulty understanding and thus measuring impacts of reconciliation and were

[3] In addition to the explicit prioritisation of reconciliation in the European Union Peace Programme, the Atlantic Philanthropies had an explicit pillar of funding focused on 'Human Rights and Reconciliation' before its closure in 2015. The Atlantic Philanthropies have invested more than £350 million in Northern Ireland since 1991 (McKay, 2017). The Ireland Funds, established in 1976, has raised over $600 million for a range of causes in Ireland, north and south, and articulated a specific 'peace and reconciliation' objective in its grant objectives (Ireland Funds, 2019). The International Fund for Ireland, established in 1986, articulates its mission as "to underpin efforts towards peace by promoting social and economic advance and encouraging contact, dialogue and reconciliation between nationalists and unionists throughout Ireland" (IFI, 2019).

given little guidance on how to do so (Coopers & Lybrand, 1997; Paisley, Hume and Nicholson., 1997; NIVT, 1997). Despite this, an independent review of its second iteration (2000–2004) again noted that "a clear definition of reconciliation remains as elusive as in the PEACE I Programme" (Harvey, 2003, p.22). Its absence meant that each body tasked with the allocation and distribution of grant aid defined the term differently, impacting negatively on how activities were understood to contribute to a broader reconciliation objective. While this lack of conceptual clarity was a motivating factor behind the development of our own study, directly influencing the programme was not forefront in our objectives, as there was little certainty about whether a third iteration of the programme would be forthcoming post-2004.

However, a two-year extension to PEACE II was agreed in early 2005, much to the relief of the increasingly reliant community and voluntary sector in the region. Responding to previous criticism, the EU Structural Fund Programme for Peace and Reconciliation embedded the Hamber and Kelly definition (2005, p.38) into their priority areas and criteria for how all future PEACE funding would be allocated from 2005 onwards (SEUPB, 2007, pp.28-29, 40-41). Subsequently, all applications made for funding were scored on what was termed "reconciliation criteria", and these were, as the documents outlining these criteria noted, based on what became known as the "Hamber and Kelly Reconciliation Model" or the "Five Strand" model. Significantly, the weighting for reconciliation in the project-scoring process was increased from 6% to 20% for the PEACE II Extension Programme (2005–2006). This adoption of the definition (**Hamber and Kelly, 2005, 2009**: **Publications 1 & 2)** by the PEACE Programme was noted by Lord Rooker in the House of Lords in response to a written question. Outlining the tighter focus adopted by the PEACE II Extension Programme, he stated:

> "The Peace II distinctiveness and reconciliation criteria ensure that only projects which pave the way to reconciliation and address the legacy of conflict or take the opportunities arising from peace are supported under

> the programme. To meet the distinctiveness criteria, an application must demonstrate sufficient targeting towards groups, geographical areas, and sectors/activities adversely affected by the conflict" (Hansard HL Deb, 5 June 2006).

During 2005 and 2006, over €160 million in grant aid was allocated to organisations and projects primarily working within the community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of the Republic of Ireland.

A third iteration of the PEACE Programme was introduced in 2007. Worth over €333 million in grant aid, the Hamber and Kelly (2005, p.38) proposed definition of reconciliation was fundamental to its redesign and reorientation and was further embedded in the Programme's core objectives. The Operational Plan for PEACE III (2007–2013) noted that the five-strand model "helped to clarify the term, encourage more understanding of reconciliation and refine the 'uniqueness' of the Programme even further" (SEUPB, 2007, p.29). The Managing Authority for the programme, the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), has consistently acknowledged the significant influence of the research on the Programme design and delivery from 2005 onwards. Over 400 large-scale strategic projects were funded between 2007 and 2013, and explicit reconciliation objectives were built in to the criteria for project selection and their subsequent implementation and evaluation. All potential projects in the Programme were required to clearly articulate how their project aligned with the five strands proposed in the definition of reconciliation, and were scored accordingly. This represented a fundamental shift in the PEACE Programme design and implementation. On receipt of grant aid, all successful projects assessed their progress against the same reconciliation criteria in quarterly returns. This regular reflection on the 'Hamber and Kelly model' served to increase familiarity with the key concepts presented, supported reflective practice and further embedded the research within a wide range of sectors. Delivery partners utilised the work of **Hamber and Kelly (2005)** to develop practical toolkits for community-based organisations

that wished to engage and build relationships across existing divides (Monaghan County Council, 2011; Pobal, 2010).

The scale and complexity of the PEACE Programme was such that it required an elaborate delivery mechanism to maximise both the democratic processes and the potential impact on target groups and areas. The Programme involved a broad range of decision-making and implementing bodies at both regional and local levels, including government departments, non-governmental organisations and partnership models comprising local councillors, civil society, business and trade union representatives. All delivery partners and their decision-making committees required extensive training in the funding criteria, including the work of Hamber and Kelly (2005), thus disseminating the research into a broad and diverse range of sectors. This work challenged established practices in funding decision-making, ensuring that grant aid was targeted at programmes which would effectively deliver on reconciliation objectives. Between 2000 and 2013, an estimated 16,000 applications were assessed and 7,900 were awarded funding, representing around €1.25 billion in grant aid. The Hamber and Kelly (2005) research has subsequently been utilised by professional programme evaluators as a tool to assess the efficacy and impact of PEACE Programme-supported projects and other interventions with explicit reconciliation objectives (ASM Horwath; Deloitte, 2010; SEUPB, 2013).

Given the unique manner in which EU Structural Funds were used to support peacebuilding work in Northern Ireland, the European Commission closely monitored the administration and impact of the PEACE Programme to extrapolate learning to other regions. This impact was scrutinised by the Committee on Regional Development of the European Parliament, with the Committee reporting that "[t]he designers and implementers of PEACE III, when selecting projects for funding, must have a sound understanding of Hamber and Kelly's work" (European Parliament, 2008, p.12). The authors were invited to contribute to a *Peace Network of European Cities and Regions*, established in 2009, which met for several years to communicate the experience of managing,

implementing and evaluating EU PEACE funding with European counterparts. More recently, this led to the subsequent co-authoring of a review of existing provision for the exchange of best practice in relation to peace and reconciliation in Europe and beyond on behalf of the SEUPB (Braniff et al., 2017).

In 2014, a PEACE IV Programme (2014–2020) worth €270 million was announced. In an effort to align the programme more closely with government policy priorities, it focuses on four core areas of investment, namely shared education initiatives, support for marginalised children and young people, the provision of new shared spaces and services, and projects that will build positive relations with people from different communities and backgrounds. The PEACE IV Cooperation Programme document stressed the continued influence of the Hamber and Kelly definition of reconciliation in the design of the new Programme, noting that the core objectives of PEACE IV "will be to support actions that will develop and deepen reconciliation between divided communities; increase tolerance and respect, promote increased community cohesion and contact, enhance cross-border cooperation and address the legacy of the past" (European Commission, 2014). The overall significance of the research lies in its substantial influence in shaping and framing the discourse on the *specifics* of the process of reconciliation in a society emerging from conflict. This work challenged established practices in funding decision-making, ensuring that grant aid was targeted at programmes which would effectively deliver on reconciliation objectives.

3.1.2 Impact on policy discourses on peacebuilding in Northern Ireland

The reach of this body of Published Work has extended beyond the PEACE Programme and has entered the broader public policy discourse. In 2010, Belfast City Council acknowledged that its Good Relations Strategy "was underpinned by the reconciliation theory outlined by Hamber and Kelly" (Belfast City

Council, 2014). That same year, there were calls by the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council (NICRC, 2010, p.15) for the adoption of the Hamber and Kelly definition to frame the newly devolved Assembly-led policy on "cohesion, sharing and integration". Quoting the reconciliation definition in full, a research report by the Corrymeela Community and the Understanding Conflict Trust called for a shared definition of reconciliation to be developed at policy and funding level, based on the Hamber and Kelly model (Morrow, Faulkner-Byrne and Pettis, 2018, p.7). A report by the civil society-led 'Galvanising the Peace Network', based on consultations with over 25 community relations groups and 45 facilitated workshop discussions across Northern Ireland, noted that the Hamber and Kelly definition of reconciliation:

> "should remain as the basis in planning and building a sustainable peace in Northern Ireland. These elements should be reaffirmed by the Executive as the foundations of a future peace building framework and strategy for Northern Ireland" (Galvanising the Peace Network, 2017, p.2).

Given its significance and reach, the adoption of the Hamber and Kelly (2005) framework for reconciliation by a key contributor to political, economic and social change had a profound effect, not only on grant-making, policy and practice environments but also on broader societal discourse on reconciliation in the region. Although not reported on in the **Hamber and Kelly (2018: Publication 8)** report, the qualitative interviews with key political leaders, policymakers and practitioners revealed that 20 out of the 24 individuals interviewed were familiar with the working definition of reconciliation, and all indicated that the definition had been helpful in framing their understanding of the areas which require attention in a post-conflict context.

Following the publication of the 2005 research on reconciliation and its subsequent incorporation into the EU PEACE Programme, it became increasingly evident that further research was required to identify the key priority areas for addressing deep societal division and mistrust within the policy arena.

Earlier post-Agreement attempts to develop cross-departmental policies to improve intercommunal relationships had been resisted by the two largest political parties, either because the proposals were a product of direct rule from Westminster or because they might threaten the traditional voting blocs, if successful in their ambitions. The identification of medium-term (five-year) priorities which could form the basis of a new policy framework was attractive from both an academic and a policymaking perspective and research funding was secured from the Equality Directorate Unit of the Northern Ireland Executive.

The research study identified twelve key priority areas for the 2012–2017 period, and eight specific recommendations to be considered by those developing policy and funding priorities within the Northern Ireland Assembly and more widely. In a debate in the Northern Ireland Assembly on 12 June 2012, the Alliance Party MLA Chris Lyttle noted that this report "sets out that we remain a very deeply divided society, polarised on some of the most institutionalised structures, including housing and education". He went on to note: "The report challenges the Government to turn pilots and projects into ambitious and courageous public policy decisions that place integration at the heart of government delivery" (HC Deb, 12 June 2012). The findings of this study were widely disseminated, and the study has been cited by officials in the Good Relations Office of the Northern Ireland Executive as a significant influencer in the development of the most recent policy strategy *Together: Building a United Community* (T: BUC) covering the period 2013–2018. As noted in **Hamber and Kelly (2018: Publication 8)**, the T: BUC document frames its ambitions much more explicitly in terms of delivering on reconciliation, citing the word 26 times in the document, in contrast to the three times it is referred to in the previous (and ultimately rejected) *Cohesion, Sharing and Integration* policy document released in 2010 for consultation. The vision articulated in the T: BUC document was of "[a] united community, based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation", which aligned with the recommendation in **Kelly, 2012: Publication 4)** to "embrace the language of profound change" (Kelly, 2012, p.107) and to use "clear and unequivocal language" (ibid, p. 108) of

reconciliation, as used in the 1998 Belfast Agreement. Discussions with those close to the policymaking process indicate that, alongside increasing pressures from other sources, the empirical evidence presented in **Kelly (2012)** allowed them to make a strong case for the increased prominence of and emphasis on reconciliation to be included in the final document published. Additionally, in a review of the PEACE III Programme and in response to the consultation on PEACE IV, the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, which acts as an umbrella body for the community and voluntary sector, cited **Kelly's (2012: Publication 4)** research in support of its arguments on the successes and challenges facing the sector in addressing the legacies of conflict (NICVA, 2014, pp.10-11).

Reflecting on the substantial impact of the research conducted over an extended period, it is heartening to recognise that, despite some misgivings about the mechanistic manner in which the Hamber and Kelly definition of reconciliation was, at times, utilised, there is substantial evidence that its influence penetrated deeply into the knowledge and repertoire of individual peacebuilding practitioners, organisations and institutions, and influential international donors.

3.2 Impact on Public Discourses Dealing with the Past and Reconciliation in NI

Following a five-year period of direct rule from October 2002 until May 2007, Northern Ireland experienced an extended period of devolution, with the Northern Ireland Assembly sitting from May 2007 until January 2017. During this decade, the persistent challenge of how to deal with the past was considered by local political leaders, and an effort was made to make progress in agreeing the framework for new institutional arrangements to address the legacies of the past. That said, the proposals that were outlined in the resultant *Stormont House Agreement* (2014) were brief and continue to require further interrogation and extrapolation before implementation is possible.

The 2016 journal article **(Hamber and Kelly, 2016: Publication 7)** explored a challenge which lies at the heart of reconciliation in a post-conflict society: how do we come to terms with the past in a way that does not further damage our ability to live peacefully together in the future? The article builds on two pieces of primary research conducted by the author (Kelly, 2005, 2013) and interrogates the proposal contained in the 2014 *Stormont House Agreement* to establish an archive of personal testimonies and to consider the wider implications for other societies emerging from conflict. In addition to undertaking the research, the author is a co-founder and active member of the 'Stories Network', which was established to provide a space in which testimony-gathering and oral-history-archiving organisations can regularly meet to discuss, share and advise on both policy and practice developments in the field. Recognised as having particular expertise on this topic, I was invited to brief the Party Leaders Group at Stormont (16 February 2015) and the Secretary-General, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Irish Government (6 March 2015) on the development of a centralised Oral History Archive, and held meetings with individual political parties to brief them on wider ethical, methodological and practical challenges of establishing digital archives on sensitive topics. The article **(Kelly and Hamber, 2016: Publication 7)**, published in a leading human rights journal, outlines how, despite the lack of a framework for dealing with legacy issues, 'unofficial' community-level testimony-gathering has provided opportunities for individuals' experiences to be documented, acknowledged and disseminated. With these issues still the focus of ongoing negotiations around a return to a power-sharing Assembly, this article still has direct relevancy for policymakers seeking to design the detail of such an archive and the Northern Ireland Office continues to solicit my expertise both on the practical implementation of such a proposal and on its wider ethical and societal impacts. Most recently, the argumentation contained in **Kelly and Hamber (2016: Publication 7)** was extensively cited in a report prepared for, and presented to, the Irish Government's Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement (Leahy, 2019).

3.3 Impact on International Policy and Practice Discourses

Internationally, the **Hamber and Kelly (2005)** definition of reconciliation has entered policy and practice discourse and debate. The Hamber and Kelly (2005) definition has been prominently cited by the influential international 'Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers'[4] in a commissioned paper for practitioners "in considering their own reconciliation plans and practice" (Keyes, 2019). A workshop to further explore the contribution of definitions of reconciliation (including Hamber and Kelly, 2005) has been organized by the United States Institute for Peace and the newly established Mary Hoch Center for Reconciliation, George Mason University, in early October 2019, which the author will attend.

Demonstrating the reach of the work of Hamber and Kelly (2005), in post-independent South Sudan a working paper prepared by the 'Committee for National Healing, Peace and Reconciliation' entitled 'Comprehensive Strategic Dimensions for Healing, Peace and Reconciliation for all South Sudanese' (CNHPR, 2013) offered the Hamber and Kelly reconciliation definition (albeit without providing the appropriate citation) as a framework for understanding what a reconciliation process might look like following a decades-long conflict in the region and the establishment of the new state of South Sudan in 2011.

The invitation to participate in the international study on progressing reconciliation instigated by the influential peacebuilding organisations, the Kofi Annan Foundation and Interpeace provided an opportunity to disseminate our research and reflections on post-accord reconciliation **(Hamber and Kelly, 2018: Publication 8)** within influential international policy and practice networks. This case study is one of few recent publications which tracks how the concept of reconciliation has moved in and out of favour in Northern Ireland and critiques the successes in practically applying the reconciliation aspirations

[4] For more information on the network, see: https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/

of the Belfast Agreement in public policy. By contributing to a high-profile international project exploring reconciliation in a range of post-peace accord contexts, this publication contributes to the consolidation of knowledge on the shifting nature of reconciliation discourses, the importance of socio-political leadership for reconciliation and the contribution of the international peacebuilding community to progressing fundamental societal change.

The production of the four-country study and *chapeau* report that defined the principles and objectives of and background to the study (Kofi Annan Foundation, 2018, pp.14-52) culminated in a high-level symposium convened by former Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan in Bogota, Colombia, which was attended by senior United Nations officials, senior diplomats and advisers from a range of conflict-affected countries, heads of international non-governmental peacebuilding agencies and international scholars publishing on reconciliation themes.[5] As co-author, I presented the findings of the Northern Ireland case study at the symposium in October 2017 and later at the official launch of the report in Geneva during 'Geneva Peace Week' in November 2018. Subsequently, both authors have engaged with the conceptual and practical discussions on the integration of reconciliation priorities in the interventions of both domestic and international actors in societies emerging from conflict, and the commissioning organisations continue to disseminate the findings of the research study within high-level policy and practice networks within both the European Commission and the United Nations.[6]

The evidence of the societal impact of the research undertaken provided above is testament to the effectiveness of two-way dialogue and exchange between academia and policymakers and practitioners, when deliberately and

[5] A full list of participants at the symposium is available via the Kofi Annan Foundation (2018, pp.223-225).

[6] See, for example, the June 2019 event, which was part of the 'European Development Days' organised by the European Commission in Brussels**.** Information is available here: https://eudevdays.eu/community/sessions/2688/does-equality-in-peace-matter

systematically employed. While the serendipity of a research report landing on the right desk at the right time can never be dismissed, the significant impact of the research studies undertaken was also achieved through an understanding of the working practices of public, social and funding policymakers and of the appropriate channels through which new knowledge should be disseminated, and an awareness of the need for both patience and persistence in the embedding of new thinking within a range of often complex social and political structures.

4. Problematising the Relationship between Theory, Policy and Practice

4.1 Identifying Gaps

Universities and research institutes play a critical role in the generation, progression, preservation and dissemination of knowledge for wider social and economic advancement. While academia is an important site for the consideration of abstract and normative ideas and ideologies, researchers also adopt suitable ontological, epistemological and methodological approaches to gather and examine primary data from a wide range of sources to support knowledge production. In the conduct of research on how societies might address the relational aspects of peacebuilding, two questions have held my persistent interest. Firstly, within the field of peace and conflict research, whose knowledge is most typically sought, valued and validated? Secondly, if value is placed on the knowledge and experience generated by peacebuilding practitioners, how can this source of practical knowledge be more effectively gathered, consolidated and theorised?

These questions are prompted by my own observations of the gaps or time lags that can appear between emergent and established peacebuilding theory and local peacebuilding practice in Northern Ireland; and by the empirical research emerging from within the wider international peacebuilding field. Professor of Psychology at Columbia University Peter Coleman (2014) argues that a science-practice gap exists within the field of conflict resolution, referencing an evaluation of eighteen, mostly university-based theory centers that conduct conflict resolution research. The research found that

> "the work of most practitioners surveyed had been largely unaffected by the important contributions (new theory, tactics, publications etc.) generated by the various centers. At the same time, much of the research

> conducted at the centers was found to be 'removed from practice realities and constraints'" (Coleman, 2014, p.24).

In a study reflecting on the 20-year influence of Lederach's (1997) transformative peacebuilding theory, Paffenholz contends that his emphasis of the crucial role of community actors in peacebuilding processes has contributed significantly to the 'local turn' (Richmond and Mac Ginty, 2013) now firmly established in both academic peacebuilding literature and international peacebuilding policymaking and practice. However, her empirical research demonstrated a largely "ambivalent encounter" (Paffenholz, 2014, p.25) between theory and practice, and she argues for "more critical scholarly engagement with the real world" to enhance policy and practice relevance so as to "move towards responsible peacebuilding scholarship" (ibid, p.27). While there has been increasing recognition of the need to close the loop between peacebuilding practice and policymaking, much of this has been driven by the fiscal demands of international and governmental donors and has taken the form of programme evaluations, which tend to focus on issues of accountability, impact and value for money rather than the development of experience-generated theory (Blum, 2011).

4.2 The Case of Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland represents a favourable context in which to explore the link between peacebuilding theory and practice, given the high levels of (mainly external) financial investment in the work of community-based, relationship-focused practice. This context has created a real-world laboratory for researchers to both develop and test theories with the support of a robust research infrastructure, a willing population of peacebuilding practitioners and peacebuilding-programme recipients keen to shore up community-led progress due to the (increasingly apparent) limitations of the Track I-focused political compromise. As noted previously, my research and practice experience outside

of the formal academic setting have provided exceptional insights into the demands placed on peacebuilding practitioners to deliver high-quality interventions while working in sensitive, highly charged, financially uncertain and ever-changing contexts. As a researcher interested in both the theory and the practice of reconciliation, I have sought to remain close to those involved in community-level practice through my involvement in practitioner networks, facilitation of workshops, roundtable discussions and seminars, reviews of grey practice materials and my teaching of practitioners enrolled on the MSc Peace and Conflict Studies programme, which I currently direct. This is enriched by regular informal conversations with practitioners, as well as formal, one-to-one interviews conducted in the course of my research studies. My work has undoubtedly been informed by their views, reflections and shared experiences as I develop my theoretical thinking on this topic.

As a result of this ongoing engagement, a number of initial observations have been repeatedly explored and substantiated. Firstly, it is clear that, as a result of decades of human and financial investment, peacebuilding practitioners have a wealth of knowledge and experience regarding how to address the multiple legacies of violent conflict. However, a significant proportion of this hard-won knowledge is being lost as short-term funded projects end and practitioners move on, change focus or become preoccupied with ongoing fund raising rather than programme evaluation and improvement. Secondly, peacebuilding practitioners do not necessarily have the time, motivation or specific skillset to deliberate, document and disseminate their work. Again, this can be due to the pressurised, sensitive or confidential contexts in which they are working, the division of roles and 'outsourcing' of the documentation or review of interventions to external evaluators, or to the lack of encouragement of donors to implement reflective practices within the funded organisations. It has been regularly expressed to me that practitioners do not feel welcomed in to a knowledge-generation process dominated by academics and are unsure of their role within it. Thirdly, some poorly conceived or badly managed peacebuilding practices continue to be supported by donors, either because of exogenous political pressures, certain

locations or thematic concerns being prioritised by donors or because of a simple lack of understanding of the efficacy (or otherwise) of particular theories of social change.

4.3 Argumentation in Published Work

The development of the research study on reconciliation **(Hamber and Kelly, 2005: Publication 1)** and the subsequent recognition of the utility of its outputs confirmed my belief in the bidirectional synergies that exist between academic research and its practical application. In this instance, a framework for reconciliation was initially developed from the existing literature but was subsequently tested with practitioners and policymakers for accuracy and resonance, leading to refinement and improvement of the final format. Later, policymakers and practitioners utilised the theoretical understanding of reconciliation to both implement practical processes and reflect on the nature, focus and outcomes of practical interventions. In this example, the multiple intersections between theory, practice and policymaking are made tangible and feasible.

The empirical research study, published in **Kelly (2012: Publication 4)** uncovered concerns among several research informants regarding the value of practical, community-focused interventions to progress reconciliation. Some interviewees expressed concerns that insufficient evidence existed to confidently assert or predict which interventions or practices are most effective and why. In particular, the research revealed hesitancies among some political leaders and senior public officials regarding championing community-based peacebuilding practice, questioning its value when they could not cite the consolidated body of evidence of its impact and effectiveness, despite the years of significant financial and human investment. One could speculate that an element of this wariness stemmed from concerns that strong community confidence or mobilisation might disrupt the political status quo or their existing position of control or influence

within their constituency base. However, the dismissal of years of intervention by peacebuilding practitioners was worthy of further investigation. A key recommendation emerging from the research was the need to support the documentation, analysis and further examination of effective peacebuilding practice using context-specific and well-designed tools of measurement.

The lack of consolidated theory and evidence of effective practice were further explored in two subsequent journal articles, **Stanton and Kelly (2015: Publication 5)** and **Kelly and Braniff (2016: Publication 6).** Both articles acknowledge that creating stronger linkages between peacebuilding theory, policy and practice was a recognised and accepted challenge, made more demanding by the complexities of working within dynamic and unpredictable conflict contexts. The articles recognised that academic researchers, policymakers and peacebuilding practitioners have distinct priorities, drivers, constituencies and working cultures and operate under differing temporal pressures. The **Stanton and Kelly (2015)** article interrogated why, despite significant academic interest and financial investment in progressing peacebuilding in Northern Ireland, there is little evidence of theory development or consolidation emerging from the accumulated knowledge of experienced peacebuilding practitioners. The article suggests two possible explanations for this. Firstly, that there has been a 'professionalisation' of peace which has promoted a technical–rational ontology that subordinates peacebuilding practices that do not fit the dominant Western or textbook understandings of how individuals, communities or societies typically function or the assumptions about how peace can be designed. Secondly, there is evidence of the persistent influence of positivism within academia, with 'scientific' knowledge being valued more highly than 'technical' and 'practical' knowledge, creating unhelpful hierarchies and preferencing particular epistemological and methodological approaches to data collection. The article argues for greater mutual recognition and collaboration between researchers and practitioners and a strengthening of both the skills required and the resolve needed to effectively 'translate' theory into usable practice.

In **Kelly and Braniff (2016: Publication 6)**, this argumentation is further developed by evidencing the missed opportunities to document and disseminate knowledge generated from peacebuilding practice and to create cultures of learning, reflexivity and generosity when sharing good practice. Examining Northern Ireland's experience of decades of financial investment in relationship-building interventions, the research highlighted the disparity between the high levels of bureaucratic oversight and form-filling associated with external funding and the minimal instances of readily accessible documentation or overarching analysis undertaken by those interested in the progression of peacebuilding theory or practice. Taken together, both articles argue that the persistent gaps that exist between *some* theorists and practitioners need not be as wide as they are currently. With greater awareness and recognition of both the existing tacit knowledge and the levels of documentation already demanded, progress in co-producing useful resources for wider societal benefit is possible. This, it is argued, requires changes to embedded cultural norms and practices by researchers, practitioners, policymakers and funders, which are outlined next in turn.

Firstly, practitioners need to develop greater awareness of and confidence in the valuable experience and wisdom they have accumulated and need to embed efficient processes of documentation, reflection and dissemination in their everyday practices. Secondly, donors need to ensure that the rich information that they regularly demand from practitioners in the form of monitoring and evaluation processes is not only employed as a functional, bureaucratic process of oversight but is also put to more long-term, effective use. Thirdly, academics need to do more to acknowledge and valorise practitioner knowledge by working collaboratively to co-design processes of documentation, analysis and practice-sharing and to ensure that it is made accessible to the wider peacebuilding practice community. This argument is reinforced in **Hamber and Kelly (2016: Publication 7)**, which evidenced the wealth of accumulated knowledge which exists among community-based oral history and testimony-gathering practitioners and the (missed) opportunities to work collaboratively to progress

both intellectual discourses on dealing with the past and evidence policy decisions taken following appropriate consultation. Finally, academics need to do more to ensure that policymakers and practitioners have access to the theoretical insights which are being generated within the research community. This requires that academic work is disseminated in accessible formats to practitioners and policymakers to ensure that practitioners are not locked out of the knowledge production cycle and have ready access to the latest thinking on effective peacebuilding practice.

The lessons which are being learned from the experience of community-focused intervention in support of reconciliation in Northern Ireland have much wider international implications. In recent years, the international community and powerful Western nations have becoming increasingly reluctant to maintain a physical presence in countries emerging from violent conflict and are more inclined to transfer the onus of societal recovery to the often overburdened and under-skilled local community infrastructures (Chandler, 2017). While local ownership of peace consolidation is, theoretically, to be encouraged, it must also be designed and implemented on the basis of appropriately tried-and-tested theories of change and adapted to reflect the context, issues and challenges the particular society faces. The research undertaken indicates that there is much more that can be done to close the gaps that exist between theoretical explanations and the everyday realities of policymaking and practice and to identify blockages, limitations, traction points and potential reciprocal benefits of engagement to encourage multidirectional knowledge transfer.

5. Conclusions and Future Research

> *The broad scope of reconciliation raises the question of whether it is too far-reaching and diffuse to be of practical use. Yet, as recent history has demonstrated, the concept and ideas it commands remain a potent force.*
>
> Paul A. Komesaroff, *Pathways to Reconciliation: Between Theory and Practice*
>
> (Komesaroff, 2008, p.1)

Despite the uncertainties and ambiguities regarding what it entails or how it can be delivered in practice, the concept of reconciliation has gained increased, rather than diminished, attention and traction within the wider field of peacebuilding in recent years. The publications included in this submission have argued that the focus on relationships in a society emerging from conflict needs to use a wide conceptual lens to include not only interpersonal and intercommunal relations between antagonists – viewed typically on the horizontal axes – but also the vertical relations between, and within, social structures and public, political and cultural institutions. As noted previously, two research questions have dominated. Firstly, how has the concept of reconciliation been understood, implemented and progressed in a post-Agreement Northern Ireland? Secondly, how can we improve reconciliation processes through the enhancement of the relationship between theory, practice and policymaking? The research publications have argued for the development of conceptual frames through which to consider the nuanced challenges of addressing damaged relations and to acknowledge that societal change emerges through a series of complex, cumulative, long-term, multilevel *and* paradoxical processes.

The overarching thesis contained in the Published Work submitted for consideration is a simple one: a society emerging from conflict needs to come to

terms with what has happened, where it finds itself post-Agreement and how its citizens, communities and institutions can work collaboratively to agree both a direction of travel and an eventual, long-term goal. Whether these processes are encompassed within the term reconciliation or not will likely remain a persistent debate. However, by continuing to explore its component parts, we might reach a greater sensitivity to and understanding of not only the complexities of the individual strands but also the ways in which individual processes interact with, complement and resist one another.

Reflecting on my research career to date, three key insights have emerged. Firstly, there is significant value in being researcher local to the conflict-affected society under investigation. The academic scrutiny of conflicts has typically attracted external researchers, and Northern Ireland has long been of interest to international scholars seeking to examine it as both a singular and a comparative case study of post-accord transition. Reflecting on the field of peacebuilding research, Dzuverovic (2018, p.112) notes that

> "a rich body of literature has emerged which focuses on different aspects of the local, with emphasis placed on people, social relations, social engagement, everyday customs and interactions or material artefacts".

And yet, too often

> "these processes are described and analysed by international researchers, and not by locals who have personally witnessed and experienced the events and developments that are the subject of research" (ibid, p.112).

While recognising the inherent biases and blind spots of the 'insider' researcher, I contend that there is value to be gained from the long-term immersion in and exposure to the dominant, subordinated and marginal discourses, diverse cultural histories and their contemporary expression, and the rich tapestry of relationships and schisms that exist within a paticular society. Working as a locally based researcher has allowed me to build trusted relationships with key research informants and to identify and articulate specific insights into and perspectives on the conflict that may be missed by those external to the conflict.

Secondly, there is value in working collaboratively and as a sole researcher and writer. Partnering with colleagues in the development, implementation and delivery of research objectives has delivered endless hours of fruitful conversations, the mutual exchange of skills and expertise, the sharing of different disciplinary perspectives and experiences, and the refinement of ideas through challenge, discussion and compromise. Working alone allows for the growth of confidence and conviction in my own perspectives and abilities and provides welcome flexibility in the pace of work and the thorough exploration of ideas through the writing process.

Thirdly, there is value in the qualitative approach to theory development and theory-testing. The research publications submitted contain ample evidence of my commitment to a qualitative approach that draws on the insights of theorists, practitioners and policymakers to develop a narrative understanding of some of the most complex aspects of peacebuilding that is based on both abstract ideas and individuals' lived experience.

Writing this reflective statement has been a clarifying experience and an opportunity to sketch out a future research agenda which will build on and progress ideas and argumentation previously made. Firstly, there is an opportunity to further test and develop the definition of reconciliation proposed as a 'diagnostic tool' to assess the progress of reconciliation within a society emerging from violent conflict. This might serve to both widen the perspectives of policymakers and practitioners to the multipronged nature of reconciliation and assist in the recalibration of donor activities which might emphasise one process or intervention to the possible detriment of progress in another. Preliminary research which I conducted in post-genocide Cambodia in 2006 highlighted the importance of cultural, ideological and faith differences, but also the universality of using macro processes to move a society from violence, trauma and division to sustainable and just peace. A more recent examination of South Africa's progress towards reconciliation by Pigou (2018) effectively

framed its review around the five strands of reconciliation **(Hamber and Kelly, 2005)**, systemically considering each aspect in turn and providing a concrete example of how this might be undertaken and deepened in other similar contexts.

By focusing on the documentation and the consolidation of practice, there is also ample scope to contribute to a greater understanding and evaluation of community-focused peacebuilding interventions in Northern Ireland through the co-design and co-delivery of a research study aimed at identifying the implicit and explicit theories of change driving relationship-focused interventions and their value and efficacy regarding implementation. If implemented successfully, such a study could have a two-fold outcome. Firstly, it could develop greater collaborative working arrangements between academics, practitioners, policymakers and donors and progress our understanding of the value of particular interventions. Secondly, it would seek to extract and generate greater value and utility from the analysis of the wealth of existing materials held in inaccessible archives by government departments, donors and practice organisations to further interrogate the progression, regression, improvement and refinement of interventions over time.

To conclude, the fifteen years of investigation into the obstacles and opportunities to progress reconciliation in Northern Ireland, and the gathering of a body of rich empirical data, demonstrates an evolution and development of ideas, focus and findings while maintaining a clear and consistent thread of inquiry. The research conducted suggests that the current understandings of and approaches to reconciliation following violent conflict are still in their infancy and require greater sensitivity to the inherent paradoxes which emerge when adopting individual processes in isolation without consideration of the wider political, social and cultural context. In 2003, Norman Porter (2003, p.4) wrote in *The Elusive Peace: Reconciliation in Northern Ireland* that "[r]econciliation continues to require advocates". Through my future research and teaching, I will

continue to support, encourage and further understand the multiple processes required to progress reconciliation as a worthwhile, if demanding, endeavour.

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