



## **Identities as Problems, Identities as Solutions**

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Senses of identity, whether internalized or imposed, are involved in all human interactions. In varying contexts, one identity may predominate over others, or they may enter in flexible and changing ways between people. Where there are situations of conflict, particular predominant identities come to the fore and determine whether conflicts escalate into violence, depending on perceptions of what is at stake in terms of values, interests, or survival. In general, we can distinguish between two opposite approaches to the solution of conflicts, top-down or bottom-up. Top-down approaches stress authority and governmental enforcements. Bottom-up approaches stress the necessity for solutions to come from the immediate levels of those concerned, with an emphasis on accommodation, compromise and understanding. In practice, we often see combinations of these approaches, and the success or failure of conflict resolutions may depend on the extent to which the approaches can function together. In our own work in two contrasting areas of the world, Ireland and Papua New Guinea, we have observed the process of negotiation between local and state levels. Cultural awareness is a crucial factor, leading to solutions that will work in accordance with the informal values and expectations of people, and in all cases the allocation of sufficient resources is a necessary factor in reaching for conflict management and resolution. The ideal is to find ways in which identities become the source of rapprochement rather than the source of ongoing conflict. This can be achieved either by altering expectations associated with existing identities or by creating and fostering new transcendent or encompassing identities that can take precedence over the identities linked to conflict.

### Relevant References:

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