
ABSTRACT

CIVIL SOCIETY AND POST-CONFLICT RECONCILIATION:
A MODIFIED-IDENTITY, RECIPROCAL OBLIGATIONS APPROACH

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Civil Society and Reconciliation in Comparative Perspective

Abstract

Much attention has been given to the fact that the victimization of peoples possesses them with a need to gain control, often leading to violence. Regrettably, relatively little notice has been given to the fact that these peoples have been indelibly changed by their experiences. In order to successfully build relationships with these groups and gain their cooperation, Civil Society agents need to gain an understanding of the group's new identity, state of vulnerability, fragility, and need to mourn.

Learning is the biological mechanism of adaptation (Wuagneux, 1999). Historical legacies and collective memories of conflict and violence shape the evolution of groups. Both the internal and external lens through which a people identify, define, examine, and judge themselves (and others) is fashioned by these ordeals. Perspectives on what constitutes principled values and acceptable behaviors shift through collective suffering, along with ideas around the concepts of shame, insult, pride, self-worth, guilt, and honor.

A change in beliefs changes values. A change in values changes behaviors; including, how the behavior of others is now perceived. A group's perception is its reality. It governs individual and collective awareness, insight, sensitivities and sensibilities. Once adopted, these perceptions become the foundation of a new group identity. In post-conflict situations, group cohesion is cemented by shared pain, humiliation, and loss. The magnitude of the tragedy is amplified by their numbers. Without a sound understanding of these concepts, Civil Society agents' reconciliation efforts will fall short of hope and in some cases will even exacerbate old wounds, disrupting the healing process.