

POST-CONFLICT PEACEBUILDING AND THE POLITICS OF
IDENTITY: INSIGHTS FOR RESTORATION AND
RECONCILIATION IN TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

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Drawing upon an interdisciplinary synthesis of literature from the fields of political science, sociology, and social psychology, this article highlights the collectivized nature of group-based violence in divided societies and seeks to identify several of the key social and psychological dynamics which undergird such “identity” conflicts. Building on this framework, this paper argues that post-conflict reconciliation efforts in divided societies will necessarily require “restorative” measures to repair these psychosocial divisions alongside more traditional structural and material reconstruction efforts. These insights are then applied to the emerging field of transitional justice, examining the recent South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission for insights into how such a restorative approach might be incorporated into transitional justice interventions to help divided societies move towards reconciliation and sustainable peace.

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War, conflicts between ethnic, national, or religious communities have presented a major threat to the human security of civilian populations. The deep societal divisions underlying this type of violence have tended to produce conflicts that are both protracted and intractable. Peacebuilding efforts and the prevention of recidivist violence are thus notoriously difficult even after widespread conflict is brought to an end. When considering interventions to promote post-conflict reconciliation in these societies, people often overlook the need to address the “communal” or “collective” nature of these divisions. This may hinder the development of strategies that could work to repair these societal relationships in order to ensure a lasting and sustainable peace.