



Identities in Conflict and Conflict Mediation: Contrasting Cases from Ireland and Papua New Guinea.

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In Northern Ireland and the wider region of Ulster, which has three counties that belong to the Republic of Ireland, including County Donegal where our long-term fieldwork has been concentrated, initiatives deriving from the Belfast Peace Agreement of 1998 have concentrated on encouraging cross-border and cross-community activities that can ameliorate senses of difference and promote ideas of similarity between groups and areas that have been sharply divided in the past. The European Union Commission has been pro-active in helping to fund and encourage these initiatives, along with the governments of the U.K., the Northern Ireland Assembly, and of the Republic. Such efforts represent a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches that over time have worked well as forms of amelioration if not complete solutions. They rely on overcoming senses of difference between people.

In the Highlands regions of Papua New Guinea, where we have also worked for several decades, fighting between clan and tribal groups was endemic in the pre-colonial past (prior to the 1930s) and has often since then been exacerbated by the effects of modernization through increasing population pressure, urban drift, and conflicts with government and mega-companies over the expropriation of natural resources through mining. Repeated efforts by the colonial government up to 1975 and since then by the independent government of Papua New Guinea have had only very limited success in quelling such conflicts. The most effective way of ending conflicts is by the payment of reparations and compensation for killings, and such payments are organized through an intricate network of kin and exchange ties. At the symbolic level, local Christian churches have also encouraged peaceful reconciliation between groups, but compensation is still essential. Here the groups recognize their essential similarity and the aim of settlements is to overcome differences, not difference.

In both cases (Ireland and Papua New Guinea) we argue that metapragmatics come into play. People have to be aware of what they are doing and why in order to reach out for the settlement of conflict. A conscious turning away from violence is the crucial step involved.

Relevant references:

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<http://www.penguin.com.au/products/9780702239083/peace-making-and-imagination-papua-new-guinea-perspectives>



<http://www.uqp.uq.edu.au/CategoryBookList.aspx/127/New%20Approaches%20to%20Peace%20and%20Conflict%20Series>

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<http://www.amazon.com/Terror-Violence-Imagination-Unimaginable-Anthropology/dp/0745323987/>

<http://www.plutobooks.com/> (This book is available as an EBook. Contact the Publisher, or Kindle Books, Etc.)

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