

# Narrative and Conflict: Explorations of Theory and Practice



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# Narrative and Conflict: Explorations of Theory and Practice

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## **Narrative Approach to Interethnic Conflicts:**

### ***Narrative Templates as Cultural Limiters to Narrative Transformations***

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#### **Abstract**

Narrative approach to interethnic conflicts considers them as competing stories. In this connection, it is argued that for effective conflict resolution the competing narratives should undergo certain transformations that could bring them towards their convergence into a common one. However, discussions of narrative transformations to conflict resolution often fail to differentiate between surface narratives and underlying schematic narrative templates. In this regard schematic narrative templates which are deeply entrenched with patterns of collective memory and identity can serve as “cultural limiter” which restrains the process of narrative transformations. This thesis is illustrated through the narrative analysis of the BBC Russian Service video report “Karabakh: Two Versions of the Story” (aired on 18th April, 2011). In the analysis of the BBC video report the author employs some procedures which are suggested by the model of “chronotopic” method.

#### **Keywords**

public discourse, truth, Azerbaijan, ethnic conflict

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### **In Lieu of Introduction**

Narrative approach to interethnic or identity-based conflicts is a relatively new field of academic and practical explorations (Winslade & Monk, 2000). The theoretical grounds for this approach are laid down by post-neoclassical social epistemology which suggests viewing social reality as a process of social construction (Berger, Luckmann, 1996). Emerged at the second half of the 20th century the new look has been explicated in the idea that realities are organized and maintained through narratives. Some of the postulates derived from the social constructionism can be applied to narrative approach to interethnic conflicts, such as: 1. Narrative serves as an important tool in grasping social or historical reality (Berger, Luckmann, 1996); 2. Any narrative is a product of a certain construction which always includes acts of interpretation (Martin, 1986; Gergen, 2011); 3. The more skillfully constructed narrative (that is more coherent, with well developed plot and well elaborated beginning and most importantly – ending) is perceived as more reliable and more readily believed in what "really happened" (Bennet, Feldman, 1981).

Within the “narrative” framework conflicts in some essential ways are considered as competing stories (Cobb, 2004). As evidenced by many cases parties at conflict strive for legitimizing their claims by creation and dissemination of their own version of “what happened in reality” while at the same time trying to delegitimize the claims and version of their opponents. In this connection it is argued that for effective conflict resolution the competing narratives should undergo certain transformations that could bring them towards their convergence into a common one (Cobb, 1993). The underlying assumption is that a common narrative would help parties at conflict to create a shared, internally consistent vision of the past, present and future, which is considered as an important precondition for civil peace (Steiner-Khamsi, 1994).

However, creation of a common narrative is a difficult task, especially when it concerns to interethnic conflicts. One of the obstacles arises from the fact that in periods of war and conflict, societies develop their own narratives which, from their viewpoint, become the only true narratives. These narratives tend to denigrate and disavow the narrative of enemy. This is definitely the case with the Israel–Palestine conflict. For example, in discussing narratives in the Israel–Palestine conflict, Adwan and Bar-On (2004 ) argued the impossibility of creating a joint narrative that could be accepted by both sides at the current stage of hostility

and violence between the Israeli Jews and the Palestinians (Adwan & Bar-On, 2004 ). The contradiction between the two sides' intentions and between their narratives is so strong that Adwan and Bar-On concluded "that a joint narrative would emerge only after the clear change from war culture to peace culture took place" (2004 , p. 516). Another type of narrative intervention – personal life storytelling for groups of Israeli Jew and Palestinian students – was suggested by Bar-On and Kassem (2004). The researchers suggested that a group develops its own collective memory out of the painful personal stories, which can lead to the development of joint space through which the participants' narratives could be accepted (Bar-On & Kassem, 2004 ).

Regarding narrative intervention into intractable conflicts, at least two issues that could restrain intervention effectiveness are worth mentioning. One is what might be called narrative embeddedness into identity (Hammack, 2008). Thus, some scholars argue that national identities are grounded in a stock of stories (MacIntyre, 1984). In this connection, any desired narrative transformations should inevitably be limited by patterns of identity based in the larger stock of stories. Another issue may be called narrative truth. Wertsch (2012) distinguishes between propositional truth and narrative truth. Propositional truth is more about historical facts (dates, acts of particular historical personages, and so forth) that can be more or less easily verified, whereas narrative truth is about the motives of the personages or the meanings of the historical events. Narrative truth is maintained through the ways how the events are spun into a coherent story (Wertsch, 2012). In this connection James Wertsch proposed to make distinction between "specific narratives" and "schematic narrative templates" (SNT) (Wertsch, 2002). According to the author, specific narratives are surface texts that include concrete information about the particular times, places and actors involved in events from the past. In contrast the SNT provide the recurrent constants of a narrative tradition. They do not include any concrete information, but are instead cookie cutter plots that can be used to generate multiple specific narratives (Wertsch, 2002). These templates differ from one cultural setting to another and require special analysis to reveal their role as a basic model for constructing plot lines for major historical events, including events that may not fit particularly well in this scheme. It is also argued that narrative template is used by a "mnemonic community" to interpret multiple specific events by interpreting them in accordance with a schematic plot line (Wertsch, 2002). In turn, as schematic narrative templates are deeply entrenched with patterns of collective memory and identity they may resist any significant nar-

rative transformations. In this connection, SNT can be considered as “cultural limiter” which restrains the process of construction of a common narrative from among the competing accounts.

In this regard the Armenia-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno Karabakh could serve as a good illustration for the above thesis. This conflict from the very beginning was accompanied with competing narratives including conflicting historical representations, historical accounts which aimed to justify territorial claims (Garagozov, 2006, 2012). In addition to conflicting historical accounts regarding ancient times both sides in conflict exert great efforts in creation and dissemination of their versions of what happened in the Karabakh conflict during the period of 1988-1994. Pointing out to the completely opposing character of Armenian and Azerbaijani narratives on Karabakh conflict Thomas de Waal (2003) has termed them “sealed narratives”. However, even if Armenian and Azerbaijani narratives on Karabakh conflict are both “sealed narratives” there is one important difference between them which is derived from the different history writing tradition developed by each community. Thus, distinct from the Azerbaijani history writing which has not developed SNT, Armenian historical writing tradition has well developed specific schematic narrative template (Garagozov, 2008). This narrative template what I called the “Loyal People Encircled and Tortured by the Enemies” essentially defines how Armenians perceive themselves and their neighbors and imposes certain limitations upon the process of narrative transformations for the Karabakh conflict. In what follows further I shall outline the Armenian schematic narrative template in more details.

### **Armenian Narrative Template: “Loyal People Encircled and Tortured by the Enemies”**

One of the most important shared narratives that binds the Armenian mnemonic community together concerns repeated Armenians’ “sufferings” at the hands of the “infidels,” first the Persian fire-worshippers, then the Muslim Arabs, afterward, the Mongol “pagans,” and later, the Turks. This national memory has encouraged Armenians to develop habits of emplotment, or narrative templates that lead them to interpret many events in similar way – namely as suffering at the hands of enemies. The Armenian Church which traditionally patronized medieval history-writing has played a particular significant role in creation of this

narrative template. Martyrologies, biblical texts, and much similar literature, had their own influence on the medieval Armenian historical accounts, which fitted into the “Procrustean bed” of providentialism and magical Christianity (Thomson, 1985). Specifically, for religious and ideological reasons, these works presented a diligent and detailed description of the Armenians’ “sufferings” at the hands of the foreign invaders. Based on the narrative analysis of the main Armenian historiographic works (Garagozov, 2008) I have outlined the following formulae of this “Loyal People Encircled and Tortured by the Enemies” narrative template:

1. An “initial situation” in which the Armenian people are living in glorious times disrupted by enemy intrigues, as a result of which
2. the Armenians fell victim to aggression,
3. they have to live through a period of suffering and difficulties,
4. if they remained loyal to their faith, they overcame their enemies; if they betrayed their faith, they were defeated.

To sum up, the Armenian cultural tradition has produced numerous “victim” narratives which are based on the mentioned above narrative template and which left strong footprint on how Armenians perceives themselves and others. In this connection we can say that the Armenian narrative template mediates the effort after meaning in the Armenian “mnemonic community”. It is a cultural tool that is widely understood and employed by Armenians when making sense of events, both past and present, and as such it provides a plot line for narratives such that they take the shape of the same story told over and over with different characters. Dealing with basic properties of the SNT in general Wertsch has noted:

It is not to suggest that this template is simply a fabrication or figment of the imagination of this mnemonic community. Instead, it suggests that the narrative template provides an interpretative framework that heavily shapes the thinking and speaking of the members of the community, sometimes in ways that are quite surprising to those coming from other collectives. (2012, 176)

For example, it would be surprising for Azerbaijani side which lost to Armenians not only Nagorno Karabakh but 7 adjacent regions of Azerbaijan and has about 1 000 000 refugees and IDPs who were forcibly evicted from Armenia and occupied regions of Azerbaijan during the last 25 years to hear that Armenians continue to perceive themselves as victims and the most suffered side in the Karabakh conflict.

In this connection the BBC Russian Service video report “Karabakh: Two Versions of the Story” which was aired on 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2011 (Boldyrev, 2011) deserves a particular atten-

tion as an attempt by an external observer to tell us the Armenian and Azerbaijani versions of the Karabakh conflict in a single narrative. I will be analyzing this particular narrative as a way of illustrating the main points of my thesis about the role of the Armenian SNT and in particular its function as a “cultural limiter” which restrains the process of construction of a common narrative from among the competing accounts. In this connection I also assume that the task of spinning off the coherent narrative as it is usually expected from such a report would be hard to achieve without the reflection on the specific function of SNT as cultural limiter. Before I go into this analysis let me outline in brief the method of my analysis.

### **“Chronotopic reading” as a Method of Narrative**

#### **Analysis: Theoretical Background**

In general there are a number of different connotations that are connected to the use of the term narrative analysis. Depending on different theoretical perspectives narrative analysis may differ in its aims and methods (Bamberg, 2010). In the narrative analysis of the BBC video report I will employ some procedures which are suggested by the model of “chronotopic reading” which I developed and described elsewhere (Garagozov, 1994). Therefore I will briefly outline the basic theoretical framework within which the model of chronotopic reading has been elaborated. This model heavily draws on the writings of Bakhtin (1981), Vygotsky (1956), and Leont’ev (1983). The central category for this model of reading is the notion of chronotope which was suggested by outstanding Russian literary scholar, philosopher and philologist Mikhail Bakhtin for the analysis of novel. He defined chronotope as “intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (1981, p.84). According to Bakhtin:

chronotopes are the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel...[they] serve for the assimilation of actual temporal (including historical) reality, [and] permit the essential aspects of this reality to be reflected and incorporated into the artistic space of the novel. (1981, p. 250)

In Bakhtin’s view: “every entry into the sphere of meaning is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope” (1981, p. 250). In the “Concluding Remarks” Bakhtin situates “the significance of all these chronotopes” on four different levels: (1) they have narrative, plot-generating significance; (2) they have representational significance; (3) they “provide the basis for distinguishing generic types”; and (4) they have semantic significance (1981, pp. 250-251). Unlike other Bakhtin’s categories such as the concepts of carnival, polyphony or heter-



oglossia this concept was neither especially appreciated nor elaborated by the Western scholarship. There might be different reasons for a long lasting neglect which is somehow only recently getting over as it is signified by producing a special volume devoted to the chronotope (Bemong, Borghart, De Dobbeleer, Demoen, De Temmerman & Keunen, 2010). But there is still not a systematic theory of this concept. Partly it is due to Bakhtin's rather vague and broad description of the chronotope which can elicit different interpretations. In this connection, initially designed as an analytical tool for establishing generic divisions in the history of the novel, chronotopic analysis has recently been suggested as a conceptual instrument for enriching such diverse fields as narratology, reception theory, gender studies and cognitive-psychological approaches to literature (Bemong, Borghart, 2010). In this regard a cognitive-psychological approach to the chronotope concept suggested by Bart Keunen (2000) is worth noting. Striving to link the concept of chronotope with the notion of schemata (memory schema, action schema) he argues: "Chronotopes are not only semantic elements of texts; they are also (and in the first place) cognitive strategies applied by specific readers and writers" (2000, p.2). The model of chronotopic reading or chronotopic analysis which I proposed in my research (Karakozov, 1994) draws on two important insights from Bakhtin: 1) chronotopes as spatial-temporal structures are explicated (embodied) in plot construction of the narrative; 2) reader through specific system of mental actions aimed at reconstructing spatial-temporal (chronotopical) structures of the text can get access to the meaning (sense) level of the text. In the upshot, the model of chronotopic reading is a specific kind of reading activity that is focused on analysis of plot as a means of making sense of a story. In this connection, the model of chronotopic analysis includes the following procedures: a) to break down the whole narrative into separate episodes (events); b) to define the meaning of each episode (event); c) to regroup episodes and to generalize the meanings; d) to define the overall sense of the narrative.

In this case my task is made easier since I have a video report that has been assembled, that is, frame montage; this makes it easier to break the narrative down into fragments (episodes). In addition, following some basic tenets of narrative approach (Polkinghorne, 2007) I will be including some comments and notes in my narrative analysis that I believe would provide better understanding of the narrative context for the audience which is not well familiar with the Karabakh conflict. From this point of view my narrative analysis could be also considered as a kind of narrative intervention into the Karabakh conflict.



### Object of study - “Karabakh: Two versions of the Story”

The report begins with a video series accompanied by the following voice-over<sup>1</sup>:

*“The pomegranate trees are running to seed, but we cannot help them. The local residents know that the area has been mined. This blackened orchard has been the victim of war for 20 years now. Five mines and several projectiles were found in the field next to it. And there are many more fields like this in Karabakh.”*

The meaning of this fragment at the beginning of the narrative can be termed as **“farming difficulties in Karabakh.”** Then a voice accompanied by scenes of gunfire exchange, followed by women (Azerbaijanis) lamenting over freshly dug graves and trucks full of refugees (also Azerbaijanis), continues:

*“At first they fought with sticks and stones, and then they began shooting, then cannons and tanks, stolen or bought at Soviet military bases, came in to back up the machineguns. In the end, this war was fought by the armies of unrecognized Karabakh and Armenia, on the one side, and Azerbaijan, on the other. The hostility between two once fraternal republics has taken more than 20,000 lives, and more than a million people have become refugees.”*

This fragment, which dispassionately presents statistics of the losses, can be entitled as **“escalation of the conflict and losses.”** Admittedly, nothing is said here about the reason for the conflict, which could give the uninitiated viewer or listener the impression that people were suddenly filled with mutual hatred and began killing each other. Nor is anything said about the fact that most of the refugees are Azerbaijanis, who have been driven from their homeland. A voice off screen goes on to say:

*“Now the capital of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic is like any other provincial center. But as soon as you turn off the main street, evidence of the past fighting is still all too obvious (walls pockmarked with bullet and projectile holes are shown). The capital is in a valley, 10 km up the hill is the city of Shusha. In September 1988, within three days, Armenians left Shusha and Azerbaijanis abandoned Stepanakert. A front line formed. Grad projectiles were fired from Shusha on Stepanakert (video series—firing of Grad projectiles, people hiding in their homes), at night people hide in shelters, in the morning they come out to see what is left of their homes (video series—two middle-aged Armenian women are standing in a doorway; the reporter asks them): “What are you doing out in the street?”— (One of the women an-*

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<sup>1</sup> Since this video report did not have a written transcript, I had to transcribe it in writing myself (in italics), retaining the style of the statements as much as possible. I underlined some of the words and phrases in the written text in order to analyze and draw the reader’s attention to them. My comments and explanations to the transcribed text are given mainly in parentheses.

swers): *“I’m not out in the street, I’ve been standing around here for an hour, I can’t go home or get to work.”*

This fragment, which concentrates entirely on the vicissitudes of the life of the Armenian population of Stepanakert during the active stage of the conflict, can be termed as **“the crisis situation in Stepanakert caused by shelling from Shusha.”** In the next fragment, which shows a tank, we are told:

*“A tank that began the Armenians’ victorious attack on Shusha 19 years ago still stands on the outskirts of the town. But there are enough other reminders. The life of Shusha can hardly be called urban. Although people somehow still manage to live here, many homes have been abandoned forever. The ruins of this mosque and this abandoned armored artillery vehicle are just a small reminder of the town’s former inhabitants. The most important thing for the Armenians’ self-identity has been restored (shot of an Armenian church). When Bishop Parkev returned to Shushi (for some reason the reporter pronounces the name of the town of Shusha in the Armenian way—Shushi), Grad projectiles were kept in the wrecked Christ the Savior church. The church was rebuilt. (For the first time, we see the reporter.) The bishop is sure that the entire town will follow suit and be rebuilt. Shushi, according to him, will become the cultural center of Karabakh. And peace will be possible.”*

It is worth noting both the verbal statements chosen for the narrative (...many homes have been abandoned forever. *“The ruins of this mosque and abandoned armored artillery vehicle are just a small reminder of the town’s former inhabitants,”* *“The most important thing for the Armenians’ self-identity has been restored”*) and the visual shots accompanying this fragment: a destroyed mosque and a restored Armenian church shown in its entire splendor. All of this makes it possible to entitle this fragment as **“overcoming the crisis by capturing the town of Shusha and driving out its former inhabitants (Azerbaijanis).”** However, judging from the next fragment, it is still too early for the Armenians to feel so reassured. Azerbaijan is destroying the idyll, which “for some reason” does not want to reconcile itself with the current state of affairs. The narrative goes on to say:

*“But like everyone here, the bishop believes that Azerbaijan must take the first step. (Shot of Bishop Parkev, who says): “Until the situation is resolved, no one can feel very confident of course. The hostilities might flare up again at any moment, since we often hear aggressive outbursts from the leader of the Azerbaijan Republic. If we go for a compromise for the sake of peace, it should be mutual. But today the president of Azerbaijan is putting forward unreasonable demands that look nothing like a compromise.”*

This fragment can be called as **“the uncompromising Azerbaijanis, who have no wish to make peace, are preventing the restoration of a peaceful life.”** The narrative continues as follows:

*“This house is occupied (shot of a sign in Russian on the gates of the house). Shusha is Armenian; the people of Karabakh believe that history has already been rewritten. On the outskirts of the city stands the house of famous Azerbaijani composer Bülbüloğlu. In the garden is a bust of his father destroyed by shelling. Now postal worker Liuda from Stepanakert lives there. Her house was destroyed by a bomb. ‘How can I go back, where can I go if my apartment no longer exists,’ says Liuda. ‘You mean it has been completely destroyed?’ asks the correspondent. ‘Yes, there is nothing left but bare ground,’ replies postal worker Liuda.”*

This fragment can be called **“Armenians are taking up residence in Shusha.”** So far we have been seeing and hearing the voices of the Armenian side. In the next episode, Bülbüloğlu presents the Azerbaijani viewpoint, managing to say, *“Of course it is very painful to see my father’s home...,”* before his voice is drowned out by the correspondent’s voice-over, saying,

*“Bülbüloğlu, Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Russia. He, which is unique for the Azerbaijanis, managed to visit his father’s home. He visited Shusha twice with a delegation of cultural figures and spoke to the woman now living in the house. He says their conversation was genial. But relations on a personal level are one thing, and the ambassador’s official position is another.”*

Again there is a shot of Bülbüloğlu, who says,

*“When they talk about a compromise, what does this compromise consist of? Giving up a piece of your land and saying, go and live on it as you wish? What sort of compromise is that? We are the ones offering a compromise. We are willing to see the Armenians living there alongside the Azerbaijanis who lived there as part of Azerbaijan in conditions of the highest autonomy. This is the only solution to the situation. But in order for it to work, the occupied territories taken under fire must first be returned. Today the goodwill of the Azerbaijani leadership and the president of Azerbaijan is conducive to resolving this issue peacefully. And to be frank, society is ready for this, the people are fed up with the whole thing, they say that enough is enough, the problem must be resolved.”*

In this fragment, we hear the opinion of the opposing side in the conflict, that is, the Azerbaijanis, for the first time; albeit with cut-ins and innuendos. The implicit meaning to be drawn from the reporter’s comments can be defined as follows: **“at the personal level, the Azerbaijanis can socialize and make peace with the Armenians, but the government’s official irreconcilable position is preventing this.”** The narrative then returns to Stepanakert (video series: airport in Stepanakert; voice-over):

*“Here is a new point of tension. For the first time in 20 years, the airport in Stepanakert is preparing to receive civilian flights. The runway destroyed by bombs has been restored and, at the beginning of May, an airplane, flying over the mountains from Armenia, is due to land here. Baku is protesting—a breakaway community cannot control Azerbaijan’s sky. The people of Karabakh are saying that this land and*

*sky is theirs.” Shot of one of the local Armenian leaders, who says, “The people of Karabakh have their own main question—the future of NKR. If we find a solution to the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh, it must be higher than the current status, and then all the other questions that result from or might be consequences of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will be much easier to resolve.”*

This fragment can be entitled as **“Azerbaijan is preventing the restoration of peaceful life in Nagorno-Karabakh.”** In the next fragment, the reporter’s narrative begins almost heroically,

*“When the time came to defend his home village, Alexander (an invalid on crutches appears on the screen) ascended these hills and took up defense against the enemy ensconced on the nearby summits.”*

A phrase follows that does not entirely live with the previous,

*“In February 1992, refugees from the village of Khojaly stretched out along this valley.” (It is not clear why Azerbaijanis began fleeing Khojaly, if the talk before this was about Armenians defending their village.) Alexander continues talking on screen: “And when they approached Agdam, the Azerbaijanis began attacking us. And there was artillery fire.” (Again, this does not jive with the former statement. It is difficult to imagine how refugees from Khojaly could attack Armenian positions set up in advance. However, without commenting upon this statement, the reporter says), “Alexander is talking about the bloodiest events of that war. But this is only one of two opposing versions of what happened. In two days, 500 residents of Khojaly were killed or later froze to death. (Video series—Azerbaijanis lamenting over the bodies of the perished residents of Khojaly.) The Armenians claim that there was firing from the crowd of refugees. The Azerbaijani side is sure that peaceful citizens were deliberately killed. The people of Karabakh (Incorrect term: correct would be to use the term - the Armenian community of Karabakh) are indignant about these statements. They call the accusations that many residents were shot point blank a fabrication.”*

This fragment can be entitled as **“there are different versions of what happened in Khojaly.”**

This fragment deserves special attention since this is the first time the reporter articulates that there are *“opposing versions of what happened.”* This part of report, as I believe, is of special significance in understanding the entire narrative construction, which I will discuss in more detail a little later. But let us return to the report. The reporter goes on to say,

*“The evidence of fighting is still so obvious it is as though it happened just yesterday. And the venom with which the Armenians and Azerbaijanis defend their truth is also as strong as ever. Fifteen years after the war, there are still two versions of the story. There on a promontory stands a monument to one of the 60 Armenian soldiers who were killed. The path goes past positions where now Armenians, now Azerbaijanis were entrenched for 4 years. Alexander believes that it is best not to dig up the past, then peaceful coexistence will be possible. But, as always, there must be the right conditions for this. (Alexander says), ‘Nothing good will come of digging up the past again. Digging up the past... But it still has a way of revealing itself. The best thing is to come to terms. Come to terms on how we can live here independently. Let them live here if they want. But it is our land, we will never leave.’”*

This fragment can be termed as **“there is no need to dig up the past, the Azerbaijanis should agree to our conditions.”** We are then informed that

*“people are digging up history, sometimes literally. Historian Vagram Varitsian (he appears on screen) took me to the ruins of the town of Tigranakert. The foundations of a 5th-6th-century church can be found here. On the hill is a citadel founded in the first century BC. The archeological searches appear to be peaceful, but Varitsian admits that there are also political implications. It must be proven that Armenians have also lived in lowland Karabakh from time immemorial. At the foot of the ancient city, fresh history is in evidence. A row of entrenchments still not overgrown with grass. Here ancient stones sleep. Here two enemies stand side by side.”*

This fragment, which contains a historical excursion of dubious nature (Varitsian’s confession that the archeological digs have political implications), can be entitled as **“Karabakh is time honored Armenian land.”** Then the reporter appears again and says,

*“There, on the horizon, in the mountains, is one of the best fortified frontiers in the world, the so-called line of contact between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan. The war came to an end in 1994, when the sides stopped firing. But, of course, there is no contact there. Tens of thousands of soldiers on both sides are separated by hundreds of meters of mine fields. (Again the reporter’s voice can be heard off screen): And these tens of thousands of soldiers still wait in full combat-readiness.”*

The meaning is as follows: **“The crisis has still not been fully resolved.”** (V. Kazimirov<sup>2</sup> appears on screen):

*“Of course, I think that peaceful settlement can be reached. But this primarily requires a solution to question number one ... exclusion of the possibility that the hostilities will be resumed. As soon as the possibility of renewed hostilities is excluded, the Azerbaijanis will have no other choice but to look for solutions at the negotiation table, while the Armenians will have no reason to hold onto the territory they gra... (quickly corrects himself) took during the hostilities.”*

This peacekeeping appeal to the Azerbaijanis by Kazimirov, who almost made a blunder, is essentially a call **“to the Azerbaijanis to recognize and reconcile themselves with the current situation.”** Then we hear the reporter’s voice again:

*“There in the distance is the destroyed town of Agdam that once supplied the Soviet country with magnificent port wine. Before the war, almost 30,000 Azerbaijanis lived there. During the war, the Armenian positions were fired on from there using heavy artillery. In 1993, tens of thousands of Agdam residents became refugees. The Soviet constitution (it appears that everyone eulogizes it here) could do nothing to help them.”*

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<sup>2</sup> Ex-cochairman of the Minsk OSCE Group for Russia, retired diplomat who is known for his pro-Armenian position shown in his calling for the Azerbaijanis to proceed from the current reality and recognize the status quo that developed during the war.



*The town was razed to the ground. Now for the people of Karabakh this dead landscape is just part of a defense complex that keeps the enemy's cannons at a safe distance."*

This fragment is worth noting for the fact that it continues the Armenian version of events (during the war, the Armenian positions were fired on from there using heavy artillery). But for some reason, it is not explained why in particular "tens of thousands of Agdam residents became refugees." The meaning of this episode is as follows: "**Agdam was destroyed because the Azerbaijanis fired on the Armenians.**" And, finally, the reporter's concluding phrase,

*"People can talk for hours about what happened on this land 200 or 500 years ago. But they are unwilling to talk about what the future will be like (shot of a blossoming tree), except perhaps to compare Karabakh to the Middle East conflict. If this is so, it turns out that the main heritage of the Soviet empire in these environs is mutual hate and mistrust."*

To sum up the reporter's thought, "**the future of these environs is uncertain, and the main heritage of the Soviet empire is mutual hate and mistrust.**" In what follows further I shall regroup the defined meanings in order to get a more generalized ones.

### Making Sense of the Report

The meanings generated in the narrative analysis are summarized in the table below

#### Meaning framing of the "Karabakh: Two Versions of the Story"

	Meanings of the episodes	Generalized meanings
<b>A</b>	(1) "the crisis situation in Stepanakert caused by shelling from Shusha"	<i>Period of crisis and suffering for the Armenians that has been overcome</i>
	(2) "overcoming the crisis by capturing the town of Shusha and driving out its former inhabitants (Azerbaijanis)"	
	(3) "The town of Agdam was also destroyed because Azerbaijanis fired on Armenians from there"	
<b>B</b>	(1) "Armenians take up residence in Shusha"	<i>Restoration of a peaceful life in Karabakh</i>
	(2) "Karabakh is time-honored Armenian land"	
<b>C</b>	(1) "farming difficulties in Karabakh"	<i>However, the crisis is not entirely over since the Azerbaijanis, who do not wish to make peace, are preventing</i>
	(2) "Azerbaijan is preventing the restoration of life in Karabakh"	
	(3) "uncompromising Azerbaijanis who do not wish to	

	make peace”	<i>the restoration of a peaceful life</i>
<b>D</b>	(1) “there are different versions of what happened in Khojaly”	<i>The Azerbaijanis should recognize and reconcile themselves to the current situation</i>
	(2) “there is no need to dig up the past, the Azerbaijanis should agree to our (the Armenians’) conditions”	
	(3) “the Azerbaijanis can make peace with the Armenians on a personal level, but the government’s official irreconcilable position is preventing this”	

As one can see from the above table, the narrative about Armenian suffering which is summarized under the heading the "*period of crisis and suffering for the Armenians*" constitutes a significant part of the report. Essentially, this narrative reproduces the main components of the Armenian schematic narrative template “Loyal People Encircled and Tortured by the Enemies”. In this connection Armenian responding to the Khojaly events is especially revealing. These events are related to the most terrible event of the Karabakh war - the destruction of the Azerbaijani town of Khojaly and the mass slaughter of its population.<sup>3</sup> Although the international community has acknowledged the fact of Khojaly massacre at hands of Armenian militants the Armenian side refuses to recognize their wrongdoings in Khojaly. Instead, the Armenians are trying to come up with different justifying stories, with some of them even insisting that the Azerbaijanis themselves committed the murders in Khojaly (Garagozov, 2010). This response is evidenced by the reporter as well: “*The Azerbaijani side is sure that peaceful citizens were deliberately killed. The people of Karabakh (i.e. Armenians of Karabakh-R.G.) are indignant about these statements. They call the accusations that many residents were shot point blank a fabrication.*” (Boldyrev, 2011). There might be different explanations why Armenians so furiously resist admitting their wrongdoings in Khojaly but one thing is clear that a narrative depicting Armenians not as victims but victimizers do not fit into the Armenian schematic narrative template and therefore is disbelieved and excluded

<sup>3</sup> In the small hours of 26 February, 1992, the Azerbaijani town of Khojaly was razed to the ground in just a few hours by Armenian fighters with the support of servicemen of the 366th regiment of the CIS Joint Forces, and hundreds of its peaceful residents were brutally slaughtered. During these events, according to official data, a total of 613 people, including 106 women, 63 young children, and 70 old people were killed and 1,000 peaceful citizens of different ages were maimed by bullet wounds. On the night of the tragedy, 1,275 peaceful citizens were taken prisoner and nothing is known about the fate of 150 of them to this day. International organizations and witnesses reported the particular cruelty with which the Armenians treated the defenseless civilian population of Khojaly, including the many instances of desecration of the bodies of the perished Azerbaijanis (See: Human Rights Watch World Report, 1993; Goltz, 1992; The New York Times, 1992; Human Rights Watch / Helsinki, 1994; De Waal, 2003).



from the mainstream Armenian narrative on the Karabakh conflict. The report is also remarkable by its “one voice-ness”, reflecting mainly only version of one side in the conflict—the Armenian. As one can see from the report, this version is voiced by the Armenians, Kazimirov, and, finally, the reporter himself, which actually goes beyond the bounds of neutrality dictated by journalistic ethics. For example, we are told by the reporter how the Azerbaijani side fired on the Armenians from Shusha and Agdam, but there is no talk about the Armenian side firing on the Azerbaijanis, although it was the Azerbaijanis who were forced to flee from Karabakh. Essentially (apart from Bülbüloglu’s words), we do not hear what the Azerbaijanis have to say. So, while the report is called “Karabakh: Two Versions of the Story”, the reporter picked up mainly only the Armenian version of the Karabakh story. At the context of narrative “wars” between Armenian and Azerbaijani sides in the Karabakh conflict the “one voice-ness” of the report makes it perceived by Azerbaijani side as a biased, «pro-Armenian”. The question - what made the reporter pick up the “pro-Armenian” version of the Karabakh conflict report is beyond the scope of this article. However, this case can be considered within the *narrative compression* paradigm which is suggested by Sara Cobb and her colleagues for analyzing the political conditions influencing the process of why some narratives are granted legitimacy while any alternatives are marginalized (Cobb, 2012). Proceeding from my analysis I would suggest taking into account some cultural factors in addition to political conditions when analyzing the process of narrative competition. In this regard two narrative properties should be especially mentioned. First, “victim” narratives can provide a winning option in narrative competition. The party which broadly employs such type of narratives usually wins over sympathy among the audience and competition after all. Another winning option is provided by such narrative’s property as its coherence, well developed plot, and consistence; a party with a better constructed narrative has more chances to win the narrative competition. From this cultural paradigm point of view, the Armenian narrative on Karabakh conflict definitely has advantage in competition with the Azerbaijani narrative as better elaborated and clearly articulated “victim” narrative.

In general the narrative constructed by the BBC reporter certainly has its flaws. For example, it is internally contradictory. The verbal and visual elements of the report contradict each other to a certain extent: we are always being told that “the Azerbaijanis are attacking and the Armenians are defending themselves,” but we see pictures of sobbing Azerbaijani women and men and Azerbaijani refugees. However, any viewer or listener unfamiliar with the conflict details is unlikely to be able to identify the ethnic affiliation of the sobbing and

fleeing people shown on screen, and could easily make a sense generated by this video report summarized as:” *the Azerbaijani side, “due to stubbornness, government pressure, or some other unknown reason, is preventing the restoration of peaceful life in Karabakh.”*

### **In Lieu of a Conclusion**

The BBC reporter's failure to create a coherent narrative that could cover both parties' versions is instructive. It is instructive in a sense that is attesting to how hard is to compose a narrative from among the competing versions of the conflict. However, a story told from the viewpoint of just one of the sides in the conflict can hardly make this conflict easier to resolve. For conflict resolution, as it follows from the narrative approach is an outcome of a certain narrative transformations of the competing accounts to be initiated through the process of narrative mediation and dialogical interactions between the conflicting sides. In this connection discussions of narrative transformations in narrative approach to conflict resolution often fail to differentiate between surface narratives and underlying narrative templates. For example, even in the face of what appears to be disconfirming evidence as in the case with Khojaly, the Armenian narrative interprets it in accordance with the Armenian People Encircled and Tortured by the Enemies narrative template. Accenting on the Armenian victimhood this schematic narrative template which is underlying Armenian narratives on the Karabakh conflict is a powerful source underpinning resistance to any significant changes. In this connection narrative templates can impose certain restraints upon the process of narrative transformations. Recognizing this might help us understand the troubles and odds that confront anyone trying to pursue the process of narrative transformations for conflict resolution in interethnic conflicts and to develop more comprehensive strategies of narrative intervention into the conflicts.

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# Narrative and Conflict: Explorations of Theory and Practice

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## **Exploring the Potential for Narrative Analysis in Maps: *The Case Study of the Georgia-South Ossetia Conflict***

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### **Abstract**

The use of narrative analyses has been used to further our understanding of conflict. While maps have been recognized as objects of power and identity, study of them as narratives has until recently been under-developed. This paper will present exploratory narrative study of maps and mapping associated with a conflict case study; Georgia and South Ossetia in the Caucasus. Texts and stories embedded into Western cartographical maps will be examined using structuralist, functionalist and post-structuralist analyses.

### **Keywords**

Georgia, Ossetia, maps, cartography, narrative analysis

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## Introduction

Narrative analysis offers useful insight into understanding the stories that underpin sides of a conflict. Casebeer and Russell (2005) describe narratives thus: “Stories influence our ability to recall events, motivate people to act, modulate our emotional reactions to events, cue certain heuristics and biases, structure our problem-solving capabilities, and ultimately perhaps even constitute our very identity” (p. 6). As Cobb et al., (2013) note, “Narrative provides a lens that has been shown to be useful for analyzing meaning making and for designing interventions in situations of protracted and escalating conflict” (p. 3).

One area where there appears to have yet been little work on narrative analysis but could benefit from its insight is maps. While maps have been recognized as objects of power and identity, study of them as narratives has until recently been under-developed. As discussed below, maps have been categorized as texts and can be analyzed as such. While traditionally recognized texts of various types have undergone analysis as narratives, more recently recognized texts, such as maps, have not generally gone through the same critique. The below provides a discussion of maps as narrative and an exploratory narrative study of maps and mapping associated with a conflict case study, Georgia and South Ossetia in the Caucasus.

The development of narrative theory itself has gone through several changes, generally in line with the progression of social theory. The evolution from structuralism to functionalism to post-structuralism has led to growing understanding of narratives and ways to analyze and understand them. It seems perhaps odd but also fitting to run a map case study through this progression to see what insights come of it, particularly given that a narrative analysis methodology for “traditional” maps (i.e. in the Western cartographic style) appears to be under-developed and the study of maps as narrative within the discipline of conflict analysis and resolution has also been less developed than in other fields, such as geography.

## Theory and Maps as Narrative

“Overall, the critical turn in cartography has dramatically modified the relations between maps and narratives in two ways: by deconstructing and exposing the metanarratives embedded in maps, and by envisioning maps as a compelling form of storytelling” (Caquard, 2011, p. 136).



There is considerable theory concerning maps, knowledge, social construct, and power that has originated primarily in postmodern geographic thought. Such theory naturally extends to and enhances understanding of maps as narratives, particularly in terms of conflict relations. However, a long-standing view commonly held is that maps are neutral means of communicating geographic data (Craib, 2000). They may be more or less scientific, more or less artistic (a common dialectic in the cartographic literature; Krygier, 1995). However, the underlying power they hold and mean to convey has been less well studied until relatively recently, when advancements in both theory and technology have led to more refined, more appropriate understanding of the roles maps play and their social impact.

Some of the fundamental key contributions were developed by Harley, particularly with his 1989 “Deconstruction of the Map.” Crampton (2001) explains the significance of Harley’s employment of deconstruction to unravel the power relations inherent in maps as follows:

Maps are situated in a particular set of (competing) interests, including cultural, historical and political; maps can be understood by what they subjugate/ ignore/ downplay (what [Harley] called the silences and secrecies); and the way to interpret maps is not as records of the landscape but tracing out the way they embody power (in creating/ regenerating institutional power relations such as serf/lord or native/ European) and are themselves caught up in power relations, i.e., are not innocent... In sum: ‘Deconstruction urges us to read between the lines of the map – “in the margins of the text” – and through its tropes to discover the silences and contradictions that challenge the apparent honesty of the image’. (Harley, 1989, p. 3)

Harley explores postmodern thought to relook the nature and role of maps as representations of power, stating that “an alternative epistemology, rooted in social theory rather than in scientific positivism, is more appropriate to the history of cartography” (Harley, 1989, p. 2). He relies on Derrida and Foucault in support of his deconstruction of the map. From Derrida he takes the concept that rhetoric is embodied in all texts. He takes from Foucault the idea that there is power in all forms of knowledge. Thus, by demonstrating that the map is both a text and a body of knowledge, he opens up the map to deconstructive pursuit.

In order to analyze the power inherent in map knowledge, Harley positions cartographic methodology, i.e. the “rules” used to create maps, as discourse, a primary Foucauldian unit of analysis. Harley states that, “The steps in making a map – selection, omission, simplification, classification, the creation of hierarchies, and 'symbolization' – are all inherently rhetorical”

(Harley, 1989, p. 11). In other words, which items are mapped, which items are not mapped, how mapped items are portrayed, how the legend is organized, all embody some of the rules (i.e. the map discourse) that convey the power relations, with their concomitant views and values, materialized in the map.

Zeigler (2002) discusses the contributions of semiotic theory to both cartography and political geography. In terms of cartography, semiotics identifies and highlights the importance of signs and symbols and how they relate to each other in the map “system.” Moreover, Zeigler brings special attention to Gottmann’s theorization on iconography (1951), i.e. “the set of beliefs, symbols, images, and ideas to which a community shows a profound attachment” (p. 675).

Recently, the concept of the “geo-narrative” has become popular in geographic theory and research (Mennis et al., 2013). “Geo-narrative” is defined by Kwan and Ding (2008) as a method of GIS-based narrative analysis that is able to incorporate qualitative data, and, therefore, is well-suited to “facilitate the creation and interpretation of contextualized cartographic or visual narratives... . It is intended to be helpful in the analysis of various types of narrative materials, such as oral histories, life histories, and biographies” (Kwan and Ding, 2008, p. 446).

The “geo-narrative” is primarily a methodology for mapping qualitative information and for integrating qualitative and quantitative data in a geospatial environment. While the work on geo-narratives has been extremely helpful in several ways, such as providing excellent insight into relations between individuals and their environments and giving cartographic voice to the disadvantaged, geo-narrative analysis is different than the narrative analysis of maps proposed here. To be sure, the geo-narrative holds great potential to be a means of providing insight into people’s narratives. However, the narrative analysis of maps proposed here is a study into the meaning of the texts and stories embedded in more traditional maps, particularly those developed under the internationally adopted Western cartographic approach because of their yet huge dominance and, therefore, inherent implications for conflict dynamics.

Below, structuralist, functionalist and post-structuralist approaches will be used to demonstrate how narrative analysis of maps can provide valuable insight into a conflict. After the 2008 war between Georgia and Russia, South Ossetia was one of two areas (the other being Abkhazia) that declared independence from Georgia and status as a sovereign state. The conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia is longstanding and has resulted in war before. This time, the

declaration of independence has resulted in a new round of separatism and nationalism justified through a narrative of being victimized at the hands of the Georgians over centuries.

### **Structuralist Approach: What's in a Name?**

The structuralist approach to narrative analysis focuses on specific parts or features, i.e. plots, characters, and themes, as well as form in terms of genre and narrative syntax. Maps have similar components and features. While structuralists such as Labov and Waletzky (1967) focus on analysis of the clause, phrase or word, a structuralist narrative analysis of a map might focus on discrete elements such as the meaning conveyed in the icons, legend, labeling, and structure.

Figure 1 presents a CIA Factbook map of Georgia. The map physically centers on Georgia, considered by the US to be an ally, albeit a lesser power. Interestingly, the map is not titled, e.g., "Map of Georgia," an omission similar to not titling a report or other text. There is also no legend, also unusual for an officially published map. As a result of lack of specified meaning (the function of a legend), the status of South Ossetia is unclear. It cannot be an independent nation, as the international borders between Georgia and its neighbors such as Russia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, are identified by the typical solid boundary. But is South Ossetia considered an autonomous republic, as it had been before the war? Indeed, the boundaries delineating South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Ajaria within Georgia all appear different. Within Georgian international boundaries, there is a solid, thin brown line outlining Abkhazia, the other 2008 breakaway republic. A very slightly thinner boundary identifies Ajaria. However, South Ossetia is outlined with a dashed brown line. Is this meant to signify the Georgian Administrative Boundary Line that traditionally identified South Ossetia and has now become a point of contention between the two political entities? It is clear that South Ossetia's status is something different. As there is no legend, the map reader is left to surmise its meaning. South Ossetia appears to be some sort of internal, undefined "Other."

Another subtle but interesting aspect of this map is the placement of Georgia so that more of Russia is shown than its southern neighbors of Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. This does not mean that Georgia interacts more with Russia than with its southern neighbors – this is certainly not the case. The larger view of Russia, concomitant with larger font titling, is more likely due to the security bent of the map maker and concerns over Russian interests in the area. Indeed, the title for "Russia" is the largest font on the map.

Thus, the positioning on this map seems to strongly hint at Georgian-Russian relations. However, underlying even that, given the somewhat unusual depiction of South Ossetia, there appears to be another positioning – that of US-Russia tensions with Georgia as proxy. If the map had purely reflected the Georgian narrative, there would have been an administrative boundary line outlining South Ossetia, or there may have been no boundary or coloring distinguishing it at all. The ambiguous depiction of South Ossetia seems to speak to the US narrative of allying with Georgia against Russia but remaining ambivalent in its view of the status of South Ossetia. It is quite possible that this map was extracted as a subset from a larger regional map that contained the standard cartographic elements. However, the lack of at least the expected title and legend leaves a lot of room for interpretation of a space where interpretations are not only very different, they violently conflict.



Figure 1. Map of Georgia. Source: CIA

Beyond fonts and features, another relevant aspect of this map is the influence it carries merely due to its structural format. The Western cartographic tradition has had a strong impact internationally on legitimizing maps after its fashion (Boschmann and Cubbon, 2014; Caquard, 2011; Craib, 2000), e.g., in a Cartesian format (i.e. contextualized within a projected frame), with “standard” symbolic features, such as points, lines, polygons, labels, north-seeking arrow, and scale (Gerlach, 2014). As Jacob (1996) notes, “Scale, grid and projection are cultural variables, not intrinsic features of maps” (p. 195).

Furthermore, production and distribution of such maps have traditionally been the purview of national governments. National governments have historically focused such maps on the security, resources, and control interests and priorities of the state (Craib, 2000). As Caquard

(2011) notes, “production of these fictional nationalistic metanarratives has been supported by the modern need to scientifically measure, control, exploit and claim territories with maps” (p. 136). Such themes dominate even laypersons’ expectations of official maps to this day. In other words, there tends to be a propensity not to question the content, accuracy, relevance, and authority of state maps, although that is changing.

### Functionalist Approach: Dueling Maps and the Status Quo

A functionalist approach to narrative seeks to understand how narratives support status quo situations. In the case of maps, this might entail trying to understand how borders and boundaries affect communities, enforce the status quo, advantage some, and marginalize or silence others. Use of this approach is useful in studying a counter-narrative. Figure 2, “Map of Ossetia,” offers such an opportunity. “Map of Ossetia” stands in stark contrast (literally) to the CIA map of Georgia (Figure 1), which, as intimated above, can be viewed a standard status quo map.

Despite the apparent simplicity of this map, there is a lot being told. In terms of plot, the depiction of South Ossetia and North Ossetia as separate (denoted by different colors and a solid linear boundary between them) but contiguous parts in a “complete” whole stress the idea of a togetherness, a shared similarity. By portraying North and South Ossetia together as a coherent entity, the map gives the impression that the two belong together.



Figure 2. Map of Ossetia. Source: Panonian at en.wikipedia.org.

The map is strikingly simple in its message about characters: all complicating characters who interfere with the Ossetian interpretation of the plot are simply absent. The absence of the international border between the two, as North Ossetia belongs to Russia and South Ossetia to Georgia (at least as recognized by the majority of the international community), connotes a rightful shared identity between the two entities. This is further amplified by the stark yet somewhat elegant “silence” in the form of the absence of any other place or feature, making “Ossetia” look coherent and complete in itself, untroubled by unnecessary “Others” who want to dominate them and keep them apart. There is no geographic context other than the Ossetias – no regional map, no map of the Caucasus. “Ossetia” is an island. The themes are obvious: a unified Ossetia, an Ossetian identity, and independence from the influence of outside powers. This representation quite graphically evokes the narrative syntax of individualism as described by Cobb et al. (2013) as,

focus[ing] exclusively on benefits for Self; the Other is simply absent in any considerations. This narrative acknowledges that the ends justify the means. It often includes a subplot in which the speaker has been forced into this self-centered position because of how they have been treated by the Other, over time, reinforcing the legitimacy of the Self, and the delegitimacy of the Other (p. 6).

The Ossetian narrative as depicted in this map certainly supports this “justification of the means” – that their marginalization and harsh treatment by Russians in North Ossetia and Georgians in South Ossetia has led to their turning inward to each other and self-isolation.

The “Map of Ossetia” contains no legend, no north-seeking arrow, no coordinate system, no title; it is missing many of the cartographic features expected in a standard map. Thus, it gives the appearance of having been made by an amateur, which may be the case. A structuralist likely would interpret this at face value – that this map belongs to the genre of amateur political maps, the cartographic version of the “vernacular” that Labov (1997) and Labov and Waletzky (1967) found so interesting (from their “educated, knowing” position).

Furthermore, the text in the “Map of Ossetia” provides additional information in terms of how the names are identified. South Ossetians and Georgians have different names for locations. For example, “Tskhinval” is the Ossetian name of the ad hoc capital, whereas “Tskhinvali” is the

Georgian name. Likewise, the town “Znaur” is called “Znauri” by Georgians. The town “Leningor” is known by Georgians as “Akhalgori.”

Evaluating the “Map of Ossetia” in terms of positioning dynamics (Harre and Langenhove, 1991; Harre and Slocum, 2003) also provides useful insight. Maps offer fertile ground for positioning theory. Harre and Slocum (2003) note that, “Positioning theory is part of a general movement in psychology toward making meanings and conventions, rather than causes and effects... (p. 102).” As maps are rich texts in terms of meaning, more work should be done to evaluate them through positioning theory. Through the use of borders, boundaries, labels, and other symbols, the status quo CIA map of Georgia (Figure 1) sets the first order positioning in terms of who are the global powers (US and Russia), who are their allies (Georgia is allied with the US), and who are considered minor players (e.g., South Ossetia). The map also implies certain rights and duties through its use of boundaries and labeling, e.g., preservation of territorial integrity and security of Georgia, although, again, this is vague because of the unclear meaning associated with the representation of South Ossetia.

On the other hand, the “Map of Ossetia” (Figure 2) counteracts this narrative with secondary positioning. It attempts to establish for the Ossetias voice, identity, agency, and a different vision of rights (e.g., independence, political voice) and duties (to uphold these rights) through establishing the border that concerns them the most: the one that defines and consolidates them, and separates them from the all-powerful Others. Thus, the two maps set up an antagonistic pattern of rights, duties, and obligations (Harre and Slocum, 2003).

Returning to the “Map of Ossetia” (Figure 2), North and South Ossetians (or some elements thereof) have combined efforts (quite literally) to develop a new positioning in response to Georgian, US, Russian, Western, etc., master narratives that, while conflicting or competing with each other, all position Ossetians as marginalized and secondary. Instead, in their map, Ossetians eliminate all features of their marginalization, i.e. international boundaries, world powers, to present a view of themselves as they would like to be seen.

Unsurprisingly, as is common with counter-narratives, this Ossetian counter-narrative can easily be used to “inoculate” the master narrative of status quo power politics in the South Caucasus in the post 9/11 world, a world where, as Casebeer and Russell (2005) discuss, narratives of terrorism dominate. Ossetians, particularly North Ossetians, who hold a higher number of both Muslims and those considered by the Russian government to be extremists, can



be portrayed as potential terrorists. “The Map of Ossetia” can be presented as a case of threatening propaganda.

### **Post-Structuralist Approach: Power Dynamics and Production of Meaning**

Wood (1992) makes an important observation that,

...because...maps constitute a semiological system..., they are ever vulnerable to seizure or invasion by myth. They are consequently, in all ways less like the windows through which we view the world and more like those windows of appearance from which pontiffs and potentates demonstrate their suzerainty...” (p. 107).

The arguments that study the relationship between this “suzerain’s view,” i.e. maps, the West and empire are compelling. Harley (1989) discusses the history of cartography in Europe and notes that Western cartography developed (Neocleous, 2003) and promoted itself as a science (i.e. objective, unbiased) since approximately the 17<sup>th</sup> century in imperial Europe. This approach allowed political and other powers to promote colonial worldviews via publishing world maps that included their visions of their territories and “uncharted lands” (Craib, 2000; Sato et al., 2014).

A particularly gripping concept is that of the map as an imperial tool of conquest – what we might now call a narrative of conquest. Neocleous (2003) asserts that the map may create reality instead of the other way around. In other words, political powers have used, and continue to use, maps as means of planning and shaping the environment – politically, militarily, socially, and otherwise – to their advantage. Edward Said (1993, p. 271) draws the grim connection between imperialism and cartography thus:

Imperialism is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control. And once in place, the map helped to illuminate the late colonial state’s style of thinking about its domain, part of the totalizing classificatory grid which the state uses to order and comprehend civil society. In helping the European powers create a world in their own image, cartography helped stabilize the earth’s surface around the territorial imaginary of the modern state (as cited in Neocleous, 2003, p. 419).

In other words, “narratives do not just reflect or respond to violence, they create it.” Monmonier (1996, p. 90) adds that the colonial powers used maps “as an intellectual tool for legitimizing

territorial conquest, economic exploitation, and cultural imperialism.” He states that “Maps made it easy for European states to carve up Africa and other heathen lands, to lay claim to land and resources, and to ignore existing social and political structures” (p. 90). Cartography is further implicated in the creation of the modern political state by Smith (1994), “Nation-states are, by definition, geographical solutions to political problems” (p. 492).

The simple acts of naming and renaming people and places, drawing and manipulating boundaries, and including, omitting or changing features can have a profound and lasting effect on people – both those being mapped and those doing the mapping. As Harvey (1990) notes, “...the very act of naming geographical entities implies a power over them, most particularly over the way in which places, their inhabitants and their social functions get represented” (p. 419). He commends Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) for its demonstration of how “the identity of variegated peoples can be collapsed, shaped, and manipulated through the connotations and associations imposed upon a name by outsiders” (p. 419).

Returning to the Georgia-South Ossetia conflict, such a contest is clearly demonstrated between the “great power” map and the Ossetian counter-narrative, as already discussed above. But beyond that, there is further insight that a poststructuralist narrative analysis can provide. For example, in her book *Feminist Security Studies* (2011), Wibben demonstrates how the security master narrative leads to a lack of security for the non-privileged Other, for example, a member of a minority group or the poor.

The nationalist fixation on status and boundaries that fuels the conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia seriously jeopardizes the lives and degrades the living conditions of those living on either side at the interface between the two political entities. These people and their situation do not appear to be a significant consideration in the common mapped narrative of either side. The conflict is portrayed at a higher, nation-state scale that makes invisible many local problems, such as lack of water or electricity, contamination with unexploded ordnance and landmines, loss of viable economic means, loss of the ability to trade or visit family or friends across the boundary, and generally being driven to stand as the front-line defenders of their “side,” leading to overall safety and security problems. Creation of such a local map, though, would be considered something unique, not a standard political map for general consumption. However, such a map would surely be more useful in conveying to the world local people’s narratives, which may not precisely mirror those of their higher governments.

### **Cartographic Legacy, Structural Violence, and Narrative Dissonance**

“...maps, all maps, inevitably, unavoidably, necessarily embody their authors’ prejudices, biases and partialities...” (Wood, 1992, p. 24)

“...the map is never neutral.” (Harley, 1989, p. 14)

As discussed above, the Western cartographic heritage has played a strong role in how maps are typically designed and made worldwide. Pioneers such as Harley have implicated primarily negative motivations, like greed, ethnocentrism and imperialism, in why maps favor the powerful and fail the rest. However, it seems there may be other, more complex factors involved in the inability of many maps to effectively convey the true narratives of mapmakers or map commissioners.

First, the global dominance of the West-originated cartographic tradition can be viewed as a case study in structural violence. What historically was developed as a key tool of exploit turned into a global scientific standard that both wittingly and unwittingly does damage by favoring certain types of knowledge collection and presentation and marginalizing or dismissing others (Bjorn and Jones, 1987). Throughout history, some “alternate” mapmakers have tried to adapt. Craib (2000) discusses how subalterns learned to read and make maps like their conquerors in order to stake (or re-stake) indigenous claims to land and resources. As Craib notes, some even learned to craft “fugitive landscapes,” conventional-looking maps designed to hide and protect their lands and people from colonizers. In the long run, though, Craib asserts that the indigenous adoption of Western maps may have done more harm than good in conveying local concerns and interests. This is in large part because the West-originated cartographic system was, until recently, largely geared towards interests, entities, and phenomena at the national scale. Thus, even when leadership or power dynamics have changed, local level concerns or dynamics have often remained obscured or even unmapped.

Second, the use of Western-style cartography is so ubiquitous and taken as the standard that it seems there can be no other way to map. As Craib (2000) notes about the Western map tradition, “The most oppressive and dangerous of all cultural artifacts may be the ones so naturalized and presumably commonsensical as to avoid critique” (p. 8). This sounds reminiscent of Galtung’s (1969) comment about structural violence as being “as natural as the air around us” (p.173). This is despite the fact that oftentimes such maps are not ideal for conveying

certain types of information or geospatial perspectives. In other words, it may not always be that people are disallowed other options for expressing their narratives geospatially; they simply may not know how to do so. Field and Demaj (2012) attribute Balchin and Coleman (1966) with coining the term “graphicacy,” as “an intellectual skill necessary for the communication of relationships which cannot be successfully communicated by words or mathematical notation alone” (p. 76). They note that while we learn other skills, such as mathematics and reading, we rarely learn the “medium of visual communication.” Thus, many people (aside from cartographers) tend to lack the skills, creativity and confidence in map making (Liben, 2009). Second, the global standardization of Western cartography has left little attention until recently for the consideration of “alternate” mapping traditions or needs.

Interestingly, in many cases, indigenous mapmakers have created good maps, but ones that focus on interactions, relations, and the blending of space and time (Craib, 2000). This approach is in stark contra-distinction to the traditional Western map based on representational locational reference of places and things, e.g., borders and resources (Gerlach, 2014). Thus, it appears there have been other ways to map; they just have been subordinated along with their creators. One of the most significant impacts of this situation appears to be the considerable dissonance between the mapped narratives of some peoples and their written or spoken narratives. In many cases, there is no mapped narrative at all. Nevertheless, as Caquard (2011) notes from Wood (2010),

While, historically, scientific maps have been used by nation states to assert territorial rights over indigenous communities, indigenous groups all over the world are now challenging the authority and the limits of the state borders fixed by maps through different forms of narratives and expressions (p. 139).

Thus, the incidence of counter-narrative mapping is rising. But what is to be done about it, particularly within the conflict analysis and resolution community?

### **Conclusion: Mapping as Narrative Intervention**

To return to a quote at the beginning of this article from Cobb et al. (2013): “Narrative provides a lens that has been shown to be useful for analyzing meaning making and for designing interventions in situations of protracted and escalating conflict” (p. 3). From the conflict resolution perspective, it is good that the disadvantaged, powerless, and unmapped are finding

their cartographic voice. However, there is a question of how can conflict resolutionists harness the power of narrative in maps for designing interventions in conflicts?

Deeper discussion of the current status and ways forward in terms of “narrative-friendly” maps is beyond the scope of this article, although (hopefully) a follow-up article will delve further into this potentially quite useful area of narrative work. Cases like that of the Georgia-South Ossetia conflict stand to benefit from such cartographic narrative intervention. For example, the discord between the local versus national narratives could be addressed. One way to do this could be to provide local people the capability to map their own narratives to counter, or at least augment or refine, the national ones, and the ones superimposed by outside global powers. For example, there has been a history of informal cooperation along the boundary between Georgia and South Ossetia, although current politics has greatly problematized such cooperation. At least after the 1991-92 war, there were various efforts at cooperation. Nan (2005) notes, “Georgians and South Ossetians have cooperated on confidence building measures such as reducing armed forces in the areas, conducting joint patrols, and also engaging in mutually beneficial development initiatives” (p. 164). It appears there have been, and maybe still are, local narratives of cooperation and respect that contradict the national narratives of nationalism and mutual antagonism. In the interest of peace and security, it would be helpful to capture and leverage such narratives within mediation efforts. Cartographic narratives offer such a potential venue.

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# Narrative and Conflict: Explorations of Theory and Practice

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## **Space, Place, & Symbol:**

### ***Utilizing Central Places to Understand Intergroup Conflict Dynamics***

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#### **Abstract**

This article will present a new way to capture highly dynamic intergroup differentiation processes. Drawing from experiences collected during several field research visits to Bosnia aimed at assessing Post-Dayton intergroup relations, and inspired by Positioning Theory, it will suggest that one key to understanding how groups interpret the behavior of other groups lies in the meaning these groups ascribe to the place of their interaction. Rules of a place limit the range of actions social agents can choose from, and establish an understanding of 'normal' behavior. This simultaneously positions all other possible acts as outside the local moral order, thus making the right to interpret a central place a favorable position and the interpretation of such a place into a strong positioning act that influences the terms of future interactions. Deciphering the dominant political meanings of central places in which intergroup interactions occur therefore becomes a promising way of understanding intergroup positioning processes. However approximating the meanings local groups ascribe to central places is in need of a thorough interpretational framework. This article will suggest one possible spatial approach to understanding intergroup interactions based on analyzing symbols that are used in the interpretational acts themselves.

#### **Keywords**

positioning theory, group dynamics, conflict, narrative

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## Introduction

It all started with a baffling observation: Why, after so many years of large scale international investments and interventions, as well as similarly large amounts of research, have so many vital problems for Bosnia as a state, society, and country remained unsolved? These problems are yet so central that in recent years there have been calls for further division and violence; dissolution of the social fabric continues to spread, leading to a situation in early 2014 that some observers called ‘the Bosnian Spring’ (International Crisis Group, 2014). The fear that we have not understood conflict in all its dimensions in the local context of Bosnia is growing within the international community once again. Perhaps this lack of understanding is because we are blinded by our old stereotypes, which prevent us from seeing the current dynamics; or maybe the current dynamics are a totally new phenomenon; or maybe the main focus of so many initiatives was pointed at solving the symptomatic issues instead of addressing the underlying problems (see Campbell, 1998; Hansen, 2006). All together, this indicates two things; first, it is necessary to re-engage with the phenomenon of conflict in Bosnia, and second, it is prudent to start with trying to abandon the old paths that currently define our picture of the ‘Powder keg Balkan,’ and of ‘Conflict in Bosnia’ as far as possible.

Setting aside the question of whether we are at all able to successfully bracket our knowledge of the past – one might struggle with this assumption and see that there is no way to experience without interpretation, and that these interpretations remain transfixed on previous limitations – starting fresh necessitates, along with an awareness of the powers the old causalities can unfold on our perspective, a thorough methodology of how to learn from social interactions in Bosnia, through social interactions in Bosnia (Heidegger, 1975; Ricoeur, 1970). Developing such a methodology, however, requires knowledge of where social (intergroup) interactions currently take place; this is challenging especially since starting ‘blank’ strictly has to mean not to assume knowledge of the different groupings that comprise the social realm of Bosnia. My solution here, which was inspired by a research design introduced by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss known as ‘Grounded Theory’, started with broadly observing various social spaces throughout Bosnia; over time I not only learned which groups exist and where they commonly interact, but also came across a way of how to capture and partly decode the meaning groups ascribe to their interactions (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

This approach, which utilizes central places and their political use today as gateways into local meaning horizons, sheds light into highly dynamic episodes of intergroup interactions. Although by no means an entirely new concept, successfully tapping into local meaning horizons opens up, as long as we agree that local perceptions shape local actions, new options and alternatives to reducing destructive intergroup conflict potentials. Before we can or should think about solving conflicts in Bosnia or elsewhere based on insights gained through this approach, it is necessary to challenge this theorem and each of its underlying assumptions in a most thorough way. The aim of this paper therefore is to expose my reasoning to challenging critique through opening up my learning process – under the hope that doing so will not only help to improve this theorem, but foster discussions, spark ideas, and inspire new projects leading to a reduction of destructive social conflict potentials in the future.

While this approach was established through years of research on Bosnia, this paper will not attempt to directly address the multiple conflicts that Bosnia is facing today, except where examples are relevant to support the theoretical argument. In other words, what follows is the examination of a theoretical approach derived from reflections on post-Dayton Bosnia, not an analysis of the Bosnian conflict or current social situations. The paper will also not, at this point, make suggestions toward the implementation of this approach in practice, although it is hoped that this can be developed at a later time. In order to fully support a critical assessment of the concept, while highlighting the potential it carries for applications in other cases outside the Bosnian realm, the next pages will offer a re-tracing of some of the essential steps in my learning endeavor, before introducing a key concept called “Forced and Frozen Positions,” followed by a discussion of one way of how to study this particular positioning by utilizing a spatial focus on central places in the social realm of everyday intergroup interactions.

### **Reflections on Conflict and Differentiation Processes**

After a considerable amount of exposure to Post-Dayton Bosnia it became clear to me that neither ethnic, religious, economic or any other kind of essential differences can explain the high level of distrust, insecurity or enmity one can observe dominating many parts of everyday life in Bosnia today. This initial hunch, that looking beyond simple causalities toward the suspicion that differentiation processes may hold the key to understanding current tensions in

Bosnia, was followed by an episode of theoretical engagement trying to find support for ways of operationalizing research in this direction.

This phase was motivated by the hope that finding some kind of well-established theoretical nexus between the process of differentiation and conflict could serve as a basis on which to frame a research hypothesis. As it turned out this nexus was so strong that no clear distinction between both phenomena (the process of differentiation and the conflict) remained valid, while in the same moment the establishment of a new distinction, the one between constructive and destructive differentiation became necessary. To see where the need for this new distinction arises from, the phenomenon of social conflict will be discussed briefly. This discussion, however, is not as my attempt to create any kind of final definition of the phenomenon itself – the value of such a definition remains after all, highly questionable. Given the uncertainty created by Agamben's argument of the unwittnesability of the final suffering, created either in a conflict or by the possibility of our inability to really know what something means for anyone else, the paper will instead consist of a discussion of crucial elements that influence the understanding of conflict on which this study is based (Agamben, 2008). In other words, the grounded and exploratory mindset of this study suggests beginning with a concrete episode of conflict as a basis, and working to extract those elements of conflict believed to be too important to be ignored by any kind of further engagement with this phenomenon thereafter.

Such a concrete episode can be found at the heart of an interview I conducted with a local politician in a café in Sarajevo, in which my conversational 'other' had his own reasons for not sharing the thoughts or memories I had asked for, or for letting me continue with my method of questioning. This situation, classically described as a conflict of interest, highlights that conflict is situated in interaction. Interaction, although it by no means has to be face-to-face interaction, entails a second element of conflict, the element of difference. In a very simplified view of social conflict, conflict appears to be dependent on at least two sets of differences; first, it is in need of at least two different parties of which, second, each is holding a different and to some degree exclusive expectation, perception, belief or stake. The essence of both differences, ranging from race, gender, or any kind of affiliation, to creed, grievance or security claims, does not have to remain stable or even resemble the pictures held by those involved in the conflict. In fact, these differences are constructed, formalized, and demonized

during the interaction – the line is drawn, broadened and challenged, while the parties engage with each other. Conflict, in this way, is in need of difference and as such it seems to be involved in the creation of difference, by creating the distinct ‘me’s’ and ‘you’s’ in an episode of interactions. By taking a closer look at my interviews, not only was difference experienceable, but also the quality on which this difference rested; in other words the meaning of the difference, defining me as an outsider and my opponent as a holder of inside knowledge – at least in my eyes – could be observed. Thus, we can see social conflict as a process of constructing differences and their meanings in terms of creating the status of those involved, or, put simply, as social differentiation process.

These established differences, however, did not disappear after I had left the café, but persisted in my memory. And as part of my memory, they are likely to influence my future interactions as well as the stories I tell about others and myself. In other words, conflict does not just cease to exist, even when only one party might have left, but instead remains ingrained in the memories of interaction, and as such, as some research suggests, becomes a part of our individual or collective identities (Cairns and Roe, 2003). Our conflicts of the past, whether consciously remembered in a moment as such or not, will not only influence our current actions and perceptions, but also our vision of our future (Friedman, 1992; Petritsch and Džihic, 2010). If many of our small and large scale conflicts remain attached to our concepts of selves and personal interests, then conflict seems to be a primary mode of socialization – of our lifelong process of making sense of our position and the position of others in the social realm, while trying to adopt appropriate actions to cater to our interests. Such an understanding of conflict as a primary socializing momentum empowered by the continuous construction of differences – conflict as a form of social being – which creates the realm of action and meaning, however, requires a new distinction in order to allow any understanding of episodes of violence, such as brutal war.

We have to ask, why, if conflict is a primary mode of socialization, we do not feel in conflict, or permanently threatened by every interaction? Or, why did a conflict of interest in which a clear line was drawn and my ability to understand was openly questioned, not culminate in a bar fight, but in a research project? For sure, perceptions of conflicts, as well as individual ways of acting and reacting are different, however, if conflict is such a continuous and omnipresent movens of our daily interactions and we still do not feel ‘in conflict’ all the time, then

our experience with conflict seems to tell us that conflict cannot be ‘bad’ per se, or maybe not simply ‘bad’ at all. As various scholars have argued from different perspectives, it is generally shortsighted to ignore the ‘positive’ side of social conflict (Coser, 1956; Deutsch, 1973; Kriesberg, 2007). Conflict can be a strong stimulus, unleashing waves of creative inventions, consolidating groups, empowering new agents, or inspiring research projects. This, however, should not imply that conflict can simply be ‘good’ either. Quite on the contrary, instead of assuming that conflict can be ‘good’ or ‘bad’, or that there are even two different types of conflict, one ‘good’ and the other ‘bad’, the understanding of conflict as an ongoing socializing force suggests that conflict is neither of the two by definition, but that individual episodes of interaction, certain differentiation processes, will lead to either constructive, or destructive, or maybe even both types of outcomes. Taking it all back to the original interest sparking this discussion, such an understanding of conflict suggests asking the question, “Why do so many of the current differentiation processes lead to destructive outcomes?” instead of asking, “Why is there still so much conflict between groups in post-Dayton Bosnia?”

### **Destructive Outcomes**

Before we can attempt to answer the latter question based on research on the ground in Bosnia, we need to know what exactly to look for; in other words, there is a need for a concept that explains how a differentiation process can create a destructive outcome and what qualifies as a destructive outcome in the first place. With the hope of finding such operationalization, several theories known for their scope on differentiation processes have been examined. Most of them could be found under the label of socio-psychological, or identity based inter-group conflict theories (Tajfel, 1981; Horowitz, 2000; Volkan, 1988; Ross, 2007). These concepts, as different as they are, are united by their ability to explain the linkage between the interests, beliefs or fears held by individuals and the behavior and action of larger social bodies called groups. Setting aside how the individual becomes a member of such a group, through birth, choice or forced assimilation, being a member of a group influences to various degrees the perspectives, meaning horizons and concepts of self and the surrounding others. ‘Others’ here has two meanings; first, it refers to other group members, and second, it is a synonym for everyone outside of the group’s own boundaries. Where the line between group members and outsiders is understood as a relatively clear boundary – a boundary in

many cases constructed through continuous acts of stereotyping of the outside others – the difference between the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ often becomes inseparable (Barth, 1969).

Interaction between in- and out-group members in this sense could be understood as a differentiation process, however, as a differentiation process in which differences between ‘we’ and ‘them’, in the form of self-concepts, boundaries and stereotypes, remain pretty stable most of the time. While any change to the stability of difference might qualify as a constructive or destructive outcome of interaction, the question of when a certain change becomes destructive, however, remains a question of perception held by the groups in that particular situation. In other words, if there is at all a universal momentum defining when a differentiation process creates a destructive outcome, finding such a definition under the mindset of collective group identity could only be achieved through an inductive reasoning process, which draws from psycho-analytical interpretations of several situations in which groups have perceived interactions as destructive to their concepts of selves. Setting aside whether such an analysis of the inner psyche of a group can be achieved at all, finding a workable concept of destructive differentiation, based on some kind of shared human perception, would remain a large-scale research project by itself.

This being said, group identities and their boundaries are truly important, and theories emphasizing this connection have a great ability to explain collective actions. However, trying to understand why social differentiation processes sometimes create destructive differences, or trying to find an operational answer as to the definition of a destructive outcome, seems in need of an alternative take on the process of constructing social differences.

### **Positioning Theory**

Such a take can be found with the help of Positioning Theory, another concept that lately has originated in the field of psychology and narrative studies. In contrast to the above-mentioned theories, the heavily interaction-centered concept of Positioning Theory, suggests a move away from the still dominant cause-effect explanations of human behavior, and towards a more inclusive understanding of human actions through a returning of the ‘objects’ under observation into their socio-cultural milieus of origin (Davies and Harré, 1990; Harré and Langenhove, 1999; Harré and Moghaddam, 2003b). Since its development, insights from Po-

sitioning Theory have been utilized to find answers to various challenges in different fields of social sciences, and through its shared roots with concepts such as symbolic-interactionism and Foucauldian discourse analysis, its application in several studies concerned with conflicts is not surprising (Tirado and Gálvez, 2008; Moghaddam, Harré, and Lee, 2008). Although many of these current applications of Positioning Theory unveiled important insights into various conflict processes, which simultaneously led to several amendments and concretizations of the concept itself, deepening an understanding of when a differentiation process leads to a destructive differentiation, only a small base portion of Positioning Theory will be needed (Harré et al, 2009).

As discussed above, social conflict does not only require differences, but in the form of a differentiation process, creates, maintains or alters such differences in an interactional process of socialization. The outcome of conflict therefore, can be understood as some kind of difference, which in the concept of Positioning Theory can be translated into a positioning, meaning a relational constellation of two or more positions to each other. Each position is understood as a cluster of rights, duties and obligations, all of which together are forming and reflecting the local moral order under which a distinct positioning takes place. Holding a certain position therefore, must be understood as a limitation to the overall amount of actions an agent could potentially draw from, which automatically makes the holding of certain positions in a distinct situation more appealing than the holding of others (Harré and Moghaddam, 2003a, pp. 4-6). This introduces one of the major differences between positioning and role theory. While both are interaction-based concepts that explain human behavior in relation to each other, Positioning Theory emphasizes the ability of agents to have various positions depending on the situation in which the interaction takes place, as well as on the envisioned goals of the agents for each interaction (Davis and Harré, 1999, pp. 37-45). The general ability to choose a position for a certain episode of interaction, which deliberately or not, always includes an act of positioning of the interactional 'other' does not suggest, however, that either the chosen or the given position will be accepted by the 'other'. While increase in social status or honor are very often the motivations behind certain positioning attempts, the reasons of why a certain position is chosen remains unimportant at this point; instead the question of what happens when a certain positioning is not accepted, or the chosen position not granted, becomes of further interest.



Based on the concept that positioning is an ongoing process, an initially unfavorable position therefore does not have to remain unchallenged and is overall likely to be changed as the episode continues. Whenever the current local moral order makes any alteration, refusal, or challenge of such a forced positioning impossible through the rights, duties, and obligations inscribed in the given position, the differentiation process has created what I call a frozen position (Langenhove and Harré, 1999, pp. 18-28). Here an important clarification of the concepts behind frozen and forced has to be made: While a forced positioning, which shall be characterized through the difference between the chosen and the actual position of an agent, still allows the agent to remain an active part of the differentiation process – active in terms of being able to continue negotiating his or her positioning – a frozen position shall be understood as characterized by its inherent inability to continue active participation in the positioning game based on the locally shared moral order. Frozen positioning does not suggest that, under certain circumstances, such a reduction of agency can not be a positioning willfully chosen, for example the positioning of oneself as insane in a court trial, but that such a willful reduction of agency is an extremely rare case (Langenhove and Harré, 1999, p. 28). Now the question becomes, what is at stake when a differentiation process has created a forced and frozen position at the same time?

### **Forced and Frozen Positions**

First, being positioned in such a way is no longer based on one's choice to give up agency, but a result of actions, which permit free choices and free development under the contemporary moral order. The emphasis on free is important, because losing agency does not mean losing the ability to choose, but rather losing the ability to negotiate the spectrum of choices available to the current position. This being said 'no agency' shall not mean 'no rights, duties, or obligations', but that these characters cannot be altered while continuing to interact on the same local moral order. A classic example for such a positioning is that of a prisoner, who whether he is guilty or not, as soon as he is locked up in a prison cell, is forcefully deprived of his ability to willfully change his social positioning in the larger community. This forceful reduction of agency does not only potentially engender acts of further violence, which might have been the reason for imprisonment in the first place, but also influences his ability to share his opinions, expectations, and beliefs. Even if he could find a way to express himself publically, his thoughts are likely to be less valued than similar thoughts expressed by some-

one currently positioned as a professor, politician or priest. In other words, on the one hand the social status of his position in the eyes of the larger community is too low to be taken seriously, while on the other hand his current position does not allow him to re-negotiate his status. While the example of the prisoner might be a good example to demonstrate the realm of a forced and frozen position, it may not be the best example to highlight why such reduced agency is destructive to anything other than the personal development of the inmate. As soon as we start replacing the prisoner with people sharing certain world views, gender, or skin color and replacing the prison bars with other locally dominant concepts that suggest deprivation of their abilities to choose, alter, or negotiate their individual as well as collective social status, the full scope of what suppressed agency means, in terms of the overall ability for societal development, becomes obvious. Unfortunately the current social realm in Bosnia holds many examples of groups of people whose agency is limited similarly to that of the prisoner.

A prime example of a forced and frozen positioned group – not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but in many other European countries as well – are those currently positioned as Roma. Under the national-political moral order as instituted through the constitution, which is part of the Dayton Agreement, Roma, even those who unquestionably possess Bosnian citizenship, are excluded from running for several of the highest political positions in Bosnia. Not being able to obtain certain positions in a political system does not qualify as a forced and frozen position per se – what makes their current positioning on the political stage into one is that the moral framework (the constitution) effectively can not be altered by them through any rights reserved for them by this moral order. Even if they would form a political party and gain the majority in the next parliamentary elections, the ethnic veto powers reserved for the three groups labeled in the constitution as constituent people of Bosnia (Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs), would make any constitutional change that would challenge the rights of these three groups impossible.

Second, it should not be understood that, for one positioned in such a way, no option of repositioning exists; but instead, it should be noted that every action of repositioning taken from a forced and frozen position will have to be an act chosen from a template of actions which is not included in the repertoire already in place in the currently dominant and shared local moral order, anchoring frozen and forced positions. Each attempt to change a frozen and forced position therefore, will be perceived by all others still operating under the dominant

moral order as ‘strange and unexpected’, if not directly as ‘immoral, illegal and threatening’ behavior. In other words, the lack of agency of a forced and frozen position can be understood as having created a situation under which active interaction including all parties can only be continued through actions outside the formerly accepted or agreed moral order. In the case of Roma in Bosnia, this meant that repositioning required actions that challenge the old order – actions that were not derived from rights and duties given to them by the Bosnian constitution, but by the European Union. Representatives of the Roma community bringing their case to the European Court of Human Rights, which subsequently attested in 2008 that the Bosnian constitution violates the European Convention of Human Rights, potentially opened a way for future repositioning, but simultaneously presented a major threat to the accustomed moral order the three dominant political groups in Bosnia have been operating under. This shows that excluding groups by positioning them under the current moral order in a way that deprives their agency is understood as destructive to the process of socialization itself, because the only way of continuing this group’s development lies in abandoning the basis on which former interaction had been made meaningful to everyone involved.

This suggests a very important distinction. Although the ways chosen to abandon a former basis on which differences have been explained can be characterized through aggressive and violent acts, a forced and frozen position shall not be understood as a destructive outcome of a differentiation process because it might lead to occasional acts of violence, but solely because its inherent lack of agency does not allow active participation in the game of negotiating social status based on the current moral order. Making this clear distinction between act and agency, between symptom and cause, is highly important in order to understand the scope behind the concept of ‘destructive’ used in this study.

First, judging any kind of actions as destructive, for example acts of repulsion to the current political order in Bosnia, is understood to not only lack scientific impartiality, but also to position a concept of multiethnic-coexistence as superior in the same moment. Such an enforced outsider vision for Bosnia’s future, however, might in the long run create a forced and frozen positioning by itself. And second, focusing on violent actions is prone to continue an old mistake which rests in the belief that understanding a state of crisis can help us to prevent similar crises in the future. While on the one hand it remains questionable if we can at all understand a disease just by looking at its symptoms, having no symptoms on the other hand cannot be

substituted with ‘there is no disease’. Instead, especially while looking at group positioning processes, groups in this sense can be understood as people sharing a similar position, a forced and frozen positioning, which occur without any kind of observable reaction to it. Knowing that people are generally rather hesitant to break rules, stepping outside of the moral order – or bringing your moral order to the European Court of Human Rights as the Jewish and Roma community did in Bosnia – might be a decision chosen a long time after someone has lost agency. Therefore looking and waiting for symptoms, a mindset that continuously grants Bosnia a relatively stable health with only occasional needs for treatment of minor symptoms, can be seen as a wrong and dangerous perspective. Instead, analyzing current differentiation processes with an eye for situations in which agency is permitted, is understood to be a means capable of detecting situations which, if they remain unaltered, may lead to violent acts of repositioning in the future.

In summary, a frozen and forced position is understood as a destructive outcome of a differentiation process, because none of the actions the current moral order holds for a party positioned in such a way would enable the party to significantly change its position and therefore improve its social status. On the flipside, this suggests that as long as two parties under one moral order can compete about their social status, their positions created through their interaction are very likely to be forced but not frozen. The only way a forced and frozen positioned party could enter such competition would be to challenge the basis on which interaction has been made meaningful for all parties in the past. Such revolutions occasionally can become very violent, however, they may also occur a long time after a forced and frozen position has been created. Conflict potentials in this sense have to be expected to lie hidden in the qualities defining the current positions of groups in Bosnia.

Therefore, the concept of a forced and frozen position is seen as a clear marker for what to look for while analyzing social interactions between groups in Bosnia in order to enrich our understanding about the current social tensions; ‘clear marker’ however shall not suggest that every frozen and forced position will be identifiable through the same distribution of rights, duties and obligations. In fact, every differentiation process can be expected to lead to unique positionings. Capturing this uniqueness of a variety of episodes of social interaction in Bosnia, brings forward one final point – the distinction between theory and practice is necessary. Leaving the theoretical realm of Positioning Theory begins with acknowledging the differ-

ence between a hypothetical interaction of Alter and Ego who meet for the first time, and any episode of interaction as it takes place right now between people in Bosnia. While, let us assume that Ego and Alter have just hatched from their eggs and have never had any kind of social interaction before, the interaction between both of them, as long as both stay alive for long enough, can be assumed to create certain structures and rules for interaction. The interaction between people in Bosnia must be understood as being influenced by such rules and structures created in past interactions.

The memories of interpretations of past interactions, of past positionings, therefore have to be acknowledged as a basis from which the meaning for present and future acts of positioning will be derived. Meaning therefore remains local and is bound to be continuously altered through present and future interactions. In other words, the local historical contexts on which acts are made meaningful are in a permanent state of flux. However, it is precisely those local contexts that have to be understood as ‘real-life’ scales for any judgment concerned with the question of whether a certain interaction has created a forced and frozen positioning or not.

Finally, we have to conclude that in the very moment of interaction between people in Bosnia it is not our outside understanding of that situation which makes it into what it is for those involved, but solely their own interpretations influenced by their histories of past interactions. Although we may have found a promising tool in the theoretical concept of a forced and frozen position, which would allow us an alternative way of interpreting current inter-group tensions in Bosnia, it seems that the old problem, the insecurity of if we truly can understand what something means for someone else – or if we can be certain that the same word really has the same meaning– has reappeared to challenge the final application of that very tool. It had to reappear in order to remind us that this insecurity is an integral part of human interaction, integral in the sense that, despite insecurity, we continue to interact because we believe we can learn to understand each other. This thus makes the ability to learn local meanings into a prerequisite for any successful attempt of analyzing the current positionings; therefore, the development of a theory of learning is the central concern of the following section.

### **Space, Place, and Symbol: Towards a Method of Learning**

The solution to the problems arising out of the decision to ‘not’ know which groups currently exist – based on the suspicion that existing concepts of groups in Bosnia may influence the direction of this study in a way that current dynamics might remain hidden – lies in the social space of Bosnia. Social space, as a tremendous amount of studies at the heart of what became known as the “spatial turn” in the social and human sciences show, engulfs all social processes and meanings and therefore all social concepts, including groups (Warf and Arias, 2009). Looking at the rich academic debate about social space highlights two central points that this study, which focuses on particular social spaces, has to be aware; first, social space does not mean the same for everyone, as the growing amount of concepts defining social space illustrates successfully; and second, all this disagreeing about what space is, or how space shapes our way of understanding ourselves in our relationship to others, indicates that people with different concepts of space interact in one and the same space—in the context of this paper, in an academic space. See for example the controversy about the relationship between space and time between Ernesto Laclau and Doreen Massey and their students (Laclau, 1990; Massey, 1992).

Bringing both to the realm of Bosnia means we have to expect that a middle aged business traveler from Sarajevo in times of internet, fast plane connections and identical coffee shops at all major cities, may understand the world as a global village, while at the same time an old farmer living in rural Herzegovina on one side of the river Neretva with no internet, money or passport to travel, and only the little garden behind his house as a central food source for the whole family, might feel that even the other side of the river is part of a different world. Space, and in this matter, time, are both important concepts to understand the worlds these individuals are living in and the factors that are influencing their ways of interacting with each other. However, both are affected by the space-time compression – or put simply, the speed of life – in a different way, making space and time into individual concepts, based on individual experiences (Massey, 1994, pp. 146-156). This suggests that while we can be fairly certain that every interaction between groups in Bosnia will happen in the social space of Bosnia and be influenced by the concepts of the social space held by each group, we can also be fairly certain that the social space of Bosnia has more than one identity. Therefore, the relaxed and exploratory mindset of this study suggests setting aside all theories and concepts concerned with the wider social space of Bosnia, and instead begin looking at particular so-

cial spaces like the Old Market Place in Sarajevo where the traveler and the farmer – the groups in Bosnia – interact.

Studying such central places of interaction will not only help to identify the current groups, but at the same time provide insights into the meanings they ascribe to that very place. Knowing those meanings will enable us to unveil the current positions not only on that very place, but, as will be described in the next sections, also in the larger social space surrounding those central places. As Jeff Malpas has argued, an understanding of place as foundational to our social experiences, anchors a growing interest in particular spaces in the Bosnia research community (Malpas, 1999; Demick, 2012; Kolind, 2008; Maček, 2000; Bringa, 1995).

### **Central Places**

In order to be able to identify central places as starting points for a study on intergroup relations, some kind of base concept of what constitutes a “central place” becomes necessary. The concept chosen here resembles the common sense of the term ‘place’ with only some minor reductions. First, it describes a place, which has a physical core – a market place one can walk upon – and not just a virtual world. It therefore shall not be set equal to community in general, because a community can exist without physical space in modern times. Second, “central” does not mean someone’s private backyard, but a public park, a market square, a graveyard, and so forth, which is and has been used by the surrounding community. Those places are plentiful, and every village and city will have several which are in use today. “In use” implies they have a function for that community and it is that social function, which regulates the use of the space through the creation of rules. Such rules can range from the demand of appropriate attire to the enforcement of a no parking zone. Setting aside the differences between such rules, what unites them is that every rule of a place influences interaction upon that very place, because even ignoring them will not prevent one getting a parking ticket. Knowing the current rules of engagement of a place therefore, is important for those interacting on it to understand and judge action and behavior, in the same way as it becomes important to every attempt to understand the positionings created through the very acts in and on that locality.



However, capturing these rules is not easy; first, while interactions are regulated or limited by rules, those rules are results from past interactions and therefore have to be expected to be continuously altered and changed by the current interactions. In other words, rules of a place are social constructions and therefore neither static nor unchangeable. And second, places may not have just one ‘identity’ or function with one set of rules to begin with, but maybe even several competing ones (Massey, 1994, pp. 153-156). Under this multiplicity of functions, the political function of places has particular importance for this exploration of social interaction. As we can see in local responses to many recent crisis– from Occupy Wall Street to Tahrir Square– places are central to political expressions, ranging from demonstrations and peaceful parades to massacres and the memorialization of such. Therefore, central places in Bosnia have to be expected to play a crucial role in differentiation processes, as the example of the Kozara Nationalpark in Northwestern Bosnia shall briefly illustrate.

Next to the park’s obvious recreational function, the park’s membership in the EUROPARC Federation already introduces the place into the wider European political arena. With the “Monument to the Revolution (also known as Mrakovica Memorial) standing on the Mrakovica plateau, used as a crest and logo of the Park, yet another political function of the park is introduced; this time putting the specific place of the monument in the center of many of today’s intergroup differentiation processes (Nacionalni Park Kozara, 2013). While in Kozara a famous battle between a truly multicultural Partisan force and Axis forces in World War II took place, the later erected a war memorial to commemorate this Yugoslav moment; the monument holds a new purpose today. A first glimpse of the current purpose can be gained in the exhibition of the park’s museum. The story told through the museum is a story of permanent violent aggression against Serbs, linking Hitler’s terror with pictures of Muslim warriors committing war crimes in the recent war of 1992/95. Together with a newly erected Christian Orthodox cross right in front of the secular Partisan memorial, the influence of the Mrakovica plateau, of the Kozara National Park, on today’s intergroup processes goes far beyond the place itself. While one group sends their school kids on fieldtrips to learn about their heritage and the threats to it by outside forces, others condemn the place as a hoard of nationalist lies (Greiff, 2011, p. 113). Kozara the park, the place, has now a strong political function, influencing how groups interact in Bosnia.

What Kozara Nationalpark highlights is that the political use of places in Bosnia today has a significant impact on differentiation processes not only by defining rules for interaction upon that very place but through influencing actions far outside of its physicality—making an understanding of the current political meanings of those places a promising path towards an understanding of differentiation processes and conflict. The idea that social processes in a particular space can be understood through an examination of the underlying meaning people give to that space of interaction is influenced by the work of Henri Lefebvre. His concept of social space as a construction influenced by spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space, suggests that while the spatial practice (the lived) slowly produces the social space, it is the representation of space (the conceived) which influences this production. Political concepts of a particular place therefore have to be expected to deeply influence interaction upon that place (Lefebvre, 1991). However, understanding the political meaning of a place is more difficult than deciphering its recreational one; first, the political meanings groups ascribe to a place today have to be expected to be deeply intermingled with various other meanings, ranging from economic to spiritual ones; and second, political meanings cannot be as easily deduced from the current political function a place is made to have. In other words, while its current political function might be to support specific claims, mobilize groups, or even justify violence, the reason why a place can be used to achieve such goals lies less in its fresh air or good connection to infrastructure, but mostly in the power of it being a widely recognized symbol. But how does a place become such powerful symbol?

The answer to that question will be explored by highlighting a link between meaning and the power of symbols; this link holds the key to a method of how to learn the current meanings ascribed to a central place, and in doing so will also offer a way to interpret current positionings of groups in and around a specific locality.

### Symbols

Focusing on symbols – as entities of meaning for those who make use of them– to understand human behavior or political dynamics is not a new endeavor. Some of the most influential works for the study on political symbols include Cohen (1976), Edelman (1964), Elder and Cobb (1983), and Mach (1993). In respect to the countries of the former Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, a relatively broad research tradition on visual representations exists (For an

overview see Šuber and Karamanić, 2012). In particular, insights gained through research on political symbols have greatly contributed to the understanding of civil unrest and have simultaneously led to a growing consciousness towards symbols in conflicts in general (Kubik, 1994; Kertzer 1996; Wedeen, 1999). Trying to gain a more detailed understanding of the broad variety of functions ethno-national symbols in peace processes can have, I set out in a previous study to analyze and compare different symbol categories and their functions in Bosnia's peace process (Greiff, 2011). Central to this study was the belief that the power of symbols is deeply ingrained in the stories they represent. This understanding of power, as rooted in the myths and memories a certain group has about a symbol, became popular through the works of Anthony Smith who also coined the term for this connection: "myth-symbol-complex." The idea of the myth-symbol-complex can be traced back to John Armstrong's work on nationalism (Armstrong, 1982; Smith, 1988; Smith, 2009).

The most influential adaptation of that concept can be found in John S. Kaufman's "symbolic-politics of ethnic war theory" (Kaufman, 2001, pp. 15-48). Symbols in this concept can become powerful tools through which elites can create fear, and maybe even hatred, because symbols are connected to important stories at the heart of group concepts of self. Threat to a symbol can be perceived as a threat to the group, and lead to emotional responses of the group to that threat. According to that causal logic, the power a symbol can have lies in the thickness of its ties with the group's core myths. The closer the symbol is connected to those important myths, such as the myth of the golden age of a group, the myth of origin, the myth of martyrdom, the more power this symbol can yield (Smith, 1988, pp. 191-192). A similar concept of power as resting in the meaning a group identifies with a symbol can be found in two other highly influential intergroup conflict theories. With some variations, Vamik Volkan and Marc H. Ross see that symbols get their power through the emotions externalized onto them— through experiences with symbols individuals share while growing up in a cultural sphere— a process central to the formation and persistence of the 'group' itself (Ross, 2007; Volkan, 1988; Volkan, 1998). Memories of past emotions stored in symbols can, when the symbol is targeted in political discourses or physical ways, become drivers for mass responses.

Although all three theories agree that the story behind a symbol neither has to be a product of experiences by all members of a group, nor be strictly remembered by each individual to be-

come a powerful group myth, power in all three concepts lies in the shared meaning members of a group ascribed to a symbol; and the bigger and older the emotional baggage of the myth-symbol-complex for a group, the larger the power that can be unleashed through the political use of that very symbol. But is it enough to understand power as resting in the meaning itself—nourished by the group's concept of their past—unleashed through emotions based on memories?

Doubts that the understanding of the power of a symbol in terms of rather simple causalities sufficiently covers the complexity of the connection between a symbol, its meaning, and its political capacities, arose while driving back from the Mrakovica plateau to the town of Kozarac—a town in the Republika Srpska, which, despite the fact that many of its Bosniak inhabitants had left (voluntarily or by force) during the war, is today again a town of predominantly Bosniak inhabitation. Through the return of many refugees, as well as strong ties to a wealthy diaspora, Kozarac has seen many improvements in recent years (Vulliamy, 2012). Next to houses and restaurants, large investments have been made to rebuild the town's old mosques, which as in many places throughout Bosnia, had been strategically targeted during the war. However, it was not a particular mosque, but the old church, which caught this visitor's immediate attention.

### **Power of Symbols**

Central to the town stands a presumably one hundred year old Orthodox church, which to my knowledge had not suffered any large-scale destruction in the war, although it today shows some marks of decay. On the church ground, with its neatly mowed lawn on which children are allowed to play soccer, two objects seem remarkable—because they were unexpected; first, in close proximity to the old church stands a new Orthodox church built in 2001. This new church is neither larger nor in any other observable way significantly different from the old church, which was still in use during my last visit in 2009. Second, a large flag pole showing the flag of the Republika Srpska stands opposite to both churches creating a highly symbolic space, which is then surrounded by a fence bearing a pattern of recurring religious symbols and is illuminated at night through several newly installed flood lights, making the churches stand out in the otherwise dark skyline of Kozarac. Looking at the illuminated staging I started wondering why someone would place two similar churches in such close prox-

imity? Does repetition of a symbol, or more generally connecting one symbol with others, create more power? In the end, is the very act of repeating and connecting the very source of the power of symbols?

The church bells the next morning offered me an answer. Hearing the sound of the bells immediately made me think about the two churches again; this forceful intrusion of the churches into my thoughts highlighted an aspect of the power of symbols I was previously unaware of. And maybe could only be unaware of, because as long as I actively engaged with thinking about symbols, I never had to question their very existence as such to begin with. But what if a symbol only exists as a symbol in the moment someone thinks about it, or is otherwise exposed to it? What does for example the Kosovo Polje— also known as ‘Blackbird Field’— one mythic cradle of Serbdom, mean to a Serb who is not actively thinking about it, or made to remember it (Ćirković, 2004, pp. 82-85). I think in that second the symbol Kosovo Polje, setting aside whether the region of the Kosovo Polje near Priština continues to exist, bears no meaning for them. While a symbol is only a symbol when we think about it, it follows that the power of a symbol can only be unleashed in the moment the symbol is remembered, or in any other ways experienced. Following this line of thought then suggests that the power of a symbol is created in the very moment of it being used as a symbol, and that without use there would be no power.

In other words, the use of a symbol is central to understanding its powers and not its bare existence. However, what qualifies as use depends on the viewpoint, as the following will highlight. While the Union Flag of the United Kingdom flying over Belfast City Hall may not catch the attention of a Northern Irish Protestant as he walks by the building, the act of taking it down one morning becomes the moment that may unleash his concerns and furies (McDonald, 2013). On the other hand the daily use of it may upset the Catholic party, and its being taken down might be seen as a success of their claims, even though the future absence of the flag might not be recognized at one point any longer.

All this suggests is that the use of symbols is not an easy political endeavor, and success in terms of arousing the intended emotions depends on the ‘right’ use of a symbol. One occasion of such a ‘successful’ use of a symbol is Milosević’s use of the Kosovo Polje as a stage and prop for his political campaign in the late 1980s. Looking at the episode in which Milosević

delivers a speech at the 600 year anniversary day of the Battle of Kosovo while standing on Blackbird Field, his successful use of it as a symbolic stage to support his political claims lies in the interpretation of the battle he creates (Sells, 1998, p. XIII). Use of a symbol therefore might be best understood as an act of interpreting, as an act of constructing the meaning of a symbol, or simply as an act of storytelling. Analyzing this particular story reveals that it is not a pure reference to a central myth held by his Serbian audience, but it shows several connections to different myths as well as to current events, fears, and insecurities also held by the audience (British Broadcasting Corporation, 1989; Department of Commerce of the U.S., 1989). This suggests that the political power of a symbol is the result of a 'successful' act of meaning making, and does not lie in the meaning itself– and most definitely not in one core myth.

Creating the meaning of a symbol, however, is not only limited to the act of directly connecting it with stories, but can also involve connections to stories via other symbols, styles, shapes, sounds, acts, and so forth, creating a highly complex, dynamic, and political symbol-story-system. Even new symbols can be successfully integrated through constructing connections to established myths and symbols; in the same way as old symbols can be expected to be re-connected with new stories, as has been highlighted for the Bosnian case by Velikonja (2003). In both cases, it is the act of meaning making, of connecting the symbol, which, if successfully done, creates the power of a symbol in the very moment of its use. In order to be successful, however, the connections will have to remain plausible for the audience. While interpreting the defeat of the Serbian forces at the Battle of the Kosovo Polje as a chosen defeat of the Serbian army– continuing to fight while knowing that they will have to die for a higher cause– creates a powerful picture of martyrdom that can rally masses for future clashes, interpreting the very same defeat as simply caused by a higher power, would very likely not achieve the same result. While the reference to a higher power could theoretically serve as a strategy to justify the defeat as not caused by bad leadership, the reason why the higher power is connected in that particular way lies in the success this particular connection has had in the past to create similar emotions to those intended by Milosević. This interpretation is of course extremely simplified and only intends to highlight that limitations to successful use of a symbol depend on the former use of that very symbol. A closer reading of Milosević's speech unveils that he actually intends to link the Serbian defeat to the divided Serbian lead-

ership, positioning himself in the role of a quasi-dictatorial leader as the only possible option to avoid such a traumatizing defeat in the future.

This highlights that the meaning created in the past limits the possibilities for future use of a symbol for the same group; however, meaning as established through use in the past can be altered through use again. In order to use a symbol in a different context the need for creating a new meaning may arise, which one can observe during larger transition periods of political systems (Forest and Johnson, 2002). Such an alteration will probably not be immediately successful if a totally new meaning is introduced in one large shift, but is very likely to be achieved through a small step-by-step process; making repetitive use of a symbol with slight alteration of the interpretation into a strategy of establishing a new range of possible connections for future use. Repetition, it now appears, is not only important for creating a constant stream of exposure to the symbol, through making us experience it over and over, but repetition also defines a certain trajectory or structure for the symbol's future use. Flying the flag day-by-day is a prerequisite for making a symbolic statement of flying the same flag on half-mast on a particular day or event. The construction of a regular pattern prepares the option of breaking that pattern through opening new ways of how to connect that symbol in the future. Maybe we can even go so far as to suspect that repetitive use of a symbol aims at creating a tacit knowledge of a symbol and what it stands for, which allows certain actions without further thought—because these actions are perceived as totally normal—in the same way as a different way of using that symbol, or even another party using that symbol, immediately awakens the audience's attention. In other words it appears that it is the disruption of the established pattern through an intentional act of connecting the symbol in a different way that creates the powers of that symbol in the very second of its use. In the end, it seems that the better a symbol is prepared to be used through repetitive efforts of meaning making over time—through establishing the rules of the game—the more successfully it can be used to create social responses in a particular episode.

Finally it is clear that the interplay between a symbol, its meaning, and power, is more complicated than the rather static concept of the 'myth-symbol-complex' suggests. Power, we can assume, is not a product of the memories, myths or the symbol itself, but of an act of using a symbol to disrupt or defend an order that was established through its previous use. This shift away from 'power in meaning' to 'power through repetitive acts of meaning making' opens



up a new opportunity to analyze differentiation processes today, because (a) repetitive meaning making in terms of making connections is very likely to leave traces that can help to understand the meaning ascribed to a symbol, and (b) in the moment a symbol is not dependent on ancient tales to become a powerful tool, we can expect a competition over its meaning, or more precisely a competition about the right to make meaning. And it is this competition about meaning making that transforms the act of interpreting a symbol into a positioning act itself, while the very way the meanings are created simultaneously allows insights into the local meanings ascribed to those positionings.

### **Gateway into Local meanings**

(a): Repetitive meaning making in terms of making connections is very likely to leave traces that can help to understand the meaning ascribed to a symbol. In the majority of cases, in order to understand interactions upon a place we have to make the tacit knowledge groups have of a place, with all its social rules and functions, explicit. The way of doing so lies in observing the acts, which create the meaning of the place for the groups to begin with. Knowing that using a place as a symbol requires an interpretation, which is an act of connecting the place to other stories via a plentitude of other symbols, practices, rituals, aesthetic expressions, styles, and so forth, suggests that these connections can become the key to entering into local knowledge.

Returning to the example of the Kozara Monument, some of those connections are rather obvious. The newly erected cross, in a similar way as the flag outside of the church in Kozarac, is an extremely important reference to claims to that place held by a certain group. This is nowadays very common—mainly ethno-national group symbols play a central role in differentiation processes and therefore become helpful indicators, auxiliary symbols, for the attempt of reconstructing the current meanings of a place. The presence of such auxiliary symbols together with descriptions of the place, as can be found not only on a large billboard in front of the monument itself, but also on the National Parks webpage, allow a first impression of the meaning dominating this place today. More facets of the meaning horizon, as well as competing interpretations, can then be found through various other connections. Many of them, however, easily remain hidden from foreigner's eyes and require extensive sensitiza-

tion efforts, which have to start with the assumption that nothing in connection to a central place today is meaningless.

Under this suspicion that potentially everything can hold an important insight into local meaning, even the ribbons of the flower bouquet someone had placed in front of a partisan memorial, will have to be carefully inspected. While the ribbon of the bouquet is held in the Pan-Slavic colors of red-white-and blue, which can reference Yugoslavia as well as many other states, the inscription on the ribbon is only in Cyrillic letters. The presence of Cyrillic, or the absence of the Latin script, the second official alphabet in Bosnia today, might be an important detail enriching our understanding of the local meaning the monument is made to have today. In other words, both the practice of laying down flowers at a monument erected under the previous social and political system, as well as the color and style of the ribbon, tell us a part of a story which together with the primary auxiliary symbols, the graffiti on the backside of the monument, the mandatory school fieldtrips, and even the efforts invested in the upkeep of the place itself, slowly enable us to retrace the meaning of that place.

Widening the focus to the surrounding environment of the place, even more details become evident. While the monument lies in the National Park, the national park itself is part of a region called Bosanska Krajina, or just Krajina, meaning “Frontier Land”. The shortening to Krajina is not just an abbreviation, but a highly political act, similar to efforts of changing many city names after the war, especially those which previously held the word “Bosanska” as part of the name, into “Srpski”. The name of the region, of the park, and of the monument are highly potent indicators for the symbolic meaning of the place. These are such contentious indicators that the highest Bosnian court, the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, ruled several times in the past that particular name changes are unconstitutional and have to be undone; which again is yet another interpretation of the particular place (The Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2004).

After all, the creation of the meaning of a central place today leaves various connections to other stories. Besides obvious differences in the medium of the connection, all of these references will have one thing in common—they are meant to be experienced, because only when they are picked up, can the rules of the game be determined. Following these connections, these traces, while trying to carefully piece them together, can finally help to create a solid

approximation of the meaning ascribed to a central place today, thus making the observation of those connections into the primary learning method toward understanding local meanings of a place. In the end it seems that political symbols can become powerful research tools, because the very mechanism of how their power is constructed offers a plentitude of ways to reconstruct their local meanings. The idea of using the connections of symbols with other symbols, acts, rituals, and myths as gateways to understand the meaning of these symbols was inspired by two specific works, one by Pierre Bourdieu and the other by Jean Baudrillard (Bourdieu and others, 2002; Baudrillard, 1996).

(b): In the moment a symbol is not dependent on ancient tales to become a powerful tool, we can expect a competition over its meaning, or more precisely a competition about the right to make meaning.

While it is the political use of a place that makes the meaning a place is designed to have understandable, it is the fact that power depends on use and not on ancient myths that allows a place to become a symbol for every group willing to use it as such. Knowing that use is possible, and the power of successful use of a place as a symbol is far reaching, we can expect to find competition between different groups about the interpretation of a place (Hayden, 2002; Danzer, 2009; Estabrook, 2002). This competition will automatically raise the question of who has the right to interpret that place: a right that in many cases will be obtained by the local elites, or maybe the right, which makes one into a local elite to begin with. Having the right to interpret a central place means having power to influence social differentiation process through not only establishing the rules of engagement on that place, but through a positioning act of the other groups involved. Whoever claims the right to interpret a place through interpreting it, claims in the very second the right to determine the terms of interaction upon that place, thus making the right to interpret into an identifier for a desirable position and the act of meaning making, of interpreting, into a powerful positioning act itself.

Closely observing the competition about the right of interpretation highlights two important points. First, the meaning we get while following one actor, one symbol-story-system, is not 'the' meaning of a place but only 'one' given meaning. In terms of it being a positioning act, such a given meaning has to be understood as chosen positioning, or maybe better as the 'attempt' to create an 'ideal' positioning; 'ideal' because each position can be expected to repre-

sent the 'ideal' distribution of rights and responsibilities as envisioned by one agent, and 'at-tempt' because as long as there is competition, we have to expect that the current positioning of all agents will lie between each of their 'ideal' positionings.

And second, with competition leaving traces on the place itself, slowly the agents, the groups involved in meaning making of a place, start appearing. The groups most heavily competing over the right to deliver the sole interpretation of a place are probably the first to be detected. However, the very fact that they can compete means that their current positions are not frozen under the current local moral order established through their interactions upon that location. Observing both the daily life on a central place, and the daily use of the same place as a means to establish power, can further reveal those groups which are not competing about the right to interpret a place, because they either favor one of the dominant interpretations, or they have no other choice than to 'favor' one of the dominant interpretations. However, whether they choose to follow an existing concept or not, a group which has no right to interpret the space of its very existence, has only limited rights to define the basis on which its social relations obtain their meaning, and therefore is positioned in a very weak way, definitely a forced and very likely frozen position. Finding those who do not use places as political symbols, who are depending on the interpretations of others, through carefully analyzing those 'interpretations of others', can become a promising framework for a study concerned with hidden conflict potentials.

Finding references to the rights and duties of those who are not competing within the interpretations of those who are competing, is not enough, because as long as there is competition, all positions can be expected to be in-between the 'ideal' positions the interpretations are meant to constitute.. Therefore not only do all dominant interpretations have to be examined for their positioning powers towards those groups not engaged in the competition, but also the relationships between the different dominant agents has to be taken into consideration in a thorough cross examination. While for example group A may not position group B in a way that would exclude B from future interactions, groups C and D may do so; in that situation the relationship between A, C, and D becomes a central factor for narrowing down the current positioning of B. This further highlights that only in the case of all competing groups positioning the non-competitors in exactly the same way, will there be a black and white result in terms of specific rights and duties, which can be attributed to the non-competitors. In all

other cases the best interpretation this framework can deliver will be a strong tendency, an educated approximation, to the positionings in place.

### Outlook

In summation of the arguments herein presented, it is believed that we can get a footing into alien cultures through learning from the political acts of using central places as tools to influence the local rules of interaction. This footing in the thick web of interpretations is of course in need of translation. While translating the foreign into the familiar is a prerequisite for analyzing current positions in a particular scenario, it has to be clear that this is no innocent translation from one text into yet another text, but actually an act of constructing text, and therefore an act of constructing meaning (Asas, 1986, pp. 157-160). These meanings, even when they are the result of thorough minded ethnographic fieldwork, will never be entirely correct representations of local realities, but will always remain subjective interpretations (Geertz, 1984; Rosaldo 1986). Such interpretations by nature can never be complete or true to everyone, therefore this paper sought to open up my particular interpretational approach to allow insights into how it attempts to complement our understanding of social conflict in Bosnia, as well as elsewhere (Geertz, 2000, p. 10).

In conclusion, understanding how places become powerful tools highlights one way of learning local meanings ascribed to central places as well as offers a direction toward interpreting the current positions of actors on these spaces. The specific value of the positioning approximation this approach creates lies in its capacity to highlight those who are excluded (forced and frozen) and the ways their exclusion is created even before violence results. Making these circumstances explicit provides space for re-thinking methods of interaction, as well as research on episodes of highly dynamic intergroup conflict. Through enabling us to find actors, acts, and meanings, focusing on central places might become a sufficient starting point for an analysis of present day differentiation processes, especially in those cases in which trying to exclude previous knowledge about a conflict is understood as ethical or maybe the only choice in order to obtain at least a partial understanding of contemporary social dynamics. In particular, the sensitivity of this approach towards hidden conflict potentials might become useful in times of dwindling financial resources and a growing understanding of the benefits of violence prevention measures.

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# Narrative and Conflict: Explorations of Theory and Practice

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## **Coherence Co-constructed:**

### ***Using Coherence for Analysis and Transformation of Social Conflicts***

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#### **Abstract**

Current approaches to narrative coherence are focused on the ways that speakers establish legitimacy and coherence by connecting to cultural norms. This paper summarizes the current literature on narrative coherence and suggests an alternative understanding of coherence could be used to deconstruct privileged narratives and provide avenues for intervening and transforming conflicts. The author presents an analysis of political rally poster used by the Turkish Prime Minister in the summer of 2013 to explore how narrative coherence is a relationship co-constructed between a text and a wider audience through shared cultural and historical narratives.

#### **Keywords**

public discourse, historical narratives, narrative coherence, Turkey, conflict resolution,

#### **Authors' Note**

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## Introduction

The subject of narrative coherence presents a predicament. On the one hand, part of the literature on narrative coherence suggests that coherence, as an internal logic, is an inherent part of storytelling—both in literary and in personal narratives. On the other hand, some scholars noted that abiding by certain standards of what is considered coherent not only limits the possible diverse range of stories, but also it makes the storyteller conform to the social standards and norms of what is considered coherent—therefore ensuring submission to dominant discourses regarding issues such as gender roles, violence, religiosity, nationalism and so on. While the formal school of thought suggests that coherence *must* exist *in* a given narrative, some in the latter suggests doing away with the concept of coherence altogether. In this article, I reflect on the literature on coherence and offer another perspective on this predicament by providing an alternative view on coherence.

In this particular stance on narrative coherence, I utilize both aforementioned approaches to suggest an alternative take on coherence. I argue that understanding coherence as meaning-structures that exist within the text indeed confirms to dominant narratives, but it is nevertheless a useful tool—especially when engaging in analyses on conflicting narratives that are interdiscursively connected with historical texts. The goal of this article, therefore, is to point out the usefulness of narrative coherence as a tool of analyzing conflicting narratives while subverting dominant paradigms of storytelling. In other words, this article asks how can conflict resolution scholars and practitioners see understand narrative coherence in a way in which it helps to deconstruct privileged narratives and provides avenues for intervening in and transforming conflicts?

To this end, I start with a review of literature on narrative coherence. I sort the literature in two categories: semantic, and critical approaches to coherence. Following the literature, I present an analysis of Turkish Prime Minister's political rally poster that he used to counter the Gezi protests that took place during the summer of 2013 in Turkey. Through this analysis, I demonstrate the main idea of this article: coherence is a relationship co-constructed between the text and the audience based on shared cultural and historical narratives. Based on this connection, the widely circulated, mainstream, and dominant stories are considered coherent, while the stories, or story elements, such as characters, who do not fit into this relationship are deemed incoherent and thus ostracized. While this might be the case, understanding these



connections might show us which narratives an audience privileges over others. This, in turn, has the potential for a conflict analyst and transformation practitioner to engage not only the privileged narratives, but also their connection to their audiences and, ultimately, audiences themselves.

### Literature on Narrative Coherence

The literature that surrounds narrative coherence clutters roughly into two categories: semantic and critical. Semantic approaches try to map out meaning structures in a given text and suggest that certain themes that arise in the text offer the reader strategies by which the text seeks coherence with the reader and on which themes this relationship might be built. This perspective centers on the writings of four researchers: Fisher (1987), Linde (1993), and Bluck & Habermas (2000). Critical approaches, on the other hand, find that idea of coherence problematic and they argue that for a text to cohere, it has to agree with a definition of coherence—which is set by dominant narratives in a given context. Arguments of this approach can be found in the writings of Hyvarinen, Hyden, Saarenheimo and Tamboukou (2010), and Cobb (1993, 2004).

### Semantic Coherence

The Fisherian tradition on narratives, which he titled “the narrative paradigm”, suggests that humans are “homo narrans;” not only humans narrate, but also human behavior can be understood within “narrative rationality” (Fisher, 1987, p. 46). Narrative rationality, according to Fisher, refers to the possibility of interpreting all human interaction as parts and parcels of narratives that we legitimize. He describes narrative rationality as “an account, an understanding, of any instance of human choice and action, including science” (Fisher, 1987, p. 66). Within his framework of narrative rationality, Fisher claims, “human communication is tested against the principles of probability (coherence) and fidelity (truthfulness and reliability)” (Fisher, 1987, p. 47). Fisher describes coherence as “whether a story ‘hangs together’” and according to Fisher it “is assessed in three ways: by its *argumentative* or *structural coherence*; by its *material coherence*, that is by comparing and contrasting stories told in other discourses (a story may be internally consistent, but important facts may be omitted, counterarguments ignored, and relevant issue overlooked); and by *characterological coherence*” (Fisher, 1987, 47), which is the interplay between a character and its context. Consequently, Fisher treats narrative coherence as a property of the text, or the story that is told. A story “hanging together,” as well as three

assessments of coherence that Fisher outlines are dependent on the meaning structures in a given story.

Linde (1993) furthers the Fisherian perspective towards narrative coherence through an analysis of the life stories of thirteen white middle-class Americans. She finds two “major coherence principles of life stories: causality and continuity” (Linde, 1993, p. 127). In her study, Linde is interested in “the social practice of establishing that the events of one’s life have been motivated by adequate causality” (Linde, 1993, p. 127). Linde defines, “adequate causality” as an explanation “that is acceptable by addressees as a good reason for some particular event or sequence of events” (Linde, 1993, p. 127). For Linde, “good reason” not only means “how well they accord with a store of common-sense beliefs about the world that the speaker and hearer can be assumed to share,” but it also refers to the requirement for “the narrator to establish that the protagonist exercised correct and sufficient agency” (Linde, 1993, p. 128).

Linde’s two criteria for “adequate causality” are similar to Fisher’s “good reasons” and “characterological coherence.” Just like Fisher, Linde suggests that character’s behavior should match with its environment, culture and learned belief systems in order to be considered coherent. Furthermore, according to Linde, speakers have an easier time to establish coherence within their narrative accounts when the causality in a given narrative is adequate. Inversely, when the causality is inadequate, speakers seem to employ certain strategies and extra effort to stay coherent.

The third comprehensive study regarding narrative coherence is written by Bluck and Habermas (2000). In their work where they examine the “mental organization used to produce” (Bluck & Habermas, 2000, p.123) autobiographical narratives, they explain their understanding of coherence as it pertains to their research. Bluck and Habermas believe that examining narrative coherence “provides support for the assertion that the life story is more than just a collection of single memories of important events ... but has a more integrated form” (Bluck & Habermas, 2000, p.125), which they call coherence.

Bluck and Habermas identify four types of coherence: temporal, cultural, thematic, and casual. Temporal coherence, according to Bluck and Habermas, is the result of the interplay between memory and narrative: “Like other narratives, the life story follows a temporal order mimicking the flow of time. Events that are remembered later are situated in terms of their temporal relation to aforementioned events” (Bluck & Habermas, 2000, p.124). Their approach

to cultural coherence echoes Fisher and Linde. They describe it as “internalized cultural norms concerning what is appropriate material for inclusion in a life story” (Bluck & Habermas, 2000, p.124). Casual coherence, events, life periods, and the self are linked in terms of motivations, causes, or explanations. The speaker describes why certain events occurred and how those led to what happened next. They may use logic but may also rely on implicit theories of what motivates people, how emotional events should be coped with, and how development across the lifespan occurs. (Bluck & Habermas, 2000, p.125)

Lastly, thematic coherence refers to the ways in which the storyteller merges her story with ‘life lessons’, in other words, themes that confirm with overarching morals in a given context. The storyteller either continuously waves these themes within the story, or ends the story with such a theme, fixing the ‘point’ of the story to a particular cultural norm: “the individual understands the flow of life’s events by creating overarching themes or drawing morals” (Bluck & Habermas, 2000, p.125).

These three approaches to narrative coherence converge on the following points: (1) Establishing coherence in a narrative account can be easier or harder depending on how much it agrees with culturally existing narratives. This point privileges those stories that agree with the cultural norms as more coherent than others. (2) Should they mostly disagree, they need to provide strategies to account for the disagreement. (3) Should they mostly agree, they need to provide a certain narrative rationality. (4) In both cases, however, the protagonist has to be at the center of the narrative. (5) Narrative rationality should include a certain understanding of time, motives and themes, although they needn’t necessarily be linear.

Consequently, these approaches to narrative coherence attempt to identify points in which the speakers establish coherence through their speech and its relationship to cultural norms. They argue that the text needs to establish coherence using rhetorical strategies and strive to be more coherent, to be more predictable vis-à-vis the already accepted and circulating narratives in a given culture. Such approach results in treating coherence as a cultural artifact—only legitimate when the society at large deems it so. This understanding of coherence sustains privilege and it is the exact point with which scholars in critical approaches to coherence disagree.

### **Critical Approaches to Coherence**

Rather than mapping out the meaning structures that coherence might co-create with other cultural stories, critical approaches treat coherence as a privilege issue. When some stories are judged as incoherent because they do not adhere to established cultural patterns of storytelling, they are othered and treated as strangers. Both approaches within this category emphasize this point.

One of the critical approaches towards narrative coherence examines this relationship through the lens of traumatic testimonies and concludes that the society ostracizes such testimonies precisely because they do not agree with the cultural norms of coherence (Hyvarinen, Hyden, Saarenheimo and Tamboukou, 2000). They suggest that paying attention to coherence, seeking coherence in personal accounts for generating meaning or using certain standards of coherence to judge the value or the virtue of the stories one hears—culturally, morally, or politically—means surrendering to dominant discursive paradigms of a given context. That surrender, in turn, sustains the power imbalances and abuses against persons who do not ‘fit in’ with the dominant ways of telling stories. Physical, cultural or structural violence, marginalization and Othering against people who either consciously refuse to display compliance towards norms of coherence, or cannot do so because of trauma, consequently, are deemed as ‘abnormal,’ ‘stranger,’ or ‘Other.’ To eliminate the sustenance of this power imbalance, authors suggest that the focus should not be the coherence of the story. Rather it should be the performance of storytelling itself, in which “a significant part of the politically and humanly most important narration comes out hesitantly, often incoherently, replete with contradictions and resistant to chronologically smooth, linear progress” (Hyvarinen, Hyden, Saarenheimo and Tamboukou, 2000, p. 11).

Cobb’s (1993, 2004) approach to coherence also emphasizes the issue of privilege that stories that adhere to dominant cultural narratives possess over others. Examining conflicting narratives during mediation sessions, Cobb also argues that coherence may lead to power imbalance—those who have stories cohere with the dominant narratives are more powerful in a conflict when compared to those who are the victims of such domination (Cobb, 1993). However, instead of ‘changing paradigms’ or abandoning the coherence completely, she suggests working with the concept of coherence to use it to disrupt the power imbalance. She suggests using various understandings of coherence to co-construct narrative accounts and coherences that provide pragmatic, contextual, and policy-based change (Cobb, 2004).

The critical approaches draw our attention to the power relations in which the story exists and away from judging a text as coherent or incoherent based on an attributed merit that a text might or might not hold. While critical approaches are not descriptive, Cobb (2004) provides a basis on which both approaches can be fused in a way where conflict analysts and transformation practitioners can see the ways in which a story would be perceived as coherent or incoherent, can recognize cultural narratives that sustain dominance, and work to deconstruct or suggest alternatives to dominant narrative accounts.

### **Turkish PM Political Rally Ad**

In this section, I offer an analysis of a political rally poster used by Turkish PM Erdoğan as a counter movement against the protests that swept the two-thirds of the country over the summer of 2013. I engage in this analysis because it is a multilayered text and image that demonstrates the ways in which a story coheres with its audience and, in this case, calls for social polarization. Erdoğan's polarizing political discourse reflected in the rally ad is based on the use of discursive tropes and "citations" (Butler, 1993, p. 12) resting on historical events to construct coherence. This coherence, in turn, feeds polarization in public discourse. Through such construction of coherence, the rally ad aims to construct a solid and coherent in-group identity. The coherence within an in-group simultaneously identifies out-groups, who do not find these references coherent with their identities and experiences. As such, through this analysis, I show that constructing narrative coherence is a dual-purpose rhetorical device, with which one can solidify an identity with its intended audience and identify as well as marginalize those who are not part of the group.

Turkish Republic was established to distance itself from its Ottoman past, where the state religion was Islam and the Sultan was the Caliph. The founding of the Republic involved various reforms from clothing to alphabet to a unified and secular education system to create this distance (Lewis, 1968). The Republic and the ideology that drove the establishment of the Republic, Kemalism, did not aim to eliminate Islam. "[O]ne of the six pillars of Kemalism, halkçılık (populism), not only approved "the public" as the "master" of the nation but also accepted their ascribed Islamic identity (the religion of the majority) as one of the constitutive elements of the imagined Turkish nation in the making" (Öncü, 2014, p. 162). Öncü (2014) further explains how the new republic aimed to control public religious life, instead of creating a

true distance between state and religion through the establishment of Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA). DRA's propagated purpose was

[T]o provide the citizens with Islamic religious services such as the appointment of preachers, muezzins and imams and the distribution of sermons. The true objective of the DRA, which was to establish control over the Islam practiced in civil society in order to contain any form of opposition against the development of modern capitalism from the quarters of heterodox Islam. (Öncü, 2014, p. 162)

Therefore, from its inception, the aim of the Turkish state regarding public religious life had been to control the type of Islam the public practiced—at the expense of banning and prosecuting what the state perceived as unorthodox practices. Before 1970s, this process was one of secularization. Only orthodox Islam was to be practiced individually in ways that would not associate, therefore threaten, the political life and processes. However, those who wanted Islam to have presence in education, political discourse, economy, foreign policy, and day-to-day life, began the Islamist movement in the 1970s (Tuğal, 2014, p. 52). To this end in 1969 Necmettin Erbakan, an Islamist politician, founded a political party named National Order Party. The ideology of this party was dubbed Milli Görüş (National Vision), and it was an ideology based on the values of political Islam fused with ethnocentrism and militarism, which also contains xenophobic undertones towards a reductionist perception of 'the West' (Atacan, 2013, p. 47). Through the 1990s, this movement lived through its greatest successes. In 1996, it was elected to lead the coalition government. However, in 1997, the military intervened and aimed to reestablish the secularization that it perceived to be under threat.

Following the military intervention, which witnessed arrests and harassment of politicians, "a new generation of Islamists began to challenge the old leadership. The former radicals were quick to adopt a free market, 'moderate Muslim' position" (Tuğal, 2014, p. 54). Among the new generation of Islamists was the current PM, Erdoğan, who was elected to power in 2002.

Erdoğan's brand of political Islam, although it aimed to challenge the limiting aspect of secular politics, used some of the same rhetorical tropes that were established during the foundation of the Republic, such as the Turkish National Anthem (TNA) and Atatürk's Address to Youth (AAY). TNA was written in 1921 in midst of War of Independence, a national war effort against invading European forces. AAY was written in 1927, shortly after the Republic was established, to reflect the nation-building efforts. Both TNA and AAY were written to



establish national solidarity based on a narrative of constant threat from the “Other,” thus constructing unison and division along national lines. At the time these texts were written, the ‘self’ referred to public, while the ‘Other’ was the Europeans. TNA, for instance, is a text that exclusively identifies Sunni-Islam and Turkish ethnicity, as well as a nationalistic ideology as components of self-identity (Erol, 2013).

Through referencing these texts, Erdoğan’s political discourse, therefore, reflects the polarizing nature of these texts and his references to these texts. A close reading of Erdoğan’s political rally ad reveals how references to these texts act as tropes that establish the same self vs. other fault-lines between his constituents and the Gezi Park protestors—just as these texts established the same lines between the people and the European invaders.

What is today known as Gezi Park Protests, began as an #occupy-type sit in demonstration against Istanbul Municipality’s attempt to demolish a public park in favor of a shopping mall in central Istanbul. At the initial stage of the protests, the first couple of days following May 30<sup>th</sup> 2013, the clashes were limited to the environmentalist activists in the park and the police. The protests escalated in a matter two weeks to include a total of “3,545,000 citizens participated in 4,725 events in all but one of Turkey’s 81 provinces” (Özel, 2014, p. 8).

To counter the protests and show solidarity among its base PM Erdoğan organized five rallies in different cities at the end of June. To promote his rallies, he used a poster that is composed of a Turkish flag, Erdoğan’s portrait and a body of text.





On the background of the poster, there is the Turkish flag, where the crescent and the star looks angled, with the red looking slightly bent in places, casting parallel shadows—implying that the flag is not just any Turkish flag, rather it is a rippling flag. On the foreground, we see Erdoğan's image, looking at the text. At the very bottom, there is the date and time with the ruling AKParty's logo on the left. Above the date and time, the text reads, from the top:

1. Rally for respect to national will (Milli iradeye saygı mitingi)
2. To spoil the big game (Büyük oyunu bozmaya)
3. Let's write history (Haydi tarih yazmaya)

The background image, the rippling flag is a direct reference to the TNA. The symbolism of the rippling flag is in the first line of the first and the last stanzas of the TNA:

“Fear not, the crimson banner that proudly ripples in this glorious dawn, shall never fade...”

“So ripple and wave like the bright dawning sky, oh thou glorious crescent...”

Through the imagery of the rippling flag, the ad taps into the narratives existing within the TNA, which outlines a dystopic imagery of invasion of the homeland—“fear not”—and ends with a utopic hope towards a better tomorrow—“the bright dawning sky” (Erol, 2013). Drawing from the imagery of the TNA, the visual rhetoric of the rally ad references the same narrative of threat in the face of a countrywide *invasion*.

The TNA and the self/other, attack/defense, friend/foe narratives that the TNA brings provide the narrative background on which the text further references and recontextualizes TNA and AAY.

On this background, the text first engages in identification of the self and the other. Just as the TNA signifies an imagined nation at the intersection of Sunni-Muslim, Turkish, and nationalist identities, the rally ad constructs a similar imagined self at through the phrase “respect to the national will.” Erdoğan often uses “national will” in his discourse to signify to himself and to his own party. The reference rests on being elected to power, therefore being the manifestation of the “national will.” The ad constructs those who identify with him as those who *respect* the national will—bridging the gap between Erdoğan and the public. Dialectically, akin to TNA pointing to the European forces as the Other that wish to harm the imagined nation, the ad constructs those who rally against Erdoğan's rule as rallying against the national will. Consequently, the text constructs the Other as those who *disrespect* the national will, the protestors.

“Let’s write history,” the third line of the text in the ad, feeds from this identification of self and other. “To write history” is an expression in Turkish that means to undertake and complete a monumental task with success. The word “haydi,” while does not have a direct transliteration, can be translated as “let’s.” Just like “let’s” it has a tacit imperative, such as “let’s [go].” The call to action in the tacit imperative collocated with an imposed task of “writing history” can be read as an attempt to establish consent through hailing individuals and transforming them into subjects (Althusser, 1971).

In addition, in this discursive context where the background is established through TNA’s narratives, it arguably refers to similar calls to action TNA makes to the imagined public to take up arms and defend the nation. Further ossifying the lingering perception that treats the protests as an echo of the War of Independence, the ad takes a step further than framing those who positively respond to the PM’s rally ad as patriotic as fighting against the Europeans. Such hailing not only justifies the police brutality witnessed during the protests but also explains, at least in part, citizens who grabbed knives, clubs, and machetes to attack the protestors.

The second line of the rally ad, “Büyük oyunu bozmaya” is transliterated as “to spoil the big game.” “Game” in Turkish also means “trick” and refers to conspiracy theories that were generated throughout the protests by the state-supporting media, as well as the 28 minute long video made by the government’s “PR and Media Directorate.” The video, named “big game,” shows protestors throwing rocks to the police and vandalizing public property. It argues that protests cost over 140 million dollars and draws attention to allegations of “interest lobby” and “foreign media” as the main driving force behind the protests. The protests, therefore, are not perceived as manifestation of dissent. Rather, they are framed as conspiracies in which foreigners’ attempt to damage Turkey using protests and protestors.

In a discursive context where the protests echo the War of Independence and support for the PM is constructed as patriotism, the “big game” becomes a conspiracy marker that refers to *previous* efforts of the foreigner’s attempt to damage Turkey. The conspiracy, the trick, in this context possibly cites the secret treaties made to partition the Ottoman Empire, such as Sykes-Picot. Here, the ad reaches back to AAY, a text that talks more explicitly about games, colonial efforts, and future enemies:

1. ‘Oh Turkish Youth! Your first duty is to preserve and defend forever the
2. Turkish independence and the Turkish Republic. This is the only
3. foundation of your existence and of your future. This foundation is your

4. most precious treasure. In the future, too, there will be malevolent people
5. at home and abroad who will wish to deprive you of this treasure.’<sup>1</sup>

Obscure personal as well as temporal pronouns throughout the text set the stage for recontextualization between the post-war newfound Turkish Republic and protests against PM Erdoğan’s decade of rule. In the fourth and fifth lines, the implicit reference to the past through “too,” and explicit reference to the future set the stage to point out enemies and reach out to allies. Those who answer the *hailing* of the “duty” to “preserve and defend” are deemed as allies, while the enemy, who provoke such defense, can be within or without the national borders. The narrative of constant threat, victimization, as well as the ambiguous prophecy rhetoric allow for “big game” from PM Erdoğan’s rally ad to tap into the narrative that the AAY uses.

“Big game” from the PM Erdoğan’s rally ad, constructs a parallel with the prophecy from the past and events in the present. By suggesting the existence of a “big game,” the ad suggests that the protestors on the street are a part of those “malevolent people’ who “wish to deprive [the people] of [the] treasure.” As such, the ad hails good citizens to duty, to rally around the leader in order “to preserve and defend.”

### Conclusion

Through the analysis, I demonstrate how we can *read* coherence in a given text through its relationship with dominant cultural and historical stories. The discourse presented in the ad with its underlying meanings that refer to specific times and memories within the Erdoğan’s political Islam ideology makes sense, connects, and aligns—in other words, *coheres*—with an audience that can make meaning of those markers at a glance. An audience who cannot engage or derive meaning from the markers presented in the ad will inevitably find the ad *incoherent*, and those who cohere with dominant ideological narratives will deem such audience incoherent with the rest of the culture.

Consequently, this moment highlights the central issue with narrative coherence: those who align with privileged cultural stories have the power to judge, other, outcast, and ostracize those who do not align with those narratives. In these kinds of cases, coherence is used as a tool of political rhetoric to both unite and divide—to unite those who align with the dominant cultural narratives against those who do not. These rhetorical moves have the power to escalate social conflict and polarization. The ad cites TNA and AAY, using their culturally dominant status to

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to AAY’s full text for all the text.

transcend their context allowing for frequent recontextualization. The ad's citation of these texts grants it rhetorical credibility and legitimacy on the eyes of those whom with it coheres.

Consequently, citations provide moral superiority as well as grounds on which *the other* can be delegitimized. The privilege of citing culturally dominant texts, therefore, deems those who find the text incoherent as targets of othering and ostracization.

Cobb (1993, 2004) engages with coherence as a tool in conflict resolution in the context of mediation. I believe it has a similar potential in the contexts of escalating social and ethnic conflicts. Engaging these kinds of texts, however, might be counterproductive. Talking back at any text that implicitly or explicitly cites the culturally dominant tropes means talking back at the tropes, and therefore talking back at the cultural and historical experiences and memories. This renders the very act of talking back to the initial text that cites the trope a defiant, deviant act that does not cohere with the text and audience—already framing the act of engagement itself as marginal and harmless at best and threatening at worst.

However, analyzing a text to see how it coheres with its intended audience provides us the historical narratives and stories that the text and the audience uses to construct or solidify their identity. This gives a unique opportunity to engage the privilege that is co-constructed through coherence. We can reinterpret the culturally dominant narratives on the grounds of reconciliation; or we can produce alternative and counter narratives that also cite those particular sacred texts that work to de-escalate the conflict. We can circulate these reinterpretations and alternative narratives to promote coexistence and cooperation instead of conflict and contestation.

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# Narrative and Conflict: Explorations of Theory and Practice

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## Calls to Terrorism and Other Weak Narratives

Ajit Maan

### Abstract

Understanding and harnessing the persuasive powers of narrative is central to current U.S. counter-terrorism efforts. There is general agreement that there is an urgent need to develop effective counter-terrorism narratives while simultaneously destabilizing and exploiting weaknesses in terrorist recruitment narratives. This paper addresses two related persuasive powers - narrative identification and trajectory – and uncovers structural weaknesses that can be strategically manipulated.

### Keywords

counter-terrorist narratives, identity, weak narrative

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## Introduction

Narrative is central to U.S. national security interests. Since the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, military strategists have become increasingly aware of the central role that narrative plays in recruiting terrorists as well as the centrality that narrative will play in any counter-terrorism strategy.

The role of narrative is recognized as so crucial to counter-terrorism efforts that the Office of Naval Research has funded a research project designed to study its persuasive effects, called “Identifying and Countering Islamist Extremist Narratives” (2009) to investigate how, among other effects, cultural narratives can be used to further ideological agendas. The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency has funded research designed to study the neurobiology of narrative comprehension, test narrative theories, and determine the connection between narrative and persuasion (2012). Previously the domain of the Humanities, this project attempts to find empirical evidence for narrative theories by engaging multi-modal neuroimaging in the interest of discovering the neural networks involved in narrative comprehension and persuasion, and to determine how the structural components of narrative can induce or disrupt narrative understanding. The Rand Corporation’s presentation “Strategic Narratives: Their Uses and Limitations” (2011) to the US Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, was guided by essential questions about the form and function of narrative: the elements and characteristics of narratives, the ownership and control of narratives, and narrative conflict.

I am in agreement with Casebeer and Russell (2005) who, from the Naval Postgraduate School’s Center for Contemporary Conflict, insist that

failure on our part to come to grips with the narrative dimensions of the war on terrorism is a weakness already exploited by groups such as Al Qaeda; we can fully expect any adaptive adversary to act quickly to fill story gaps and exploit weaknesses in our narrative.... (p.3)

Because most of us are not conscious of the power of narrative, narrative is even more powerful. It is a tool that we can use, and if we don’t it will use us. We are being used by someone’s narrative as we sit here now. If we think about narrative at all, we think about the content of the theme. Narrative structure, on the other hand, is generally assumed. And when we assume something we do so uncritically. I would like to turn a critical eye to what is accepted as standard narrative form and its implications.



Accordingly I will proceed as follows:

1. I will begin by demonstrating that classical western narrative structure limits re-framing. When I refer to Western narrative structure I mean a structure, first articulated by Aristotle, which is *linear* (goes from beginning to middle to end) and is *unified* (there is a theme into which each component part plays a role) and is *temporally ordered* (time is an essential feature in the structuring operation.) It is important to recognize the non-universality of Western narrative structure so we don't make the mistake of projecting a culturally specific assumption onto those who don't share it, and so we are aware of the ways in which it can be exploited.
2. I will suggest the reconceptualization of an American narrative, as a counter terrorism narrative, that encompasses conflict rather than joins it.

### **I. The Limitations of Classical Western Narrative Structure**

Narratives can be weaker or stronger, more persuasive or less persuasive, depending upon the effectiveness of both the formal elements and the metaphorical reference. In this paper I focus on two central features of narrative persuasiveness: formal structure, because form affects function, and identification, because identification influences action.

In this context I am using story and narrative interchangeably. When I refer to a story or a narrative I am referring, as Aristotle did in the *Poetics*, to an artfully arranged telling of events for the purpose of persuasion. This is distinct from a "history", or a simple litany of events.

We all have narratives, and we all act in relation to the narrative we see ourselves as a part of, but we don't all share the same structural assumptions. That means there is no universal cross-cultural agreement about how a story should proceed. As McAdams (2008) observes, "Our stories spell out our identities. But they also speak to and for culture. Life stories sometimes say as much about the culture wherein they are told as they do about the teller of the story" (p.1).

Most of our contemporaries concerned with terrorism and narrative begin by making an assumption about what narrative is – an assumption about its form or structure. For example, Casebeer and Russell assert that narratives generally have a beginning, middle, and an end. Citing Gustav Freytag (Freytag's Triangle), and Joseph Campbell's study of the structure of myths, they relate a structure familiar to western audiences, "there is some beginning, a problem presents itself that leads to a climax, which resolves itself into an ending" (p.4). They follow a

long tradition of assumptions about narrative form. It is an assumption familiar to lay persons and academics alike, and it has its foundation in Aristotle's *Poetics*,

Now a whole is that which has a beginning, middle, and end. A beginning is that which is not itself necessarily after any-thing else, and which has naturally something else after it; an end is that which is naturally after something itself, either as its necessary or usual consequent, and with nothing else after it; and a middle, that is by nature after one thing and has also another after it. A well constructed plot, therefore, cannot either begin or end at any point one likes; beginning and end in it must be of the forms just described. (Janko trans., 1987)

While there is general agreement that narrative is both expressive and constitutive of identity (Ricoeur, 1995, 1992; Johnson, 1993; MacIntyre, 1981; Lloyd, 1993; Schaffer, 1992; Bateson, 1990; Bruner, 1990; Linde, 1993) many contemporary philosophers, literary theorists, and psychologists have argued, at length, for the centrality of the classical Western narrative structure because they link a unified linear narrative, in the form just described, to identity. But they link it not to just any kind of identity; they link it to coherent unified identity in particular,

It is indeed in the story recounted, with its qualities of unity, internal structure, and completeness which are conferred by emplotment, that the character preserves throughout the story an identity correlative to that of the story itself... How, indeed, could a subject of action give an ethical character to his or her own life taken as a whole, if this life were not gathered in some way, and how could this not occur if not, precisely, in the form of a narrative? (Ricoeur, 1992, p.143 )

And in his classic text, *Acts of Meaning* (1990), psychologist Jerome Bruner insists, "What gives the story its unity is the manner in which plight, characters, and consciousness interact to yield a structure that has a start, a development, and a sense of an ending" (p. 21). Narrative, according to Bruner, has four grammatical constituents: agency, linearity, canonicity, and perspective (p.77).

Most people would agree that three of four of these constituents are not neutral but rather reflect interest. Those three are: agency, canonicity, and perspective. I think the fourth, linearity, is not neutral either although linearity deceptively masquerades as neutral so its

resulting persuasive power goes undetected (Maan, 2013) As Bruner says, “the meaning of what happened is strictly determined by the order and form of its sequence” (p.90). It is imperative to recognize that “the meaning of what happened” can be manipulated by enlisting an ancient fallacy that linear narrative form relies upon for its enormous persuasive power; it is the “post hoc ergo propter hoc” (after this, therefore because of this) logical fallacy. As McAdams and McLean (2013) have pointed out, in recent studies of narrative identity researchers have focused on psychological adaptation and development but more needs to be done to “disentangle causal relations between features of life stories” (p.1). Narratives convey a specific understanding of the events they are about. And this understanding involves a particular way of organizing events. And in this way, narrative, by its very nature, is strategic and its strategic nature is inseparable from its form. Narrative bestows meaning on what were previously just a series of events that are sometimes related and sometimes not related. It ties together events in a certain way for a certain purpose. Narratives have “rhetorical aims or illocutionary intentions that are not merely expository, but rather, partisan”, they work to “cajole, to deceive, to flatter, to justify.” (Bruner, 1990, p. 85-86). And its formal elements effect action “what you do is drastically effected by how you recount what you are doing, will do, or have done” (Bruner, 1990, p.87). Narrative is also a way to appropriate, or to give meaning to, experience, and in the context of this discussion, involuntary aspects of experience are essential (note that many calls to violence first begin with casting the potential terrorist as a victim). I may not have control over my environment and circumstances but narrative gives me control over how I understand my environment and my circumstances. We re-create ourselves with the stories we tell, that is, events happen but we determine the status of those events in our narratives. In classical western narrative, the meaning of present events, past events, and future action, conforms to certain principles of emplotment. The event or action is going to fit either into the initial stage (harmony) or the second stage (conflict) or the last stage (resolution).

The application of his poetic structure to autobiography (individual identity) and cultural narrative (group identity) is not what Aristotle intended, however, that lack of intention is not itself problematic (ideas don't have to be used as prescribed to be useful or not). The problems that result from this unintended application are:

1. The exclusive application of Aristotelian poetic structure, to the exclusion of any other, is unnecessarily constrictive.

2. The structure and the meaning of action is therefore similarly constricted.
3. Forms of narrative, identity, and action that are inconsistent with Aristotelian structure are not recognized or mis-identified.

Classical Western narrative structure is a foundational myth that has served a purpose and continues to be useful but emergent sensibilities are overly restricted by it. Linear narrative restricts re-framing by restricting the structure of the new narrative to the culturally sanctioned structure of the old one, so that there will be a new theme but it will be coerced into the same structure with all the same attendant problems and we are back in the business of gathering together experiences that cohere with the dominant theme and editing life of its exceptions and inconsistencies. The only way that experience of chance, luck, accident, or tragedy enter in is if they *are* the dominant theme.

A few theorists have pointed to the handicap that this narrative structure places on the identity formation. Psychologist Roy Schaffer, for example, describes problems that occur when multiplicities of experience are diminished and reduced in order to represent a consistent self which can fit into a unified and whole culturally imposed narrative structure,

...self-deception is but one instance of a set of problematic ideas that are introduced by self theorists or grand self narratives. It is advantageous to regard self-deception as a story that people tell in order to present themselves or make a psychoanalytic interpretation .... It is a story that 'works': it communicates effectively and it helps construct experience. *But it is only one version.*" (Schaffer, 1992, p.52 ) (The emphasis is mine).

And philosopher Rosi Braidotti fears the normative force of this structure, "I am struck by the violence of the gesture that binds a fractured self to the performative illusion of unity.... and by its incomprehensible force" (Braidotti, 1994, p. 35).

One of the concerns of Steve Corman and other strategic communication scholars is to restore lost U.S. credibility while keeping in mind that Western notions of credibility may not translate (Corman, Trethewey, Goodall, Lang, 2008). I want to add that an essential aspect of credibility that may not translate is the value of unified selfhood and the attendant association with credibility in the Western mind. The self-consistency associated with Western ideals of credible selfhood may not translate. Conversely the lack of self-consistency may not be

universally perceived as a threat to credibility. This is a good thing from a strategic perspective as it allows for changes in policy without threatening credibility.

If, as those of us who argue for the centrality of narrative understanding insist, identity and action are correlative to narrative, and if unity-wholeness-linearity are not universal characteristics of narrative, then they are also not universal characteristics of identity or the actions that result from it (them). And this is good news for counter-terrorism strategists. Alternative narrative structures leave more room for changes and re-association and re-framing.

It is possible to be inconsistent without any threat to selfhood. So while one with a traditional narrative orientation will think of themselves as the same consistent self no matter where they go or when they exist in time, another person with a less rigid narrative orientation may think in terms of various aspects of self in various contexts at various times, and this sort of orientation is not understood as a threat to the stability of selfhood because consistency and uniqueness are not universally recognized central features of selfhood. What to some may seem to be a “talking out of both sides of one’s mouth” may in fact be a rational and functionally obvious way of being in different contexts, with competing demands, at different times.

## **II. Anti-Terrorism Strategy**

Nothing is as persuasive as a story. There is no form of argument, no logical process that can move us the way a story does, because stories encourage us to identify. Who one sees oneself as, and the story one sees oneself as a part of, both compel action consistent with the self story. And if the narrative form privileges “unity” and “wholeness” then identity and the actions that result from it will be consistent with this form. What is the problem with that? One problem is that identity, whether personal or group, will be made up of consistent experience. Only the experience that fits into a whole and unified form is included in the narrative. The form doesn’t admit anomalous experience or action. There is no room for exceptions to the dominant story line. And as philosopher/novelist Rebecca Goldstein (1989) warns “the aesthetic preference for wholeness will often lead us to actions we would not otherwise undertake” (p. 57).

Narrative Identity Theory doesn’t just conceptualize identity as consistent with plot; it conceptualizes identity as consistent with plot structure – the Aristotelian one - that admits only a particular type of assimilation. I think this is an overstatement. Hilde Nelson has argued that narrative identity is a social construction that is tied to power, and an expression of moral

agency, or the lack thereof, and the fluidity of this would mean that identity can evolve even within the same plot structure, depending on the alterations in the construction of the person, by self and others. Hegel argued against Aristotle's centralization of the plot, arguing that it was the characterization of the person that is core to narrative, and it is conflict in that characterization that is the heart of the matter. However, Narrative Identity Theory can still retain its strength without relying on a model that bases identity on consistency over time. This is important because the over-emphasis on self-consistency is incongruent with change brought by changes in external circumstances, or changes occurring as a result of time passing, or changes brought about by critical reflection, or from gaining new information.

The problem with understanding a self as that being who narrates a whole and unified story, a story with one dominant authorial voice and consciousness, linearly over time, is that potentially meaningful experience will be left out of a unified and whole plot structure if it is anomalous or if it cannot be synthesized. Experience will be dichotomized as meaningful/trivial, anomaly/pattern, and will be included or repressed depending upon which category it falls into.

Culturally varied and contextually specific ways of being are at odds with a consciousness directed toward discovering, or creating, unity between diverse phenomena and its attendant orientation toward inner integration and consistency. That sort of orientation can cause acute problems in situations of narrative conflict. Because cultural and ideological conflict is inevitable it is strategically pragmatic to negotiate a narrative framework that is not threatened by change.

I would like to refer back to the claim made in the title of this paper. The title asserts that calls to terrorism are weak narratives. What is a weak narrative? A weak narrative is a fundamentalist narrative: a narrative with one theme that silences information that is consistent or contrary to the theme. What makes a fundamentalist narrative structure tactically weak? There are several things:

1. temporal order (because simply switching the order of events will alter moral responsibility),
2. unity or coherence (because this type of narrative leaves no room for anomalies or exceptions or change),
3. linearity (because all current events fit into the middle which is the conflict stage. The end is only projected and there will be endless disagreement about when the "beginning"

was, for example, did the war on terror begin after Sept 11 or years before?)

Dissemination of the counter-terror message within the U.S. doesn't involve the difficulty of dissemination in many other countries. Note that I am specifically focused on potential targets of terrorist recruitment *within* the United States. And when I refer to terrorism and the danger of domestic recruitment, I refer to the threat posed by the likes of Al Qaeda, as well as to the equal if not greater threat to national security posed by separatist groups within the United States.

In the U.S., dissemination involves conceptualizing and advertising an American narrative that encompasses difference, even conflict, without being threatened by it. Our narrative should welcome conflict. If we are not conflicted we are not thinking. And if we are not mindful of conflicting narratives then we are not doing what we should be doing: creating a national narrative that locates its identity not in one narrative or another but in the glue that holds multiple narratives together.

The Bush era slogan "war on terrorism" forces one to take sides without any inherent persuasive power to pull an individual or group in one direction or another. The slogan relies on identification as a victim for its persuasive power. But it is a weak narrative; it leaves identification open and vulnerable. Both, or all, sides will identify themselves with the victim and view their actions as consistent with fighting the war on terror. This war relies on an unvoiced assumption that the narrative begins with this current victimization, as the narrative structure is linear rather than cyclical. But in the mind of the "other" this event was not the beginning and if everyone jumps on the linear narrative bandwagon with its attendant need to stabilize a beginning, there will be endless disagreement about when the beginning was. If, on the other hand, the "other" does not share the same structural assumptions, the "other" can exploit this assumption with counter-examples of "beginnings". When we invoke a weak narrative like this one it is immediately countered in the mind of the "other" and the speaker not only loses credibility but also opens himself up to a litany of counter-examples.

The "war on terror" is a terrorist metaphor. Both sides have used it. It is the war Al Qaeda thinks of itself as fighting. It is the war white separatists in the U.S. are prepared for. An essential narrative strategy of terrorist recruitment is to dichotomize "us" and "them" and then to align "us" with good and "them" with evil, "us" with victim and "them" with the aggressor, "us" as on the side of God and "them" as heathens. Given these dichotomies who wouldn't align themselves with the "us" category? Most people, members of Al Qaeda as well as members of the U.S.



Department of Defense will align themselves with the “us” category. Under the “us” category (on both sides of a conflict) will come a long list of historical wrongs inflicted upon “us”. This dichotomy is a conceptual trap leaving participants, combatants, if you will, endlessly in conflict about who is “us” and who is “them”. No one is going to win that conflict. Both sides of a conflict will always justify violence by reference to a conflict narrative – a war. A counter-terrorism strategy must be a counter-fundamentalist strategy. And the commitment to, and even the unconscious assumption of, linear unified narrative is a brand of fundamentalism.

While the current administration has been careful to refine communication referring to the scope of the conflict and the nature of the threat (away from the “boundless global war on terror” language toward descriptions of “targeted efforts” and “partnerships with other countries”) (Obama, 2013) our national narrative still needs to be developed. A “war of ideas” is a more nuanced description of the situation than a “war on terror” but a “war of ideas” is still a weak metaphor. It is ineffectual. An idea cannot be killed or imprisoned or expelled from the mind or from society. Bad ideas have to be bettered, and in the case of counter-terrorist strategy, they need to be more attractive than the alternative.

I am not simply suggesting replacement of the conflict metaphor with another. Nor am I suggesting that we develop a competing metaphor, even a non-conflict metaphor. I am not suggesting this because it is not necessary. Rather than replacing the conflict metaphor we need to get outside it and encompass it. We, the United States, are already in possession of a metaphor that encompasses conflict. The U.S. already has the advantage here; we *are* the alternative metaphor.

We are an experiment in democracy, an experiment in religious tolerance, an experiment in preserving the dignity of the individual while considering the greatest good for the greatest number. And, as in many experiments, we sometimes make mistakes and we sometimes get results we don’t want and didn’t expect and then we modify our procedures and try again. As a young culture the U.S. doesn’t have the rigid fixed national identity that some other nations do. We are not so philosophically entrenched that we cannot re-think our intended results and recalibrate. And we are inclusive. We invite others to come along, to jump on-board. If we posit our narrative as an imperfect and on-going attempt, we encourage good will (if even grudging). If we posit ourselves as morally or culturally superior, or as victims, we encourage the resuscitation of contrary evidence and we are back in conflict.

We have an advantage over fundamentalist narratives and our advantage didn't come as the result of moral superiority and the advantage does not belong to any particular political party. Our advantage is that long before the events of 9/11 an American narrative has been one of inclusion. An American narrative must carefully avoid mirroring fundamentalist rhetoric by not forcing individuals to make a choice between religious beliefs and nationality. An American narrative enables one to be a Sikh, a Muslim, a Jew, and not be in conflict with those who have other beliefs. Forgetting that makes us weak. We play right into the hands of terrorist recruiters when we burn the Koran, when we attempt to silence dissent, and when we adhere to a fundamentalist national narrative.

The United States has taken a few steps back in terms of international credibility but we don't have to come up with a new narrative. We should invoke the metaphor of a worthy experiment in tolerance, dignity, and inclusion.

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# Narrative and Conflict: Explorations of Theory and Practice

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## Narrative Conflict Coaching

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### Abstract

Conflict coaching is a relatively new concept, derived from the domain of executive coaching. The concept has gained a foothold in the conflict resolution literature. There have been references made to a narrative practice of conflict coaching but it has not been articulated as fully as it might be. Here we seek to describe such a practice in relation to Foucault's concept of the care of the self and Deleuze's concept of the event. We also outline Deleuze's approach to the reading of time as chronos and aion and show how these different readings might be put to use. A set of guidelines for narrative conflict coaching are proposed and transcribed conversation is provided as a case study to illustrate the process in action. In this conversation, the conflict coach asks questions which lead the client through an exploration of the series of events that make up the conflict story, the externalizing and deconstructing of this conflict story, and the opening of a counter story as a basis for the client's preferred future conduct in relation to the conflict.

### Keywords

Conflict coaching, conflict resolution, narrative, care of the self, event, chronos, aion, counter story

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## Narrative Conflict Coaching

*Conflict coaching* refers to conversations with one party to a conflict that do not reach the point of becoming a joint mediation. They are particularly pertinent in any of the many situations in which the relational conditions for mediation have not yet been met or may never be met. Such is the case when professional assistance may only be sought by one party, while the other party refuses to participate, or when separate conflict coaching conversations may take place with each party prior to a later joint mediation. Our intention here is to outline some ideas to guide the practice of conflict coaching from a *narrative perspective*.

The goal of those conversations is, strictly speaking, not “conflict resolution”, since that would need to involve the other party. But talking with one party on his or her own can go beyond being just information-gathering ahead of the main event. It deserves consideration as a practice in its own right.

The aim of such a conversation might be to help a person articulate how he or she might conduct himself or herself in the ongoing evolution of the conflict, whether or not mediation is to take place. However, conflict coaching reaches beyond giving direct instruction or advice on performance strategies in a conflict scenario, as strategizing might emerge as a collaborative product of a conversation, rather than as something a professional does to someone who consults her or him.

So why use the term at all? We do so because it has arisen in the conflict resolution literature and gained some traction in practice. Trish Jones and Ross Brinkert (2008) claimed to have written the first book on conflict coaching (see also Brinkert, 2006). Their definition of conflict coaching reads:

Conflict coaching is a process in which a coach and client communicate one-on-one for the purpose of developing the client’s conflict-related understanding, interaction strategies, and interaction skills.

(Jones & Brinkert, 2008, p. 4.)

They add that it can take place in person, over the phone, or through the internet. They trace the derivation of the concept of conflict coaching from the field of executive coaching (Kilburg, 2000, Stern, 1994) and go on to suggest some general principles: a flexible model; the potential inclusion of all stakeholders in a particular context; the suggestion that a relational orientation is essential; caveats that conflict coaching is contingent on an incomplete

knowledge of the situation and that it is not always appropriate; and emphasizes on client empowerment and cultural and contextual sensitivity.

Jones and Brinkert also suggest several different approaches to conflict coaching, one of which is a narrative approach, drawing on the articulation of narrative mediation (Monk & Winslade, 2013; Winslade & Monk, 2000, 2008). While their description of narrative conflict coaching serves as a useful starting place, the current article aims to take it further and to locate a narrative practice in relation to a movement of thought that can be traced through poststructuralist philosophical work, particularly that of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze.

We shall start by conceptualizing conflict coaching as what Foucault would call a “technology of the self” (Martin, Gutman & Hutton, 1988), that is, a technology aimed at enhancing the “care of the self” in conflict situations. Foucault drew heavily on Pierre Hadot’s (1995) account of Stoic philosophy in his later work on the “care of the self”, partly, at the time, to correct an impression that, in his earlier work, he had represented power relations in ways that were too deterministic. He was at pains to step away from the suggestion that life experiences were constituted almost entirely by power. Instead, Foucault wanted to stress that people were actually freer than they thought they were. Despite his compelling documentation of how power relations could internalize certain discourses into consciousness, he maintained it was still possible to take up subjective positions and act from a sense of agency.

The “care of the self” was his effort to speak to the crafting of a subjective position, often in resistance to the internalizing force of power relations. Care of the self was about the intentional design of one’s life as an aesthetic project. Foucault also referred to this project as “concern for the self” in a project of becoming. Rather than the humanistic project of an essentialist unfolding of the self from within, Foucault preferred the project of producing oneself to become other than who one had been. Production suggests deliberate and conscious action, rather than the unfolding through self-actualization of a pre-existent potential. Deleuze (1990), in fact, calls it “counter-actualization” (p. 150) rather than self-actualization. Foucault describes this project as:

... those reflective and voluntary practices by which men (*sic*) not only set themselves rules of conduct, but seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make of their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria.

(Foucault, 1992, pp. 10-11)



Some commentators get concerned about Foucault's apparent focus on the individual self and worry about whether it might lead to neglect of the other. Critics have even claimed that Foucault was advocating "narcissistic absorption" and "outwardly aggressive self-aggrandizement" (Wolin, 1986, p. 85). In answering these critiques, David Boothroyd (1996) shows that Foucault was not referring to "egoistical self-interest" but to the "practical formation of an interiority" (p. 382) as the basis for the construction of relationships with others. The process of becoming a subject thus involves the intentional construction of a subjectivity through resistance to dominant discourse and this can only be achieved through becoming accountable to the other. Boothroyd concludes that:

... Only a subject understood in terms of his/her autochthonous self-fashioning capacity and which sustains itself 'before' it encounters the Other, can *respond* without violating the other's alterity.

(p. 382.)

What might we be required to do to take care of the self? Foucault (2005) speaks about a series of disciplinary exercises founded on philosophical truths that were advocated by the Stoics. Meditation was frequently involved. Nowadays practices of conversation often perform a similar function. Coaching, for example, is one of these and it serves a similar purpose to the ancient Greek and Roman practices of meditation. It allows a person to layer experiences of living reflexively over each other. An experience is lived, and then reflected upon, and then the reflections are talked about and distilled into a form that can be taken back into practice and become again the stuff of experience. Like meditation, it is about producing a sense of truth to guide the ongoing project of living.

We, therefore, want to propose that we think of conflict coaching in these terms – as a reflexive practice of layering and distilling experience and thoughts, a "practical formation of an interiority" in advance of an "encounter with the Other". It is an example of what the ancient Greeks called a *techne*, a method, aimed at the "care of the self". We would suggest that the English word "craft" is a good candidate for describing this method. It conveys the sense of an art (informed by practical skill) and a science (informed by knowledge). It might be useful, then, to describe conflict coaching as conversation in which a professional helps someone craft (the verb can be said to derive from the noun) a sense of who he or she is becoming in relation to another or several others in the context of the events of a conflict.

### How might we think of conflict?

Let us turn to the conceptualization of conflict itself and consider how it might be thought about in ways that enable the emergence of such a practice. There are many possible places to start, such an inquiry, but here we will focus on Gilles Deleuze's (1990) work on *The Logic of Sense* as a productive starting point, because of its philosophical rigor and its originality. This work of Deleuze is difficult to read, but the account of it presented here has been aided by the explanations of James Williams (2008) and Sean Bowden (2011), who help draw out Deleuze's purposes.

One of Deleuze's central ideas is the argument that events are logically prior to identities. It is more than an opinion, because Deleuze sustains a systematic philosophical case for it, complete with mathematical proofs. The idea is revolutionary, because the modern "image of thought" habitually thinks of identities first to explain events. In other words, when something happens we seek to explain it by looking for a category of person and understanding events that follow as typical of what that "type of person" would do (Bansel, Davies, Linnell, & Laws, 2009, p. 61). A category of person might be a diagnostic category, a personality type, a social or cultural designation, a political or religious affiliation, a position in a relation (such as victim, perpetrator), or a lifestyle (lesbian, sports jock, surfer, cheerleader, vegetarian, Manchester United fan) and so on. Deleuze's concern is that, when we start with identity categories, we notice and privilege sameness over difference. Emphasizing what is "identical" with a category of classification impedes the process whereby people differentiate themselves, and differentiation is necessary for the development of nuanced practices of living (what Michael White & David Epston, 1990, called "unique outcomes"). Instances of difference are instead squeezed into boxes and people experience discomfort if they do not fit the box. Michael White (2001) referred to this phenomenon as the "cellularisation of life" (p. 20).

To be assigned to an identity category can be of little consequence unless the assigned classification falls on either side of a line along which a given society exercises "dividing practices" (Foucault, 2000, p. 326). When dividing practices are at work, the identity category can have serious consequences for structuring, as Leonard Cohen (1992) puts it, "who will serve and who will eat".

Deleuze's logic here resembles Michael White's aphorism: "The person is not the problem; the problem is the problem" (White, 1989, p. 6). The alternative to an emphasis on identity

categories and on explanations based on who persons “are” is to start with events. Bronwyn Davies (2009) puts it simply:

Being a person in this way of thinking is not to belong to a category, but more in the nature of an event, or a series of events.

(p. 19)

Accordingly, Deleuze advocates that we understand problems of living by starting with the priority of events. To this end, Deleuze expounds a “logic of sense” which serves the purpose of explaining the relationships between events and persons.

### **How we might think about events in a conflict**

Deleuze’s first assertion is that an event always takes place as part of a series of events that coalesce to form a narrative. A narrative conveys a sense of movement through time and a series also refers to moments in time organized into a sequence. For Deleuze, each event in a series stands out, because it is (perhaps only slightly) different from earlier events. On the other hand, each piece of difference can only be recognized when it is part of a sequence and, therefore, significant, because of its participation in the series of events.

The concept of series thus has explanatory value. It helps explain how events developed in the way they did. Deleuze argues that such explanations do not rest on the usual grounds of formal causal logic. Events in a series do not determine each other. If anything, events in a series mutually “cause” each other’s participation in the series. Deleuze does not reject the causal logic that has been so important in modern science. It is more that he wants to add to it and mark out a space for a different form of logic to be also accorded value, particularly in situations of complex human interaction.

Deleuze, therefore, interrogates the nature of the connection between events in a series. His argument for such connections relies on what he calls “sense”. Sense is felt rather than logically determined but nonetheless operates to hold events in sequence with each other.

Deleuze illustrates it with reference to paradox (where we can sense a connection that defies strict logic) and to nonsense (where something is logically impossible but still hangs together). He uses Lewis Carroll’s (1865) “*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*” to illustrate how nonsense events need not interfere with narrative consistency.

### Chronos and aion

Following the ancient Stoics, Deleuze (1990) also argues for the parallel existence of two distinct readings of time – which he calls *chronos* and *aion*. Each of these readings amounts to a discrete, consistent system of thinking about time. Each is “complete and excludes the other” (p. 61). *Chronos* refers to the conventional conceptualization of time as divided into the discrete categories we call the past, the present and the future. In the modern world, we divide time further into days and hours and minutes and measure it precisely. *Aion* is a more elastic reading of time in which the past, present and future are conceptualized in an unbroken line. From this perspective, the past flows into the present and the future is already implicit and exerting an influence right now. This more fluid understanding of time draws upon Henri Bergson’s (2001) concept of “duration”. Thinking in terms of *aion* produces an awareness of the arc of time, as if we are viewing events from above, rather than from within the immediacy of the present.

Deleuze does not argue for one of these readings of time as more important than the other. Both have their value for different purposes. It is, nevertheless, worth pausing to note that modernist culture has exercised a preference for *chronos*. In fact, many texts in humanistic psychology (for example, Krug, 2009) have emphasized staying in the “here and now” as a preferred value. The present has been established as the territory in which feelings and emotions take place and their spontaneous expression has come to represent authentic presence. Consider, for instance, the current fascination with mindfulness. To live as much as possible in the present is taken by many people in the therapy field to be a cherished goal and the message is reinforced in many products of popular culture (songs, television shows, and movies).

On the one hand, much of this emphasis is worthy of value. To live in the fullness of the present is necessary to get the full value of certain experiences, such as the tasting of a fine wine, the successful sporting performance “in the zone”, and the experience of the joys of sensuality. The intrusion of the past or the future into each of these experiences would interfere with their impact.

On the other hand, a reading of time through the lens of *aion* also has value. It opens up a certain flexibility of perspective that is not possible within the confines of the present. The sense in which events from the past continue to live in the present is one such value. A sense of *aion* allows us to dwell in what we remember and hold a sense of movement over the span of a series of connected events, over a lifetime. The future too, can haunt or can animate the

present and even the past. What we imagine might happen can motivate us to work for a desired future outcome or away from a feared one. Deleuze (1990) asserts the value of reading time as *aion* in relation to the process of personal becoming:

... becoming does not tolerate the separation of or the distinction of before and after, or of past and future. It pertains to the essence of becoming to pull in both directions at once.

(p. 1)

We need a reading of time as *aion* in order to hold a sense of a career, for example. Career counseling, thus, is not just about the expression of identity in the present moment, but explores how a person's interests and commitments might propel them through time. The temporal trajectory of such exploration always invokes a sense of relationship with a past, a present and a future.

We also need the reading of time as *aion* in order to invoke "a life". In conflict coaching we might inquire into the life of a conflict story, or the life that a counter story might promise. Or we might inquire into the values that a person might hold dear and wish to express in response to others. Such values may transcend any particular moment in the present and suggest an arc that runs through the past, present and future. Reading time from this vantage point allows us to sense the duration through which commitment to a particular value endures. It also allows us to step out of the immediacy of feeling in the present and to see a conflict in wider perspective. In the process, events which have caught us up in their thrall can reappear as more trivial in the greater scheme of things. If this leads to a shift in response, then conflict coaching may be demonstrated to contribute something of value.

### **The process of conflict coaching**

In what follows we will outline a map (see Figure 1) for a narrative process of conflict coaching. Of course, no map fits exactly to the contours of any given conversation and this one should not be read as prescriptive. What such a map can do, however, is to serve an orienting purpose for a conflict coach. It might guide the building of a conflict coaching conversation and render a conversation more purposeful than haphazard. That is the spirit in which this set of guidelines for conversation is offered.

In broad terms, these guidelines move through three territories of conversation. Within these three different territories some specific lines of inquiry that can prove useful for each territory are suggested. The first territory is focused on understanding the conflict story. The second

territory involves asking questions to deconstruct the conflict story, make visible the lines of force (Deleuze, 1988; Winslade, 2009) that run through it, and loosen its authority. The third territory involves asking questions to grow a counter story (Nelson, 2001), an inquiry rooted in a reading of time as *aion*. We shall introduce some of Deleuze's (1990) terms into each of these territories of inquiry in order to ensure that the conflict story is fully understood and the lines of force that run through it are made visible.

To help understand the story of what has happened in a conflict, the guidelines draw from Deleuze's (1990) account of an event in order to specify what we might listen for. Deleuze begins his account of an event by including Bertrand Russell's (1962) explanation for an event, which features the three criteria of "denotation", "manifestation" and "signification". Denotation is about the facts of what has happened. Few would disagree that listening to understand a conflict story would need to include an inquiry along the lines of, "What happened?" Manifestation is the name for the second line of inquiry. It refers to the persons involved and is founded on the idea that we cannot understand an event without inquiring into the "beliefs and desires" (Bowden, 2011, p. 26) of those involved. For conflict coaching this means asking about what the events of the conflict make manifest about the beliefs and desires of the person consulting the conflict coach, and also what this person guesses to be the beliefs and desires of the other party or parties. The third inquiry is into signification. Signification refers to the relationship between what happened and its "conceptual and logical implications" (Bowden, p. 27). This is a recognition of how meanings circulate within a discursive field and influence what people say and do. For this reason, a conflict coach should maintain a stance of curiosity about the discourses that dominate a particular situation, the concepts that are salient in the discourse, the positions established for people by particular language uses, and the "images of thought" (Deleuze, 1994, p. 129) that are conveyed by the words uttered.

Deleuze argues that these three aspects are necessary, but insufficient for purposes of explanation and need another element to be added. To this end, he outlines the location of an event as always part of a "series" (1990), and then he proposes that "sense" is the element missing from Russell's account and, what is more, that sense is the glue that holds Russell's other three criteria together. Thus the conflict coach should remain alert to the ways in which one event is explainable through its connections with other events in a series of events, none of which can be said to have caused other links in the chain, but none of which would be likely to have taken place without the sequence having occurred. Sense is the glue that holds such a

sequence of events together. It refers to a form of narrative logic that need not reach the standard of causal determinacy, but is enough to satisfy the disputing parties that things are connected.

Figure 1 includes these elements in a suggested road map which might guide a conflict coaching conversation. It also includes some other concepts which will be further discussed below.

**Figure 1: Narrative Conflict Coaching**

<b>Understand the conflict story</b>			
1.	Denotation	Establish the facts.	What happened?
2.	Manifestation	Inquire about people's desires and intentions.	What was your hope? What do you think the other party intended?
3.	Signification	Ask about the influence of discourses and systems of meaning.	What concepts, meanings, discourses govern the situation?
4.	Series of events	Establish how events are part of a series.	What was the sequence of what happened?
5.	Sense	Ask what holds the series of events together.	What is your sense of what is driving this situation?
<b>Deconstruct the conflict story</b>			
6.	Double listening	Listen to both the conflict story and the counter story.	It sounds like ... happened, but you would prefer ... Is that right?
7.	Ask deconstructive questions	Loosen the authority of <u>dominating discourses</u> or <u>lines of force</u> that run through a series of events.	How much were gender stories, or race, or the conventional family idea, or normality etc., affecting what happened?
8.	Explore assumptions	Inquire into background assumptions.	What were you assuming? What was the other person assuming?
9.	Externalize the problem story	Help people separate from the conflict story by naming it as outside them.	What would you call this situation?



10.	Map the effects	Explore the effects of the externalized conflict.	What effect has <u>it</u> been having? (emotional, physical, relational, financial, institutional, academic)
<b>Grow the counter story</b>			
11.	Evaluate the conflict in relation to the arc of one's life	Ask the person to look at the conflict in relation to a reading of time as 'aion'.	Where does the series of events fit in relation to what is important to you?
12.	Ask about preferences	Open the story of what the person would prefer.	What would you prefer to happen?
13.	Find unique outcomes, differences	Identify moments which contrast with or contradict the conflict story.	Have there been any times more like what you would prefer?
14.	Anchor counter story in value system	Link the preferred way of handling the conflict with the person's values.	When that happens, how does it fit with your values?
15.	Trace the history of these values	Give the preferred values a history.	How have those values been important in the past? Can you give an example?
16.	Extend preferred values into the future	Extend the preferred values from the past into the future.	How would you act in future in this situation if you were to apply your preferred values?

### A case study

We shall trace the development of these lines of inquiry through a case study of narrative conflict coaching. This conversation was recorded and transcribed for the purposes of this study and took place between the first author<sup>1</sup> and a volunteer who was a recent graduate of a Masters degree in counseling<sup>2</sup>. According to the guidelines, the first part of the conversation would involve the conflict coach in understanding the conflict story and following lines of inquiry into the denotation, manifestation, signification of the conflict, as well as tracing the series of events in which it has taken place and the sense which holds it together as a narrative. Now, let us look at what transpired.

### *Understanding the conflict story*

**Jocelyn:** Well I do have something on my mind that's been pressing and it's my job. My boss currently, and we used to be co-supervisors, and when the program manager retired, he is acting program manager, so now he's my boss. And because he's wanting the program manager's position, he now sees me as competition.

**John:** Oh I see.

**Jocelyn:** And so the relationship that we've had since December of 2012 has been very oppressive, like he's not communicating anything with me. If I shut my door to my office, he's knocking on it to ask what I'm working on. He'll want to ask me what happened at the meeting. Or if someone is coming to my office, he'll stop them on the way or he'll call people into his office after they come out of mine. So he's had this almost like paranoid type of reaction...

Jocelyn begins her explanation of the conflict story by referring to what the conflict manifests about the person she is in conflict with (“... he sees me as competition”). She explains it further by designating a signifier for her relationship with this person (“oppressive”) before moving to some denotative aspects of the story (“... he is knocking on [my door]”; “...he'll ask me what happened at the meeting”; “... he'll stop them on the way [to my office] or he'll call people into his office after they come out...”, etc.). In the last part of the segment she reverts to an explanation of the conflict as manifestation (of the other person exhibiting a “paranoid reaction”). In other words, the denotation, manifestation and signification are woven together in the initial representation of the story. The conflict coach then begins to sort out the sequence of events into a series that takes place in time:

**John:** So this changed around December you said.

**Jocelyn:** Mmmhmm.

**John:** What happened in December? What followed through? What happened?

**Jocelyn:** The program manager retired. So he went from being my ... co-supervisor to ... because there was two.

**John:** So you were colleagues then.

**Jocelyn:** Right we were colleagues and then we would play uh ... supportive roles to each other and we had two different units that we supervised and we were under one program manager and so, when that program manager left, he became acting program manager. But that doesn't necessarily give him the full scope of the program manager's duties.

An event is established (the manager's retirement) which does not determine the events in the series that follow but is clearly connected to these subsequent events. The denotative event is traced through into what was made manifest before and after it (that is, what colleagues might manifest and what an acting manager might manifest). The word "then" is used by both the conflict coach and Jocelyn to indicate the temporal dimension of events. Jocelyn responds to the conflict coach's inquiry with more denotative details of what happened. She establishes more of a time sequence in her account ("... we used to be co-supervisors"; "... now he's my boss"; "... the relationship that we've had since December of 2012"; "then we would play uh supportive roles") and thus supplements the conflict coach's inquiry. The conversation continues with further explanation of the conflict in denotative terms:

**Jocelyn:** Ya, he called a meeting with my unit ... and wanted to let them know. This was, like, back towards January. He figured he would let them know his position on ... he doesn't know much about children and family services, nor does he want to. And my whole unit basically functions under children and family services. And all the things that have to do with child welfare, from the federal government to state to county too and so for him to kind of put out there that I'm not going to do what the program manager used to do. He's more of a statistical analyst supervisor, so he kept up with numbers.

**John:** Right.

**Jocelyn:** As opposed to we come up with outcomes and we do research on the programs that the county offers.

**John:** Ya.

**Jocelyn:** And we audit different programs and we do all kinds of stuff with CFS, I'm sorry, with Children and Family Services and uh Department of Aging Adult Services and things like that.

**John:** Yes, yes.

**Jocelyn:** And he had said that he was no longer going to carry that out, and I told him well I'm going to continue to carry that out, because ... I'm actually the vice chair for C.M.P.A. and he kind of just like paused. And from that point on, he has been involved in trying to be involved and signed up for CFS and CWDA and he doesn't share any of the information with me. And I've asked him, hey, can you share this information with me and he'll say yes and he doesn't. I've asked him to share his calendar with me, because I've shared my calendar with him and he doesn't. I've given him permission to see my calendar and he hasn't given me any permission to see his calendar.

While this segment is largely denotative, there are also elements of manifestation built into it (references to the parties' different roles and interests) and there are allusions to discourses

that govern relations between managers (for example the expectation that they might “share calendars”). But little inquiry is needed in this instance, because Jocelyn is continuing to flesh out the conflict story with little prompting. In the next segment, however, the explanation dwells on a specific element of signification:

**Jocelyn:** And there’s already been two people who I’ve had to go to human resources about, because of the words that they used. And so I told them that once you say that, then I have to document that and take it up, and they were fine with that but ...

**John:** Once you say what?

**Jocelyn:** That they’ve been harassed. That they feel like he is bullying them.

**John:** Those are words that are kind of red flag words.

**Jocelyn:** Yeah, that he uh, those are words that as a supervisor it turns the conversation you’re just venting to now I have to ...

**John:** Have to act on that.

**Jocelyn:** Right, I have to act on that. Um ... two situations now which creates an awkwardness between him and I, because I technically have to write up my colleague, slash boss, and that in itself has caused, you know, kind of a wedge between us and um ... but at the same time we’re both trying to hold a unit together.

We can see here particular pieces of signification that produce developments in the series of events (use of “red flag words” like “bullying” and “harassment”). Thus it is not just denotative actions that can lead to the generation of signification. Sometimes signification can also produce actions. This is consistent with Deleuze’s (1990) argument that denotation, manifestation and signification can all produce each other. What is more, the whole situation is summed up in the concept of the “wedge between us” that has been produced by events and that, in turn, contributes to discomfort in relation to the task of “trying to hold a unit together”. This may be a localized example of what Foucault (2000) refers to as a “dividing practice” (p. 326). The effect is that everyone is positioned on either side of a designated conflict in the workplace.

Here we can sense the dilemma that Jocelyn is experiencing. The sensing of this dilemma is enough. It need not be analyzed in terms of causal factors. The sensed dilemma itself is enough to serve as the glue that is holding the conflict story together in Deleuze’s terms. In

the following segment the conflict coach endeavors to summarize the series of events and connect up the narrative.

**John:** So, there's been a series of events, there's been ... first it started with the resignation of the old manager, the program manager, and then you've had signals that he's treating you as competition.

**Jocelyn:** Mmm.

**John:** Then it started with that meeting back in January.

**Jocelyn:** Mmm.

**John:** And there's been a series of little interruptions with people coming to see you. There's been denials with you being able to go to a conference. Or not getting, or requiring to actually go over his head to get that ... um, interference with things that are part of your job. And part of how you've done your job in the past ... right?

**Jocelyn:** Right.

The connective tissue between events largely lies in the denotative sequencing of plot elements here. The conflict coach is setting up a reading of events through the perspective of *aion* by invoking a contrast between “how [Jocelyn] has done her job in the past” with what is happening in the present. There are, however, some allusions to the sense of a pattern at work that is referred to through some key significations: “competition”, “interruptions”, “denials”, and “interference”. These all suggest some form of power relation at the epicenter of the conflict, and it will be the task of the next section of conversation to tease this out.

### ***Deconstructing the conflict story***

The first element of deconstruction in the conflict coaching guidelines is double listening (White 2007; Monk and Winslade, 2013). The task of double listening is to “listen for exceptions, gaps, contradictions, and expressions of resistance of the dominance of the conflict, as well as of the conflict-saturated narrative itself” (Winslade & Williams, 2012, p. 34). Double listening builds on the notion of active listening, but extends it by specifying a distinction between what is listened for. It occurs when the conflict coach hears both the problem story and a counter story simultaneously, making possible a contrast between the two. This counter story is not necessarily at first well-formed enough to be clearly articulated by the subject, but may be constructed out of elements or fragments of a possible narrative that are spoken of by the person and granted increased significance by being heard by the conflict coach. The

contrast makes it easier to move away from a conflict story and towards a story of hope (Winslade & Williams, 2012, p. 20). Double listening makes it possible for the conflict coach to say once the conflict story has been explored:

**John:** And if you look at that sort of series of things that have happened ... that this doesn't fit with how you want to be in your life and do your professional work and, I'm wondering if I can ask you to speak to that. What is it about this whole situation this series of events that is kind of um, creating this sense of challenge for you?

This inquiry is informed by double listening, because it draws out a contradiction between Jocelyn's account of what has been happening and her preferences for how things might happen. It also implies a contrast between events in the conflict story and Jocelyn's beliefs and desires. Jocelyn supplements the question the conflict coach asks by confirming what he has heard.

**Jocelyn:** Well you're right about that ... it doesn't fit with my style of supervising. And my style of supervising is one you ... um, you should, whatever you expect from the people you're supervising, you should be willing to do it yourself.

**John:** You should be willing to do it yourself. Yes, ok.

**Jocelyn:** Also um ... inviting people out, coaching, mentoring, developing skills. Things like that I'm huge on and so to have one of my people to follow me to a meeting or I have even invited a few of them to the Children's Network Conference, um ... just things like that, having them um ... really get their face out there and learn more about what it is that they're doing, even though they only have, you know, they basically only collect that data ... it's still my hopes that they would want to know.

What emerges here is a distinction between the story of what happened and the story of what Jocelyn would prefer. This distinction is not yet fully developed but a gap is opened up that serves a deconstructive purpose. In this gap there is the possibility for surplus meanings and actions consistent with them to arise. The gap opens as a result of the conflict coach listening for a distinction and inquiring about how accurate what he has heard is. In a further example, the conflict coach responds in a way that indicates double listening:

**Jocelyn:** And um, because he's been going to those just recently, the assistant director has been asking me to come to his office. And he asked me, how do I feel about Brett? ... So, for him to ask me that kind of threw me for a loop. And I just told, him ... hey, let me just tell you a little bit about myself,

because I didn't come to your office to discuss Brett. You know I didn't really want to have to be a part of, you know, and mainly because I didn't have many nice things to say.

**John:** So you'd rather not say anything disparaging of him?

"I didn't have many nice things to say," could be read as a reference to thinking things that were "not nice", but the conflict coach also attends to Jocelyn's positive intention of ethical restraint from saying "anything disparaging", and emphasizes that in his response.

**John:** So, my next question I had in mind was something like ... what made this get so big ... into such a big challenge sort of so quickly? What were the conditions that sort of enabled that to happen?"

**Jocelyn:** Well, he was given the authority.

**John:** He was given the authority. That was one thing.

**Jocelyn:** That was, that was the hugest thing because he's even stated to me that he only wants the program manager position for the authority. He said it wouldn't be too much ...

**John:** He actually said that?

**Jocelyn:** He said that to me. He said that it wouldn't be actually that much of a pay scale raise for him, because the program manager has to come in um ... five days a week and we only have to come in five days one week and four days the next week.

This exchange makes visible some of the power relations that are entwined with the conflict. The word "authority" is the key signifier that is shaping relational positions for Jocelyn and her colleague. It is a word that assigns authorship of the unfolding narrative to the other party and implicitly positions Jocelyn as having little chance to be an author. Making such power relations visible rather than having them remain hidden is sufficiently deconstructive in conflict coaching.

The next step in the deconstruction of the problem story is to nominalize it and assign it a name. The conflict coach joins with Jocelyn in finding a name for the problem story in externalizing language (White & Epston, 1990; Winslade & Monk, 2000). The conflict coach attributes any negativity to the problem instead of to Jocelyn. The words are separated from the person who utters them and they are assumed to have a certain amount of power or influence on people's actions. This process begins with a question:



**John:** So, if you think about what you have talked to me about, how would you describe the interactions between you and this other person? How would you describe the things that have been happening in the relationship? ...

**Jocelyn:** Yeah, it's annoying for me and I'm at the point now that, when we're in meetings, because now the assistant director has invited me to their meetings. And I still don't understand why the assistant director would ask me that. And I almost feel now that maybe I caught myself up by even saying anything negative.

**John:** So, it's like this whole problem almost got you into saying and doing things that you would not normally do and think twice, and would not fit with who you think of yourself as.

Jocelyn talks about the effect of the problem but the conflict coach, after calling it "this whole problem", persists in asking about an externalized name for the problem story.

**John:** So, you're talking about some of the effects of this whole thing here. I don't know if you would call it an outright argument or it's not quite like that, it's something else.

**Jocelyn:** It's a um, it's almost like a sibling, um ... um ...

**John:** Sibling rivalry?

**Jocelyn:** Yeah I almost want to say it's like a, like a ... or it's almost about a tension.

Whether or not the name is settled upon, the purpose of the externalizing language has been served. The problem has become an "it" and is separated from the persons involved. A collection of actions and meanings are bundled into a noun. The "sibling rivalry" or the "tension" both refer to events in the relational domain between persons, rather than to either party's internal experience. Once this bundling has been achieved, the mapping of the effects of the externalized problem begins. Jocelyn says:

**Jocelyn:** But on the other hand, I was thinking to myself, this guy is so concerned about getting the program manager job that he can't even see straight. He can't even see the bigger picture.

**John:** So you've got this ... what you described before as a sibling rivalry going on, even though that doesn't describe how you would like to behave, it ends up being what you get caught up in, or pulled by, or affected by ... right?

The word "but" is an early indicator of a different story beginning. The preferred story is referred to as "seeing straight" and "seeing the bigger picture". It is a reference to a more inclusive viewpoint that is not yet visible to Jocelyn, while she remains embroiled in the sibling

rivalry. The conflict coach's response sharpens the sense of difference between the two stories. It pries them slightly apart and differentiates the two stories. It implicitly invites Jocelyn to "see the bigger picture", since that is the viewpoint it is spoken from and opens up an inquiry into how the conflict has affected Jocelyn. According to Michael White (2007) mapping of effects of a problem story entails an inquiry into:

... the various domains of living in which complications are identified. This can include:

- Home, workplace, school, peer contexts
- Familial relationships, one's relationship with oneself, friendships
- Identity, including the effects of the problem of one's purposes, hopes, dreams, aspirations and values
- One's future possibilities and life horizons (p. 43).

The purpose is to increase the motivation of a person to change what is happening in the conflict when he or she starts to notice the extent of its effects and its emotional impact (Winslade & Williams, 2012). Here is a part of the externalizing conversation that addresses this task:

**John:** What I'm thinking about now is what effect does that have on you? Because it gets you to sometimes say too much.

**Jocelyn:** Right.

**John:** What else does it do? Embarrassed, you said before.

**Jocelyn:** The thing is ... I'd like to move up in the county and, you know, build on my career there and I'm sitting with the H.S. director, not knowing what he's thinking of what's coming out of my mouth and how he's going to see that as me being able to solve my own problems or ... you know, I don't know how he sees that, even though he initially asked the question, you never know if you just caught yourself up in your own web type of thing. So, I don't know what this does for me as far as my relationships with human services and moving up ... you know he may say ... yeah I've had talks with Jocelyn and she doesn't get along well with others. You know, you just never know what could come out of it. And so I would hate for it to become a blemish effect on my, so far so good, work ability with the county.

**John:** Yes, so that's kind of what it would get you worrying about, creating a blemish.

**Jocelyn:** Mmmhmm.

**John:** It could interfere with what you were hoping for in your career and you're wondering if what you have said so far could be interpreted that way, even if it's not anything intended that way, it could just get interpreted that way. Anything else?

**Jocelyn:** Well it's definitely um, it's making me um ... I'm not insecure, but I'm more watchful of what I say, what I do. How I do it, when I do it. I just don't know what direction. I don't know what anyone is thinking. I don't know what's being discussed about me. I don't know ... So I've had some things that have played well in my part, but, at the same time, you just never know what position is going to open up to you. You don't know who knows who or whatever and I just don't, you know, need any bad marks or saying or concern about me.

**John:** Right, you don't like being so watchful and guarded, right?

**Jocelyn:** Right.

What is exemplified here is the way conflict can invite people into self-monitoring and becoming hypervigilant about others' surveillance of them. Foucault (1980) would explain this internalization of the gaze as a phenomenon of modern power. There are other effects mentioned by Jocelyn, but this one stands out as something that Jocelyn is thinking carefully about.

### **Growing the counter story**

The process of mapping the effects of the conflict eventually leads to the opening of a counter story. This often begins with the conflict coach inviting the person to evaluate the problem and its effects. The purpose of evaluating the conflict story and its effects is to explore "... whether these effects have been good or bad, okay or not okay..." (Mann, 2002, p. 6). If the answer is that the conflict story is not okay, the conflict coach next invites a justification of the evaluation, often by asking simply, "Why?" The purpose of inviting the justification of the evaluation is to "open up space for the people consulting us to give voice to the values, beliefs and intentions that inform those justifications" (Mann, p. 6).

This inquiry can begin the process of opening a counter story, because the problem is no longer represented as part of the person, but is now the object of the person's judgment. In the conversation with Jocelyn, however, this stage in the process remained implicit and was overtaken by other developments of the counter story.

**John:** So, why is that important to you? I'm just interested to know why that's important.

**Jocelyn:** It's important to me, because we supervise two units that have to work together and, if we can't be professional and we end up arguing or being inappropriate again, one, it can affect my career advancement, because that type of behavior will for sure be reported up in our next to the H.S. assistant director. So I wouldn't want that to ...

**John:** But it's more than that right. That's just one reason. It's more than just your career.

**Jocelyn:** Yeah and then, two, it's just not worth it to me.

**John:** Like personally it's not worth it?

**Jocelyn:** It's personally not worth it. He's just a guy I work with and, yeah, I do spend a lot of time at work, but I have so many other things outside of work that I do, that I'm a part of, or responsible for, or whatever. And I have so many connections with the county that do matter, that are positive, that are role models that it would be unwarranted from myself to give him any type of attention that would cause ...

**John:** Not give him that much power over you and let you take it home. Is that right? ...

**Jocelyn:** Yeah it bothers me to the extent that, like I said, like I'm trying to think what does the assistant director ... where is this going to end up? What are these meetings that we're having every month? What do I do in these meetings to remain professional? ... It bothers me to that extent ... but at the same time I know that ... if I stay within my rules, that it's gotten this far within the county just within seven years, so it has to continue to work. So, I have to stay within those professional boundaries that I've set for myself within the county.

The mapping of the effects of the conflict has thus directly led into an expression of the values that Jocelyn holds to be important. These values are expressed as “staying within my rules”, observing “professional boundaries”, and “not being dictated” to. Sticking to these values becomes an expression of agency in the face of provocation. This opens up the possible counter story. Continuing to inquire into such cherished values can eventually be expected to throw up unique outcomes (White & Epston, 1990; Winslade & Monk, 2000), which can be found in moments when the problem story did not dominate Jocelyn's experience of a specific situation. These unique outcomes may be volunteered or may be sought out through questioning. For example, a useful question would be, “How are your

preferences being expressed in action? Can you give me an example?" Here is a unique outcome that just appears in Jocelyn's account of recent events.

**Jocelyn:** I've even asked him, "Are you picking on me, or is this a rule you're going to apply to everyone?" And this is something that I just came up with a few weeks back. It was about transportation, about driving the county car. I was like, nobody drives the county cars. So, why are you telling me to drive the county cars? So it was like one of those things where I had to tell him like, if we're going to start doing that, then technically everyone will have to drive the county car. He said oh no, no, no, no. Let's not play that, because we've all been just kind of doing our own thing in our own cars. So, if you're trying to pick on me, then you know, because you're in one of your moods today and you're trying to control me, or whatever. So I have to constantly do that with him, because he constantly does that with me.

**John:** So, it sounds like, in many of those instances, you're quite successful in making that shift. In getting him to back down.

**Jocelyn:** Oh yeah.

**John:** In getting those things to work in more of the direction you want them to go.

**Jocelyn:** Mmmhmm.

**John:** How do you know how to do that?

**Jocelyn:** Mmmm, I guess just growing up and having been picked on before. I pretty much get it ... you have to stand up for yourself or people are going to continue to pick on you. And usually, when you say things back to someone, they don't pick on you anymore.

This is a confident statement of agency in knowing how to deal with petty authority when it is used against Jocelyn. It is a unique outcome, because it does not fit with being harassed and bullied, or being fearful of being subjected to monitoring. It speaks to an emergent counter story. The conflict coach becomes interested in extending this counter story and granting it even more significance. He responds:

**John:** So you've developed a sort of principles of how you respond in that sort of situation, right?

**Jocelyn:** Right.

**John:** You stand up for yourself.

**Jocelyn:** Right, I don't like for people to just throw anything at me. If it doesn't make sense, then I'm not going to give it that much attention.

**John:** Yeah, right.

**Jocelyn:** So it has to make sense to me and, if it doesn't make sense, then I'm going to throw it back at that person, and see how they can make it make sense.

**John:** So that's your criteria. So it has to make sense in context.

**Jocelyn:** It has to be factual, because then we're only having a conversation that's a rule for me. And I like to get people to realize what they're saying. So if you say something to me, then I want you to know exactly what you just said to me, and how it sounded.

**John:** Ok and how it sounded.

**Jocelyn:** So I will repeat it back with some facts.

**John:** With the intention of ... ?

**Jocelyn:** With the intention of that person knowing, getting an idea of ... what you just said doesn't make sense. It's not something that can be carried to a factual. It doesn't make sense. It's not facts.

**John:** So it's almost like you have an educational agenda there. Like you're trying to help someone to see something.

Now the actions of the unique outcome are granted the enlarged status of enactments of a principle, in which can be seen a recognizable process of making sense and of educating others to do the same. As the conversation continues, these principles emerge into generous actions, for which Jocelyn feels a sense of accomplishment. They start to constitute a line of flight (Winslade, 2009) out of the striated spaces (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 474) produced by her colleague's managerial actions.

**John:** Yeah, but to help them to realize what they sound like and when I hear that, I'm hearing, I'm not just interested in telling you what you sound like, I'm interested in you learning to modify your behavior by you hearing what you sound like. Right?

**Jocelyn:** Exactly ... and usually he does.

**John:** And usually he does. Then, you're quite effective in modifying his approach.

**Jocelyn:** Yeah.

**John:** When you get that opportunity. Right?

**Jocelyn:** Right and it just further pisses him off, because he can't find a way to control me.

**John:** And what does that do for you when it pisses him off?

**Jocelyn:** Well I've learned how to be quiet. I've learned that less is more. So, I just return to whatever I was doing and I don't necessarily feed into it.

**John:** And you don't want to just push him further at that point?

**Jocelyn:** Right.

**John:** So you just have learned to be quiet ... and allow him to back down in his own time almost.

**Jocelyn:** Mmmhmm ... and sometimes he'll be so upset that he'll go home early. A lot of times he'll do that. He gets so upset that he has to leave. And so I do the little ... uh, well, good night. See you tomorrow.

**John:** And what's your intention in that moment when you say that?

**Jocelyn:** That it bothers me, but my intention is that we keep a professional working relationship.

This is now a conversation that is doing more than reporting on what has happened. It is starting to generate new meanings about Jocelyn's own actions and to invest them with a more fully articulated ethical rationale than was contemplated before. They are coalescing into a more well-formed narrative with its own trajectory of becoming. To achieve this, the conflict coach invites Jocelyn to read what has been happening from a perspective of *aion*, rather than *chronos*. From this perspective, it is more important to view events in terms of "keep[ing] a professional relationship" than in terms of the immediate hurts from relational slights. We are starting to see what I believe Foucault meant by the "care of the self". But the conversation is not yet done. The conflict coach keeps inquiring into the counter story and differentiating it further from the conflict story.

**John:** When you hold all of those things clear in your mind, what happens in the situation with Brett?

**Jocelyn:** Um, it really doesn't matter. What he does doesn't really matter ... at this point I feel sorry for him ... You know, I watch him sometimes ... just some of the things he puts himself through. He's his own worst enemy. He goes home sick, because he created a problem.



**John:** You almost feel compassion for him?

**Jocelyn:** Yeah.

**John:** You do?

**Jocelyn:** You know I'm at the point where I think this man doesn't even know what he's doing ... So not only is he suffering from, you know, whatever else is going on, he's also being asked to look very smart in a child welfare position and that's not something he's passionate about. He doesn't care about it. He's said that. And he's ... said some things to me about it being too much for him, but I've offered him my help. I've even said, "Hey Brett, if you can't make this meeting, because you have this going on, I'll go for you." Well his response was oh no, no. I don't want you to go. That way I can tell the assistant director that there's so much going on here that we need a program manager, because I'm missing meetings. And I'm like, but you could just send me.

**John:** You don't get it, I was just trying to help you. Yeah?

**Jocelyn:** Right, and how does that look to the assistant director? That you don't know how to utilize people in your unit or the other supervisors to go to these meetings on your behalf, instead you're just willy-nilly missing meetings, but he thinks that that's smart. So it's just things like that ...

**John:** So you actually stand up for the things that you stand for. The professional stands, the commitments you have. The beliefs, the values you have, and, when you do that, it sort of puts you in a stronger position of yourself so you don't feel like you have to ... you can feel sorry for him, you even feel compassion for him. So what's it like to think about it that way?

**Jocelyn:** Well, for me to think about it that way, it keeps me, it makes me want to help him.

Jocelyn can now be seen to be speaking very differently from how she started. In response to the invitation to "hold all those things clearly in your mind", she talks about how she can "feel sorry for him", "want to help him", and "feel compassion for him". These are values rooted in the counter story and the conflict coach helps her to extend them into future interactions. He asks what it is like to think about it in this way, which again takes her to the perspective of *aion*, the viewpoint that sees time as an arc that includes the past, present and future. She can view the evolution of her own thinking from this vantage point.

There is one last exchange to note. It focuses on what Michael White (2007) has called the experience of "transport" (p. 191). The conflict coach asks about what she will "take away"

from the conversation he and Jocelyn have been having. In itself, this question zooms out again to a different territory. It “reterritorializes” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 142) her earlier words in a place governed by a perspective of *aion*.

**John:** One last thing I want to ask you, Jocelyn, and that is what are you going to take away from this conversation that we’ve had?

**Jocelyn:** Um, I guess that I’ll take away, one, that I do have the support of other people throughout the county ... Yeah that and the fact that I do have the strength to stand on, and I’m compassionate enough, and that I can find compassionate at a time at odds, when it’s somebody who is against me.

**John:** Yeah, yeah, when it’s not easy to feel compassion.

**Jocelyn:** It’s not easy to feel compassion, you know, when someone is not treating you the best.

**John:** What’s it like to think of yourself in that way?

**Jocelyn:** Well um ... it’s a good thing, because I wasn’t always the one who was a compassionate person ... however, people showed compassion towards me. So I feel like, you know, sometimes I need to think of ... let’s not forget there were times when you were not nice.

**John:** Yeah, yeah.

**Jocelyn:** Or compassionate or whatever and people still stood by you and were compassionate and all of those things, and this is kind of like a returning of that favor that other people did for me.

**John:** Wow! That’s lovely!

**Jocelyn:** So that’s kind of why I’m the way I am now.

The response Jocelyn makes, from the territory of *aion*, makes a link between this conflict situation and other moments when the boot has been on the other foot and others have shown her compassion. It strengthens the meaning she has been making into a meta-learning with the potential to govern future interactions with Brett and others.

### Concluding remarks

Narrative conflict coaching has not been extensively written about, nor is it widely known. It thus can benefit from being articulated in case study examples that serve as a benchmark for future exploration. In this example, we have shown the relationship between an actual conflict coaching conversation and a set of guidelines intended to inform such practice. The

transcribed conversation demonstrates a shift from a territory of striated constraint, to a more expansive vision that can even allow the feeling of compassion toward the other party to the conflict. Such a shift is what Deleuze & Guattari (1987) refer to as deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Jocelyn negotiates a shift to a territory in which she can view the strained relations with her temporary manager from a different perspective, one that allows a reading of the series of events of the conflict through the lens of *aion*. This reading generates a different sense about the conflict and about self and is, therefore, about “differentiation” (Davies, 2009), about becoming other than who one has been. It does not solve the conflict but it offers a forward trajectory. Jocelyn sounds clearer in how she might conduct herself in the conflict situation. This is the aim of a conversation concerned about the “care of the self”.

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### **Author's Notes**

1. The conflict coaching in the case study was recorded from the work of the first author. It was transcribed and analyzed by the second author as part of a research project for a Masters degree.
2. Names of participants have been altered to protect anonymity.