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# Civil Society and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: Ambiguities of International Programmes Aimed at Building 'New' Societies

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This article offers a critical analysis of aid programmes aimed at supporting local civil societies in post-conflict peacebuilding (PCPB). Such programmes are often seen to carry the best hopes for a genuine democratic counterweight to existing power-brokers and to hold the key to the building of a 'new' society. But, in their interventions, outsiders tend to forget the large diversity of local civil societies, creating many counter-effects in the way international programmes purport to support or empower local people. The resulting consequences affect the ways in which international and local actors interact in post-conflict contexts and, accordingly, the ways in which actual 'civil society' may contribute to PCPB. A close analysis of these elements reveals larger political ambiguities present in PCPB strategies and actions. The article ends with a series of recommendations to support a better understanding and acknowledgment of local processes and resources in any aid programme, as well as greater accountability on the part of outsiders.

**Keywords** Post-conflict peacebuilding • civil society • NGOs • local ownership • reconciliation

## Introduction

**M**OST OF THE RECENT peace operations and related programmes aimed at post-conflict peacebuilding (PCPB) contain objectives and components (more particularly, those relating to human rights and electoral process) explicitly geared towards working with NGOs in the countries in which the operations and programmes are undertaken. Other aspects of the mandates (refugee repatriation, preparation of the post-conflict phase,



etc.) usually anticipate working with international and local NGOs. This approach reveals the increasing recognition that nongovernmental actors play a large role in both the domestic and international scene. In war-torn societies, the creation and consolidation of NGOs is more specifically considered as part of the process of democratization. The role of such NGOs in this context is supposed to complement other components of the democratic programme, such as the holding of elections, important both to install a legitimate and democratic government (an element particularly critical in situations where, as in Kosovo, East Timor, Afghanistan and Iraq, there is a political vacuum at the state level, partially and temporarily filled by the UN or an occupying force) and to encourage the consolidation of peace structured by a durable democratic system. But, the multiple flaws in the organization of elections in post-conflict contexts and the limits of their role in actually grounding democracy and peace (Pouligny, 2000) explain the necessity to count on other mechanisms to gradually install a peaceful and democratic culture. Local civil societies, through monitoring and lobbying activities, may push the local state into fulfilling its responsibility for implementing the rule of law. They are often seen to carry the best hopes for a genuine democratic counterweight to the power-brokers, economic exploiters and warlords who tend to predominate in conflict-ridden weak or failed states, and may even capture the electoral processes. More pragmatically, outsiders often try to identify 'civil society' against a 'failed' state, to play NGOs, intellectuals, women, religious groups or 'elders' against 'warlords', 'low politics' against 'high politics'.

These motivations and attempts are praiseworthy, particularly as they finally reintegrate the state–society relationship as a central dynamic in the process of both rebuilding a state apparatus and recreating a 'new' society out of the ashes of conflict. Indeed, PCPB projects have traditionally focused more on economic and physical infrastructures or on formal institutional processes, but have tended to forget that wars destroy not only buildings and bodies but also trust, hope, identity, family and social ties. In other words, insufficient attention has been paid to the radical transformations in political cultures and codes of conduct of the individuals and communities who have experienced mass violence, and the way these basic values and beliefs affect the way a state is conceived and governed. These transformations also set the terms of the renegotiation of the relation between political and social order. From that perspective, the objective of strengthening local civil societies is a matter both of enlarging the range of interlocutors with whom outsiders need to interact to help rebuild a 'new' society and of better understanding the bases on which this society can be actually rebuilt and further conflicts peacefully transformed.

Unfortunately, these hopes are not necessarily supported by the way the vague, highly polysemic and ambiguous notions of both 'NGOs' and 'civil

society' are generally referred to in PCPB contexts. This article will concentrate on three main issues that affect the utilization of these references. Reflection will be driven by a few key questions: who are we speaking about, how do outsiders identify their interlocutors, and how do they work and interact with them? A close analysis of these elements will reveal some political ambiguities present in PCPB strategies and actions aimed at building a 'new' society in post-conflict settings. Although space constraints will not allow NGOs to be distinguished according to their main activities and to the moment of their intervention in the crisis-management spectrum, the trends identified here are widely applicable, and a thorough consideration of their consequences is important if we are serious in our wish to contribute to further sustainable peacebuilding.

## A Micro-Sociological Analysis of Who Is Representing the Local Civil Society

As with most popular academic concepts, there is no universally accepted definition of 'civil society'. It is generally considered as referring to the arena of voluntary – uncoerced – collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power.<sup>1</sup> This working definition of civil society actually refers to very different realities. As a concept, civil society has been weighed down by an excessive load of meanings present since its origin, deriving sustenance from philosophical trends that do not concur (Khilani, 2001). 'Civil society' in Locke, the Scottish thinkers of the 18th century, or Hegel – to name only three decisive stages in the development of this subject in the Western hemisphere – had to do with greatly differing representations of social reality and conceptions of the interaction with the state and the market. But, contemporary discourse on civil society seems both to have forgotten this historical variety and to have become rigid in its use outside of the original Western context. This has three main consequences for our current practices. First, it narrows the range of organizational modalities considered. Second, it conveys the idea of a clear distinction between what is political and what is not. Third, it tends to conceal the distinctions made between indigenous and outside NGOs.

<sup>1</sup> This working definition is based on one proposed by the London School of Economics Centre for Civil Society; see <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/introduction.htm> (accessed 22 September 2005).

*Local Civil Societies Are Diverse*

When working in non-Western contexts, most outsiders tend to look for structures representative of a civil society, that is, something that corresponds, in reality, to the form that 'civil society' has taken in modern Western societies – NGOs, trade unions, etc. – albeit with historical and cultural varieties. Either they do not find this representation of society and thus create one (as UNTAC did in Cambodia during the peace process in the early 1990s), or they may find groups mirroring Western society that suddenly emerge and claim this label. But, such groups are far from covering the range of different modalities of a collective organization (Afghanistan offers many recent examples). Moreover, these groups (often limited to a small number of individuals) have difficulty in establishing links with other existing arrangements, especially at the community level. In many cases, this approach leads to a *de facto* exclusion of the so-called traditional forms of arrangements existing in the society – because the latter involve political cultures apparently too different from the dominant Western one – and hence it ignores the extent to which such traditional ways of organizing may participate in a local experiment of 'modernity' and 'democratic' representation. The role of traditional structures may be all the more important in contexts where the social fabric and all mechanisms of regulation have been weakened by years of violence, repression and the negative impact of international interventions. The 'community' (having a different, moving definition and content according to the local context and history) may appear to be the last resort for surviving and coping with persisting problems of insecurity, while death and injury rates remain high in so-called post-conflict situations (as in El Salvador, Afghanistan or Iraq). Some experiences have shown that community consultation and engagement, for instance, is critical to successful and sustainable disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes. Among the few DDR success stories are experiences that have aimed at introducing normative compliance through local informal 'peace agreements' with voluntary disarmament and reintegration clauses (such as the Mendi Peace Agreement in Papua New Guinea and, to a certain extent, the Community Arms Collection and Destruction programme in Sierra Leone) or the declaration of weapons-free areas where civilian as well as combatant weapons are collected (as in South Africa and the Solomon Islands) (Pouligny, 2004). Recent years have shown that even in areas of utter desolation, as in some regions of Eastern Congo or Sudan, and still more in refugee camps, social life is generally quickly reorganized within community networks, with structures of control included in the process. Even with this ambiguity, these may well represent the most vivid actual civil society in most post-conflict settings.

What happens in the 'interstices' of societies contributes to a greater

'density' of social ties, and in turn promotes a greater confidence in oneself and others. From that point of view, social exchange is like the sense of civic responsibility: as it is used, so it grows and imposes its usefulness. This is essential in view of one of the main challenges to any peace process: ensuring that individual and collective choices now give priority to peaceful means of resolving conflicts. Finding out how 'bridges' between communities and groups are built, and encouraging and boosting such bridges, should be among the priorities of PCPB. Indeed, the timid forms of reconstruction identified in community settings are an essential stepping stone if a larger political project is to develop. Now, these are often saturated with many different outsiders that rush into the peacebuilding and democracy market place. Not only occupying many spaces themselves, these often encourage a veritable explosion in the local NGO sector, supported both by the ideology of promoting 'civil society' and the arrival of substantial funds targeting specific issues, such as gender issues. Those who have recently been working in the Balkans and even more in Afghanistan have many stories to tell about the mushrooming of women's organizations of all kinds, whose programmes are often largely disconnected from the core issues faced by the women of those regions and even more from their cultural references. The local NGOs, oriented primarily towards the outside world, may have difficulty finding their place as intermediaries at the community level; they are also often diverted by local political networks (which sometimes create them) into patronage channels. There is a major double issue at stake here. First, people tend to withdraw into the community in order to protect themselves. Many exit strategies are observed in war-torn societies as ways of defending oneself and surviving. But this re-enforces the marginalization of large portions of the population. Second, returning to a partially 'reinvented' community space – as the pre-existing space has been turned upside down by years of war, repression and forced displacement – may also resemble a retreat into a more intensified identity owing to ill-treatment. Re-essentialized identities may well offer concrete ways of reinventing citizenship and enhancing economic and physical security. But, in such circumstances, what is needed is to ensure mediation towards the political sphere concerning what happens at the community level. That is the way forward, so that identity-based particularities can effectively appear as a mode of representation, participation and redistribution.

Ultimately, most outsiders tend to reduce the main characteristics and richness of any civil society: its diversity. In our frequent quest for homogeneity, we tend to seek a 'consensus' or a 'common view'; however, this does not exist in any society, and certainly not in a postwar period. A so-called common belief is neither necessary nor even desirable for remedying the real problem: a long, contradictory process of defining a new social contract. Historians and sociologists have shown us that such processes rarely unfold

in sanctified harmony but are rather the outcome of successive negotiations or, indeed, of concrete struggles. Neither can they result from 'dogmatic voluntarism' alone. Yet, most donors and agencies continue to believe in such a process, as shown by the creation and sponsoring of a countless number of consortiums and platforms – not to mention the multiplication of coordination meetings of all kinds that, among other consequences, justify the complaints of leaders of local organizations that they no longer have time to actually work!

### *Local Civil Societies Are Part of Political Games*

The second limit of the 'civil society' concept, as it is commonly used, is that it conveys the idea of a clear dichotomy between what is supposed to be and what is not supposed to be political. Obviously, even in Western contexts, this distinction is far from being so clearcut, but it tends to be considered in an even more rigid way in places where 'civil society' is presented as an alternative to a dysfunctional or even 'failed' state. Situations on the ground show the limitations of such an approach, especially in conflict or post-conflict situations.

In Kismayo, in the south of Somalia, humanitarian organizations and UNOSOM learned in the early 1990s, at their expense, that local actors did not entirely develop in separate worlds, that many changing ties of solidarity linked them. Similarly, some of the people they had contact with assumed many roles within the community, including those of faction representative, traditional elder and intellectual. The configuration of political forces may explain the limited space for organizing interests autonomous of the parties to the conflict. Situations as diverse as those of El Salvador, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Afghanistan have clearly illustrated this. Thus, registers for action can be confused, because individuals can pass from one network to another and introduce themselves to outsiders under different guises. It often happens that heads of NGOs who interact as individuals with outsiders are close to political parties and simultaneously undertake many roles, using the resulting ambiguity to manipulate their contacts with foreigners.

Such questions are often seen as taboo, because they are perceived as a way of discrediting the individuals concerned. However, a minimal analysis of this type is essential to understand the various dynamics at work in local societies. As some analysts have pointed out, one must guard against the tendency to 'romanticize' the civil society sector. In practice, some sectors of society are just as discredited as the state (Lemarchand, 1992).

*International and Local NGOs Should Not Be Blended Into a Single Category*

Our analyses and practices too often suppose that the 'NGO world' ignores borders and national identities. In fact, there is much more proximity between northern or international NGOs (which are often the same, as there are very few actual transnational NGOs) and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), than between the northern and southern NGOs. The first two categories share the same codes and to a large extent the same historical culture, with IGO officers falling prey to the natural tendency of collaborating with like people, with whom it is 'easier to collaborate'. There is thus a strong temptation to instigate the creation of 'home-grown' NGOs, more malleable and capable of forming a true patronage network, leading to charges of 'collusion' from representatives of local NGOs. Moreover, although in various UN operations several staff members came from international NGOs that had previously been in contact with local NGOs, this did not improve relations, as outside and inside NGOs partly compete for the same money and for the same 'symbolic space'. When a 'crisis' is discovered by the 'international community', international NGOs are part of the real 'invasion'. Hundreds of international organizations are present in the capital, occupying a space no longer available to local actors, thereby having a detrimental effect on local economies through increases in salaries, store prices and housing rents, which impede local organizations from functioning properly.

These distinctions are important when considering current efforts being made to strengthen and support local civil society. In most cases, the reality is that, while pretending to work with the local civil society, outsiders actually collaborate with other outsiders – in other words, with themselves. Those who work in this domain probably have plenty of examples of meetings pointing to this scheme.

## The Support to Civil Society and PCPB

The resulting consequences affect the ways in which international, transnational and local actors interact in post-conflict contexts and, accordingly, the ways in which actual civil society may contribute to PCPB. Three dimensions in particular have come to my attention in the different situations in which I have worked for the last 20 years. First, we have difficulty taking into account local knowledge and resources as major inputs in rebuilding strategies. Second, we generally fail in scheduling outside interventions so that they will reinforce local processes. Third, the fact that relationships with local civil societies are very asymmetric and characterized by

patronage has concrete consequences for those rebuilding, and thus support for these processes by local people remains an uncertainty.

### *Knowledge and Resources*

Acknowledging and fully considering the actual knowledge and experience that local people have of their own situation is difficult. One concrete illustration is the fact that the UN or other international organizations will more commonly cite reports from northern human rights NGOs than local ones, even though local organizations may possess a more profound knowledge of the situation. Although there has been clear progress in this area, much more needs to be done. Similarly, a foreign 'expert' or 'academic' is more easily chosen over a local one to brief outsiders on the local situation. In research as well as aid programmes, local staff members are mainly hired as low-cost manpower in subordinate positions, and rarely as main actors in a strategic process.

Most outsiders falsely behave as though the date of their arrival was year zero for the country, as though nothing had happened before them. In other words, we tend to function as if we could rebuild a society without first identifying and recognizing locally existing resources. Yet, in all cases, even the most devastating, some local resources are not only already in place, but more deeply rooted in the complex cultural interpretations of the consequences of trauma than outside resources. These interpretations are most naturally accessed by survivors, who immediately try to make sense of their world and find ways to reconstruct it in a variety of subtle and small ways. In Mozambique and Sierra Leone, actions undertaken by traditional healers for children traumatized by war and former child soldiers demonstrate the success of strategies deeply rooted in the social and cultural context. In Mozambique, through purification rituals involving the whole community, mediums and healers (*kimbanda*) particularly helped peaceful reintegration of child soldiers within communities. Referring to concepts of pollution and purification, they made it possible not only to designate and describe the period of violence as 'abnormal' or 'unacceptable', but also to redefine the rules indispensable for the group's coexistence and survival. In Cambodia, mediums and healers (*kruu* and *ruup*) played a decisive role in the reintegration of displaced people and refugees. In particular, they made it possible to rebuild symbolic links among members of a community and to reinterpret the various violent ruptures suffered by the society. Here, it is not a matter of wanting at any cost to recover 'traditions' that sometimes no longer exist, but rather of listening to the resources that ordinary people may mobilize so as to pick up the threads of disrupted history. In Guatemala, Maya rituals expressed in ceremonies commemorating the dead, especially when there are exhumations, are no longer a bygone tradition; they reflect a will both to

recover one's roots and to reinterpret them in a world that has gone through a profound upheaval.<sup>2</sup> Mediums and healers thus appear to complement transformations taking place in transitional societies, especially endowing them with meaning. It is important to take them into account to understand how, in a concrete situation, alternative modes of participation and inclusion of the majority can be ensured. The will to 'build peace' entails reinstating the imaginary and representations into their proper places.

Not all traditional practices lead to peace, however. Traditions of vengeance, for example, may support continuing feelings of rage and a conviction that evil abides in others, laying the ground for future conflict. Local practices and beliefs can result in negative as well as positive outcomes. Nevertheless, local and traditional resources will naturally be used in the aftermath of conflict, and must be known, minimally studied and understood for that purpose. Those that are in support of peace will prove more beneficial than outside interventions with no connection to local perspectives. The question of the attitude to adopt towards traditional practices that may lead to negative outcomes for the PCPB process should be answered exactly the same way as when dealing with more formal or common social actors. According to their own practices and rules, outsiders will adopt different kinds of answers, from ending all relationship with the actors concerned towards actively campaigning for their sanctioning if they consider that they violate important international and local standards. This legitimate argument should not distract us from the importance and effectiveness local practices may have. Rather than imposing external methods, the objective should be to initiate a process in which local resources, knowledge and information are taken seriously, and then supported and valorized if they concur with the PCPB objectives, instead of being duplicated or simply ignored. These are essential conditions if we want to have a positive effect on local processes.

### *Improved Scheduling*

Another aspect is the importance of timing in interventions. While everybody understands the importance of outside support during the first years after a war, the subsequent period is generally even more critical for members of the local civil society. The current situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina provides a good example, where after several years the conditions of 'peace' are more difficult to grapple with. Bosnian colleagues use the same words to describe the postwar 'vacuum' that replaced the hope that people had been able to retain: that peace resembles something real. The accumulation of tiredness and stress in the trauma cycle itself may explain

<sup>2</sup> On the different case studies, see Pouligny, Chesterman & Schnabel (forthcoming).

why many activists and professionals face more difficulty in their daily functioning and tend to have far more psychosomatic problems. There is greater tension between people, and more divorces and quarrels in families – coping with daily life is more difficult. At the same time, however, local civil society organizations struggle to secure funds from outside, as the amount of global aid given to the country has been reduced drastically. Greater energy is expended to acquire less outside support and advice at a time when perhaps more is needed. Paying more attention to the local contexts and processes also implies fine tuning the terms of programming the support.

### *Perversions in Processes of Legitimization*

Relationships between outsiders and insiders are very asymmetric and characterized by patronage. Various clientele approaches and levels of intrusiveness related to issues of internal governance (for example, the information requested and criteria applied for grant applications) not only divert important time and energy away from more central issues, but often appear as an unacceptable double standard. We tend to ask for more accountability and better governance on the part of our interlocutors, while the 'international community' keeps making arbitrary decisions regarding local situations and changing what local people have decided. We keep asking about our interlocutors' representativeness and legitimacy, yet put ourselves in positions in which we legitimize those interlocutors through providing access to crucial symbolic and material resources. As to an extent with political actors, legitimacy does not arise from any social basis but must be granted by outsiders. International and local mechanisms of legitimating may actually contradict one another. For an activist or a professional from a war-torn society who becomes caught in the international sphere, the issue is a disconcerting one: how to maintain your contacts and roots and actual interaction with 'your base' while the international sphere transforms you (the way you talk, the systems of reference you use, the way you arrange your agenda, etc.) – whether you desire it or not – and takes up most of your time. Many feel that, at some point, they must choose between the two.

## The Political Ambiguities of Programmes Aimed at Building 'New' Societies in Post-Conflict Settings

If there is some common ground in what has just been described, then we should quickly think of the main contradictions generated by our approach to these questions. First, we are pretending to build 'new' societies while excluding the large majority of their members. Second, we are pretending to

build states while draining their political substance. Third, we think in terms of 'stability' when we should think in terms of 'change'.

### *Excluding the Majority*

We largely deprive ourselves of the means necessary to understand how, in what circumstances, and with what means local people try to answer fundamental questions they ask about life and death, good and bad, their past, present and future. Consequently, we may help rebuild economic and socio-political infrastructures and institutions, but they are no more than 'empty boxes', because we have given little consideration to the conceptual roots of social and political life. In other words, we quite simply forget that politics and statehood must be understood in their 'substantial' aspects, their diverse conceptions and properties, and not only in their formal appearances (Balandier, 1991). Reconstruction efforts have to deal with changing identities and group boundaries; the difficulties of communicating across boundaries; justice and reconciliation; the distribution of property, land and wealth; the writing of history; the rebuilding of trust; and the capacities for new political systems. Yet, behind these lies a host of cultural meanings that are usually unremarked and unanalysed. These offer conflicting and often contradictory answers to questions people are constantly asking themselves while surviving and trying to cope with the trauma of conflict and its individual and collective consequences – what happened to us as people, who is to blame, what vengeance is due, who are we as people, what is our nation, what is the state, is there any point in rebuilding at all? – thus setting the stage for action or inaction.

### *Draining States' Political Substance*

Indeed, most programmes of assistance are based on this fundamental ambiguity: they pretend to help rebuild a society or even a 'civil society', while continually reducing this process to highly technical dimensions, depriving it of all political substance. This attitude has to do with the recurring flaws in many interventions: lack of preparation and improvisation explain why action is too often based on 'kits' that may indeed be useful in emergencies for building makeshift hospitals, nutrition centres or refugee camps, but are absurdly over-systematized when it comes to institutional rebuilding. But, it is also directly inspired by a liberal messianism that is not limited to the Bush administration. When outside interventions deprive the state of most of its substance, of the means to play its central role – that is, to define and ensure that some common interests may be guaranteed and served – they also work against the society. In its most liberal assumption, the US approach to 'nation-building' emphasizes the need to 'liberate civil society' from the orbit

of the state and subsequently give it a free hand in reconstruction. This approach largely bears the legacy of the postwar occupations of Germany and Japan but was applied elsewhere, particularly during the Cold War, from Latin America to Asia. It not only amounts to believing in some kind of 'invisible hand' of civil society, but also clearly applies a highly ideological vision of what politics and the state–society relationship are about.

### *Change, Not Stability*

In the same line of thought, most interventions think about 'stability' when they should think in terms of 'change'. Indeed, understanding the conditions in which peace can be built in a given society means trying to make the numerous changes in its structures and its rules intelligible, so as to assess the bases on which reconstruction is possible. In fact, far from being the intangible foundations to which the 'international community' readily refers, 'peace' and the 'rule of law' (with their various definitions) are the products of concrete histories, the expression of worldviews and of social relations (Roulard, 1998). They form a project built up through successive compromises and processes. As the anthropologist Georges Balandier (1988: 247–248) has reminded us, this enterprise involves renouncing a way of thinking that attaches order to stability, and renouncing a concept that rejects the irrational and the imaginary in the aim of achieving, at all costs, a society of reason. War does not only destroy a society, it also deeply transforms it. The transition from war to peace (which is by no means linear) involves extending this transformation and accentuating some of its dimensions. In many instances, the 'international community' aims at stabilizing the situation in the short to mid-term, as was the case in Kosovo, and not necessarily at promoting an actual resolution of a conflict, something usually more demanding and painful. The current emphasis put on stabilization may be caricatured in situations where, as in Haiti or Afghanistan today, the 'international community' seems to be willing to 'stabilize the chaos it created', as local people put it. The interests of the intervening forces may find common ground with those of local elites: 'consolidating' the status quo or redistributing cards without stimulating any major change, which obviously contradicts the ambition to 'build peace'. For sure, local and international actors themselves generally have quite different sets of objectives, for the short, mid- and long terms, and these ambiguities are often necessary to initiate a PCPB process in the first place. Progress in resolving these major political contradictions will only be made if citizens of the world 'at peace' begin to mobilize and call their political leaders to account on these questions and over the conditions in which diplomats, militaries or humanitarian workers actually interfere in postwar contexts.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The highly formal and – it must be said – ‘elitist’ approach generally favoured by aid programmes aimed at supporting civil society in post-conflict situations ignores a large portion of the changes occurring within the societies concerned. However important the role of different local elites may be, that group constitutes one side – and not necessarily the most important – of a much larger story that is also written at the community level. From one situation to another, the idea of ‘community’ contains highly variable forms of organization and mediation. In a given country’s recent history, the modalities of organization and projection in the public space have often undergone profound transformation, stemming from various factors: the contacts with national and international NGOs intervening in the area of humanitarian aid or development, according to a project-oriented approach that implies the existence of a certain type of ‘organized’ partner on the ground; the effects of repression and war, leading in particular to major displacements of people to refugee and displaced-person camps or to cities, which hastens the break-up of former community ties according to the imperatives of survival; the effects of violence within the group, especially when this violence has been used and heightened by political entrepreneurs; the transformation of identities and frameworks of reference; and so forth.

To grasp this, an accurate and dynamic analysis of each part of the social fabric is required. Such analyses must assume that outsiders overcome the impression of disorganization, or even anomie, often given by societies at war or just emerging from conflict. In fact, war profoundly transforms social and political foundations at least as much as it destroys them. From this perspective, a community-oriented analytical approach should help to understand how collective life continues to organize itself, even amid many difficulties. Such an approach implies fundamental changes in the intelligence and communication capacities of outsiders, in order that they might better understand local contexts and, more particularly, identify the local actors likely to be the major motors for change. It does not assume years of study and expertise, but simply taking stock of what various social science disciplines have to say about the situations under consideration, and using that knowledge within an operational analytical approach. Whereas some progress has been made in the evaluation of aid programmes, much remains to be done on pre-assessment and actual monitoring of the socio-political contexts and consequences of PCPB programmes. Those aiming at supporting local civil societies have no comprehensive monitoring and verification systems in relation to the dynamics they engender. In each programme, field staff should have at their disposal concrete guidelines to help them identify their interlocutors in contexts where actors may no longer play the same role

as before the war, and where new hierarchies and values may have emerged and been transformed, as well as key indicators so they can monitor and report on the way they actually work and seem to be perceived by local people. All staff members – not just members of analysis units or military intelligence cells – must have at their disposal these relevant tools of work. This effort should include the regular organization of meetings with other agencies (both local and international) involved in similar activities in the same country and in comparable contexts in order to share information, to debate questions such information may raise and to identify perspectives relevant for continuing the work. In intense and violent situations, pretending to contribute to PCPB is a difficult task, and there are very few clearcut answers. But, it is possible to at least improve the practice of outsiders who to date too often function blindly.

Practitioners intervening in war-torn societies also need to be better trained. The preparation, pre-briefings, continuous training, monitoring and debriefing of mission staff should be a priority. This should include specific psychological support, so that staff members can anticipate and deal both with their own reactions and with the reactions of their interlocutors in the field, as well as a true ethical reflection (Pouligny, 2002, 2004: 22–23). In the same vein, we need to reconceptualize how the staffs of international organizations or international NGOs conceive of their role in any peacebuilding process. Contrary to what they may be inclined to feel or believe, they are not the main actors, but should think of themselves as facilitators in a leverage process. This means that one needs to be modest, flexible, patient and unobtrusive – almost the opposite of what informs most of the current practices. Such an approach may also conflict with what a given organization may need in order to ensure its visibility, self-promotion and fundraising, or what individual staff members may seek in order to obtain a good performance record. Therefore, the role of facilitator, the leverage effect and the actual objectives of both processes need to be better conceptualized, including in relation to their various interactions with local political processes (such as in the legitimating process), so that they accurately inform programme and job descriptions, and consequently assessment programmes. Finally, this also requires that concrete steps be taken in order to improve outsiders' actual accountability towards local peoples and partners; for the moment, this is close to zero. In the UN system, in particular (but not only there), reforms are desperately needed to change a system rightly assessed by the Brahimi Report (United Nations, 2000) as diametrically opposed to meritocracy. Such reforms need to be vigorous and to include an effective performance-assessment and sanction system.

These are very concrete steps to be taken. They are feasible with few additional means and would allow actual and quick improvements in practice. But, they require a political decision to be made by heads of aid programmes

and organizations so that this is considered a priority. Such a decision would be a signal that outsiders should cease to consider local people either as passive recipients of their largesse or as potential obstacles to the smooth progress of their work. In that sense, such a reform also entails a mental revolution in which we must all – as analysts, policymakers, practitioners, etc. – play our part. Our societies have always been preoccupied with winning wars. It is time that we reflect on ways of winning peace. How can we pretend to build peace in societies where our actions de facto exclude the large majority of their members? How can we pretend to support processes aimed at changing a local social and political fabric when we merely ignore what local knowledge, resources and wishes are? It is time that we begin to be serious in our desire to contribute to peacebuilding in other countries and become accountable to our local partners.

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